Striving Toward a Lovable Nation: Nationalism and Individual Agency in the Writings of Chen Duxiu

by

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Nationalism and Individual Agency in the Writings of Chen Duxiu

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Preface

My mother’s side of the family has a special expression for people who talk excessively about themselves: *moi je*. It combines the French terms for “me” and “I,” and is based on the way such a person might be expected to begin every sentence: “Well as for me, I…” I have endeavored in this thesis to distract the reader with as little *moi je* as possible. Yet this project now has a rather different appearance from its origin two years ago, and has involved many people along the way who will not be mentioned in the text. Thus I hope the reader will indulge me for these few pages.

This project began as a fairly innocent final paper for Professor Tony Day’s Modern China course, finished in the dead of night and later discovered to contain a horrifying number of spelling and grammatical errors. The topic was Sino-Japanese relations after World War II, and the influence of radical nationalism upon the interactions between the two countries. By the end of the project, however, I had become much more interested in the seeming split between state-led nationalism in China (which tends to be more pragmatic), and Chinese popular nationalism (which is considerably more ideological). In post-communist China, the concept of “the nation” is highly contested, with both the Chinese Communist Party and a number of popular groups vying for control of its definition. At about the same time as I was doing this research, the 2008 Tibet protests leading up to the Olympic Games showed the world the ugly face of this reactive popular nationalism. Chinese worldwide took to the streets to protest what they saw as fresh round of Western discrimination.

A month after completing the paper, I travelled to China for the first time, and spent six months in Beijing studying Mandarin and classical Chinese. A paper I wrote there focused on the issue of the Diaoyu Islands, a small archipelago lying between
China and Japan and the focus of much diplomatic friction between the two nations. The willingness of nations to fight over the history of a few uninhabited rocks has left me fascinated with nationalism ever since. Halfway through my stay, a series of bomb attacks in China’s northwestern province of Xinjiang prevented my visiting the province, and reminded me of the continuing problems of China’s “unity of races.”

The Xinjiang situation led to me to ask travel advice from Vera Schwarcz, the department chair of the East Asian Studies Program at Wesleyan, and at the time my advisor by default. Our correspondence became a regular travelogue. When I returned to Wesleyan aching to write after months of language study, I found an advisor ready to both listen and guide. My interest in Chinese nationalism became a Davenport Study Grant application for research during the following summer, entitled “A Peculiar Relationship: Chinese State and Popular Nationalism,” a topic I would revise almost entirely before I received the grant.

The bibliography I had prepared included an article written by Chen Duxiu in 1914, “Patriotism and Self-Awareness,” which I had picked up at random, and, finding no translations, decided to translate myself. The project took two weeks, and the result was a translation littered with blank spaces, representing my first encounter with *bu bai bu wen*, “neither vernacular nor classical style,” which was the linguistic morass that became early twentieth century Chinese writing. I had also been reading Sun Yat-sen’s “Principle of Nationalism,” and was expecting something similar. Instead, the translation revealed phrases such as “one who does not know a country’s purpose but loves it is deceived, and one who does not know a country’s situation but loves it is dangerous.”
This was not the radical nationalism I was expecting, which had reminded me so much of the kind of patriotism I had watched while growing up. I am part of the generation for whom the attacks of September 11, 2001 happened while we were in middle school, and who impulsively planted American flags in our front yards, and in some cases later regretted being so carried away by our emotions. Chen’s criticism of blind patriotism resonated deeply with my more recent reflections on the consequences of radical nationalism.

Having received the Davenport Grant to do research on a completely different topic than the one I had originally proposed, I set off to Beijing for two months of library work, thoughtful conversations, and a perusal of monuments layered with many meanings. In the midst of this research, I discovered that Chen Duxiu’s article belonged to a larger conversation that took place between 1914 and 1915, and that conversation was relevant to a larger debate about twentieth century Chinese intellectual history, and nationalism in particular. Pleasure also came from the small details that the research revealed, such as knowledge about the classical Chinese calendar, and the evolution of written Chinese language over the twentieth century. A side project brought me in contact with the great textual debates of the late Qing dynasty.

Some fraction of this two-year journey is presented here, with the conviction that Chen Duxiu and his times remain relevant to the conversation about how China emerged from imperial times in its present form, and to the global conversation about nations, their value, and their impact upon world events.
This project came about with the help of many friends, teachers, and family members, whom I wish to acknowledge here. The three people with whom a thesis writer has the most contact are frequently his academic advisor, his thesis advisor, and his department chair. It was my good fortune to have all three of these figures brought together in the person of Professor Vera Schwarcz, Chair of the East Asian Studies Program. She caught me just back from my first time in China, listened to my scatterbrained thoughts and observations, and with her considerable experience decided that the best solution was to send me back. She has endured nearly weekly installments of terrible writing for almost a year now, and has always taken the time to give thoughtful comments and guidance on each and every one of them. Professor Schwarcz’s Wednesday thesis tutorials over tea have been the highlight of my week for two semesters now, and have continued without fail despite a schedule that would have killed a lesser professor. Her experience, guidance, and high expectations have ensured a thesis that has been both enormously satisfying and remarkable in its sanity.

Professor Stephen Angle, Chair of Philosophy, took time out of a similarly busy schedule almost weekly to patiently help me wade through the jungle of early twentieth century Chinese prose, and to produce partial or complete translations of over five difficult articles. He also gave me the tools necessary to translate most of the primary source documents in this thesis myself. Professor Angle’s assistance and insights effectively make him the second advisor for this thesis.

My appreciation also extends to the faculty and staff of the East Asian Studies Program, for much help and individual insights. This thesis was built on unexpected discoveries and conversations. I am also especially indebted to Shirley Lawrence and
Lisa Calhoun, administrative assistants past and present, for running the program competently, professionally, and with ceaseless good cheer.

My two months of research in Beijing in the summer of 2009 would not have been possible without a generous Davenport Study Grant from the Wesleyan Public Affairs Center, as well as a particularly meaningful Caroline Condil Award from the Mansfield Freeman Center for East Asian Studies and Bianca Condil. Furthermore, I am thankful to the Freeman Center for a one-year fellowship that allowed me use of such a beautiful building and office.

My second stay in Beijing would not have been nearly so meaningful without so many people welcoming me back to China. My thanks go to Liu Wei, Xie Mingguang, Jia Yajuan, Yue Gongzheng, and Chu Guofei for many kindnesses, unexpected sources, and thoughtful conversations. Xiao Ran, a dear friend and teacher who oversaw my research into the Diaoyu Islands controversy during my first stay in China, taught me how to live independently in Beijing, and how to rely less on maps and more on people. Huang Jun and Zhang Hong welcomed an unknown foreigner (and a boy, no less!) into their apartment for two months as a flatmate.

The Spring 2009 seminar on “The Problem of Truth in Modern China” was the perfect venue for digesting scattered observations from my first stay in China, and remains the most dedicated group of classmates that I have worked with here at Wesleyan. My housemates at 63B Home Avenue have put up with my neglect in favor of sleep and thesis for nearly two semesters, and the calligraphy of one of them, Li Yang, adorns the cover page and chapter titles. Jack Wood, Annick Cadot, Lo-Ching Chow and Ann-Marie Illsley provided valuable proofreading.
Finally, my greatest thanks go to my parents for their love, encouragement, and support, and for teaching me to love books, languages, and people of all kinds.
Introduction:

Awareness of a Nation’s Purpose
“Patriotism! Patriotism! This sort of clamor in recent years has nearly stuffed the society of our country full,” wrote Chen Duxiu in Beijing in June 1919, although his words could have applied to China in the twenty-first century just as aptly. Observers made much of the virulent Chinese nationalism displayed in 2008, when foreign condemnation of a government crackdown in Tibet triggered worldwide demonstrations by Chinese sensitive to foreign interference. Such nationalism can also be seen in many of China’s relations with its neighbors, particularly Japan, against whom China regularly spars for territory and the writing of history, particularly regarding Japanese atrocities during World War II.

Nationalism, along with the emotion of patriotism associated with that ideology, are uncertain terms in today’s China. Since the 1980s, the Chinese Communist Party, facing great disillusionment with Maoism, has turned to nationalism as a way to legitimize its rule. Its ideology has since defined patriotism as loyalty to both the nation and its government, as essentially the same entity. Nationalism is a volatile ally, however, and popular groups with goals different from the government have often advanced their agendas by calling the CCP’s patriotism into question.

The Chinese and Japanese governments, for example, have been in dispute for 40 years over the sovereignty of the Diaoyu Islands, an archipelago located near major oil fields between the two countries. While both governments have kept this debate relatively civil and pragmatic, popular organizations from both nations have forced the issue by staging several spectacular landings on the islands themselves, creating a series of diplomatic incidents that both governments, with their economies already tightly intertwined, would have preferred to avoid.
Patriotism is a contentious issue in China. It is also a term that allows a way for the government to find unity when speaking of otherwise complex or contentious subjects, particularly historical figures. Sun Yat-sen, who founded the political party that would oppose the CCP for all ninety years of its existence and yet flirted with socialism himself, is remembered as the “father of the nation” and a “nationalist.”

The May Fourth Movement of the early 1900s, whose origins encompass a broad range of ideas including the rejection of traditional Chinese culture, democracy, and Marxism, is conveniently reduced down to the event itself, the anti-imperialist demonstrations that occurred on May 4, 1919.

Is it possible to find any other narrative about Chinese nationalism that tells a more nuanced story than that of ideologically rigid reactions to foreign interference? One figure – arguably the most important figure – of the May Fourth Movement in early twentieth century China provides such a possibility.
Chen Duxiu, the founder of the Chinese Communist Party itself, is in many ways a key symbol of China’s nationalist narrative. The tourism website of his hometown of Anqing, Anhui province boils down his accomplishments neatly: He “joined the movement to repulse Russia” in 1903, “opposed the Qing Dynasty” (perceived at the time and in retrospect as a foreign occupier due to their ethnicity, much like the Mongols before them), founded the most influential magazine of his times in 1915, *La Jeunesse*, and five years later founded the Chinese Communist Party, becoming its first Chairman.²

Chen Duxiu was ousted from the Party in 1927 after committing “serious errors” of ideology, and was expelled from the Party entirely in 1932 for his support of Trotskyism. In 1937 he was accused by two Party members of supporting the Japanese invasion of China, which ended his political career and cast his memory into oblivion for forty years after his death in 1942. Since the 1980s, however, he has been rehabilitated, and remembered for his patriotism, Marxism, and his opposition to “feudal” Chinese society, a label affixed similarly to the May Fourth Movement.³ This uncomplicated memory, however, masks the enormous controversy surrounding Chen Duxiu, both in life and in death.

*Stepping onto a High-Tension Line*

There is no lack of writing about Chen Duxiu in Chinese, with controversial narratives generated even while he was still alive. In 1932, anticipating Chen’s fifth and what turned out to be final appearance in court, newspapers and journals all over China published commentaries about the trial and the defendant, which were collected by Chen Dongxiao and edited for the anthology *Commentary on Chen*...
Duxiu (Chen Duxiu Pinglun). It contained commentary from figures as diverse as Hu Shi, a moderate who praised Chen’s role in the literary revolution of the early 1900s, and Cai Hesen, an important Chinese Communist Party figure who panned Chen’s “right-wing opportunism,” accusing Chen of switching parties and ideologies frequently and for the sake of political expediency.4

A smaller but no less influential burst occurred after Chen was released from prison in 1938, when the CCP operatives Wang Ming and Kang Sheng began a print campaign accusing Chen of cooperating with the Japanese in their invasion of China, ending his political career and affixing the label of “race-traitor” (hanjian) on him for forty years after his death in 1942.

Chen’s delicate position in the scholarly literature between cultural revolutionary, founder of the Chinese Communist Party, and race-traitor may have contributed to the relative lack of scholarship about him between 1942 and 1978, to say nothing of the position of intellectuals themselves in China during that period. After 1978, however, there followed a veritable explosion of scholarship, which resulted in Wang Shudi and Lin Maosheng’s massive 1982 anthology, Selected Commentaries on Chen Duxiu (Chen Duxiu Pinglun Xuanbian).

This volume included research by several scholars, most notably Tang Baolin and Sun Qiming, who overturned the previous generation’s evaluation of Chen as a “race-traitor” although 1980s scholarship largely kept the labels of “opportunism” and “serious errors” firmly affixed. Chen Duxiu remained a sensitive question even in the 1980s, as seen by the warning given to the author of the long but mediocre Biography of Chen Duxiu (Chen Duxiu Zhuan) by his faculty advisor: “This is stepping onto a high-tension line.”5 Chen Duxiu remains a topic of research in
twenty-first century Chinese scholarship, with regular publications of the anthology *Research on Chen Duxiu (Chen Duxiu Yanjiu).*

The culmination of the scholarship about Chen Duxiu in the 1980s is arguably Tang Baolin’s short yet encyclopedic *Chronology of Chen Duxiu (Chen Duxiu Nianpu)*, which draws upon volumes of source material to locate and date Chen’s movements, publications, and correspondence. Despite its age (1988), it remains the most complete and thorough volume of its kind regarding the basic facts of Chen Duxiu’s life. It is used here as the final arbiter of dates and places, except in cases that must account for newer research or serious disagreements in the literature.

Western scholarship on Chen Duxiu is considerably sparser. The most recent book-length biography of Chen Duxiu by a Western scholar is Lee Feigon’s 1983 *Chen Duxiu: Founder of the Chinese Communist Party*. Although this text draws on some of the 1980s Chinese scholarship mentioned above, it disagrees seriously with Tang in a number of places. Its analytical contentions, however, remain useful, and frame many of the arguments below. Of comparable importance to this text is Yves Chevrier’s 1984 masterpiece “From Occidentalism to Solitude: Chen Duxiu and the Invention of Chinese Modernity” (*De l’occidentalisme à la solitude: Chen Duxiu et l’invention de la modernité chinoise*), and a number of more current articles on various aspects of Chen’s life and work. This thesis will focus particularly on the evolution of his nationalist ideas.

*A Patriot, but of What Kind?*

“Patriotic” remains the safest term intellectually to describe Chen Duxiu. It is employed extensively by the party he founded, as well as by scholars of all nations.
Labeling of Chen Duxiu and the movement he represented as “patriotic” (aiguo), however, marginalizes the ideas of a man who would write some of the most perceptive articles of his times about the nature of nations and individuals, of patriotism and reason. For Chen Duxiu was not a simple-natured patriot, but a careful thinker whose polemic prose often masked a mind that worked slowly, methodically, and with great resistance to distraction.

Chen was at once a nationalist who over time came to understand the ease by which patriotism could be manipulated by those in power, and a cosmopolitan who understood the power relations inherent in that term, too. Chen did not think in isolation, but was deeply engaged in politics and reacted in writing to all that went on around him. Through his writings, it is possible to gain a deeper understanding of the nature of early Chinese nationalism. And through his changing status in Chinese historiography over the years, one can gain insights into the nature of Chinese nationalism today.

1914, the jiayin year in the sixty-year cycle of the Chinese calendar, marked a turning point for a group of Chinese intellectuals. Chinese nationalism up until this point was a cocktail of Ming loyalist literature and Western Social Darwinism that would label the Qing court, made up of an ethnic group known as the Manchu, as an occupying foreign power. Sun Yat-sen, Zhang Taiyan, and Zou Rong would become early leaders of a movement to remove the Qing as a solution to China’s troubles. Anti-Manchuism was a heavily racial paradigm with the narrow goal of removing the Qing from power and restoring rule the Chinese race, or the Han. Such thinkers tended to favor democratic or republican forms of government; the concept of rule by
the majority had particular resonance with intellectuals who believed that a minority group had ruled China for over two hundred years.

Anti-Manchuism, however, became the victim of its own success. The Qing were overthrown in what can be best described as an accidental revolution in 1911, only to be replaced by a series of military juntas and regional warlords that lasted all the way until the Communist victory in 1949. Chen Duxiu like many at first welcomed the Xinhai Revolution that overthrew the Qing. He himself participated in the Anhui revolutionary government that was put in place after the fall of the imperial governor. By 1913, however, he had to flee for his life to Japan due to his opposition to the dictatorial behavior of Yuan Shikai, the new president of the Republic of China. Disappointed, disillusioned, and confused, Chen along with a group of like-minded intellectuals cast about to find what had caused the revolution to fail.

*A Wrenching Transition of Language and Ideas*

The conversations of this group could be found in the pages of *Jiayin*, a journal founded by Chen’s friend and frequent collaborator Zhang Shizhao, and whose impact on both Chen Duxiu and the Chinese intellectual community is hard to overstate. *Jiayin* itself was a true representative of its time, encompassing commentary from a wide range of Chinese intellectuals, from monarchists to anarchists. Most importantly, as many scholars have recently become aware, it brought together a group of writers and thinkers that would form the nucleus of what would become known as the New Culture Movement. For Chen Duxiu, his time at the magazine would be a formative period for some of his most basic and consistent ideas on nationalism.
*Jiayin* was written largely in a crude mix of classical Chinese and Japanese loanwords, the language itself reflecting a wrenching transition of both language and ideas. Certain Chinese writers, Chen Duxiu among them, had been writing in vernacular Chinese as early as 1900, but in 1914 the preferred language for intellectuals to write to each other remained classical Chinese. Many Western concepts, however, such as those of “nation,” “state,” or “race” came to China through Japan, and thus the terms came from Japanese. In reading such texts, it is possible to use most of the grammatical rules of classical Chinese. Many of these rules, however, were already being modified or broken by 1914, forcing the reader to adopt a somewhat looser method while translating.

Such dialogue with the texts in their original language, however, remains important, for as will be shown, many of the changes seen in 1914 and after can be traced through the changing meanings of words, the recycling of metaphors, and the repetition of key phrases. This struggle with the texts, whose authors were themselves struggling with a changing language, serves as the point of entry for many of the issues dealt with in this thesis. In recognition that texts do not exist in isolation, however, this thesis also relies greatly on a dialogue between the texts and their context.

The conversation which became the fulcrum of this thesis began with Zhang Shizhao, whose article “Self-Awareness” (*zijue*) attacked the traditional notion that individuals should always sacrifice their own interests for the public good. In Zhang’s view, this essentially meant sacrificing oneself for those in power. Zhang saw the purpose of a nation as promoting the welfare of its citizens, and the overall strength of a nation tied to that welfare. Thus, it was up to individuals to pursue their own
betterment, and up to the nation to help them do so. Zhang’s term zijue, although never defined directly in his text, amounted to the ability of an individual to see his or her individual interests inside a group.

Chen Duxiu took what appeared to be a somewhat abstract political conversation and applied it with devastating effect to the current situation in China. “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” (aiguoxin yu zijuexin) contrasted zijue with another trait, patriotism, and argued that China’s failure to change its system of government was due to the Chinese failure to balance the two traits. Redefining zijue as “awareness of a nation’s situation and purpose,” Chen saw the purpose of a nation as a practical union that safeguarded the people’s rights and provided for their welfare. Ignorance of this purpose led people to sacrifice themselves for those in power as described by Zhang Shizhao, while ignorance of a country’s situation led to well-intentioned but misguided efforts at improving the nation. An excess of self-awareness and a lack of patriotism, by contrast, would lead to pessimistic outlook and a failure to bring about any real change to China’s situation.

Feigon characterizes Chen Duxiu during the period between 1915 and 1919 as “an ardent nationalist…[who] opposed those nationalist proposals that he felt would not preserve what he deemed to be the true essence of the Chinese nation. Similarly, he advocated Western ideas that he felt could help to retain a real Chinese essence.”6 As this thesis intends to show, however, Chen Duxiu in 1914 appears to have been relatively uninterested in such theoretical debates, and focused instead on more concrete, practical concerns.
Pessimism and Self-Awareness

Chen Duxiu’s concern for China’s political situation was shared by many, and his article would provoke responses from both Zhang Shizhao and Chen’s future cofounder of the CCP, Li Dazhao. Li’s “Pessimism and Self-Awareness” (yanshixin yu zijuexin) criticized what he saw as an excessively nihilistic outlook in Chen’s article, which called for the abolition of nations that did not meet the standard of protecting rights and promoting popular welfare. Li called instead for taking what China had and working to improve it: “To work toward a lovable nation” (qiu yi ke’ai zhi guojia).

Zhu Chengjia has argued that Li Dazhao was responsible for the final form of Chen’s patriotism and many of the ideas that he promoted during the New Culture Movement.7 This thesis will call that statement into question, using the five years of Chen’s writing that followed to show how little his ideas on nations and nationalism changed, and yet remained relevant for the whole period and beyond. Texts, however, are tied to real events, whether by causing, influencing, or recording them. Li does appear to have influenced Chen’s actions: the same year as Li’s response, Chen returned to China and founded La Jeunesse (Xin Qingnian), a magazine targeted a younger, more changeable audience. Throughout the next five years, Chen’s magazine would stand at the head of what would later be known as the New Culture Movement, in which all aspects of traditional Chinese society would be exposed to extensive pondering and critique.

Chen himself, however, soon moved away from the increasingly apolitical content of La Jeunesse to found another journal, The Weekly Critic (Meizhou Pinglun), with the express purpose of talking about politics. This journal would
record Chen’s reaction to the second crisis of his intellectual life, the announcement of the Versailles Treaty that ended World War I, and handed over German colonies in China’s Shandong province to another imperial power, Japan. Over the course of two months, one can see Chen’s writing shift from cautious optimism about the end of the war and the vanquishing of imperialist Germany, to disillusionment and indignation at the betrayal of China by foreign powers, and finally to the realization that his own government had been complicit in the handover. His climactic article of that year was entitled “In the End, Should We Be Patriotic?” (Women jiujing yingdang bu yingdang aiguo?) It was a focused, vernacular version of Chen’s earlier “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” that attacked the blindness of China’s “patriots” who had allowed their government to sell them out, and as of yet had failed to hold them accountable.

The five-year span between these articles roughly mark the beginning and ending of the First World War, which served as one of the main political events against which Chen Duxiu would shape his insights into nationalism and patriotism. The onset of the war led Chen to comment on the ease with which people confused their government and their nation, and allowed themselves to be sacrificed for the imperial ambitions of their rulers. The end of the war gave Chen a moment of optimism, hoping perhaps that the forces of right had triumphed over imperialism. The Treaty of Versailles served to confirm much of what Chen had written five years before; as this thesis will show, May Fourth for Chen was the apex of an era, not the beginning. Although the context was different five years on, Chen’s critique of patriotism remained both accurate and relevant.
Cosmopolitanism from a Variety of Sources

The five years of World War I also allowed Chen, in parallel with European intellectuals, to discover cosmopolitanism. Cosmopolitanism became in vogue in Europe during the latter part of the war, but the cosmopolitanism that Chen drew on had a much deeper root in classical Chinese philosophy. Since the eighteenth century a group of Confucian scholars living on the Yangzi River delta had been questioning the authenticity of large parts of the Confucian canon, favoring a group of alternate editions from the early Han dynasty.

One hundred years later, in the late 1800s, the scholar Kang Youwei took up these texts, and using their conception of history envisioned history marching toward a future when all divisions of gender, race, class, and nationality would be erased, and all people would live in harmony with one another. He called this future “The Grand Unity” (datong). Kang’s utopian vision was greatly influential all throughout the first part of the twentieth century, with all major nationalist thinkers having to at least respond to it. Chen Duxiu after 1914 also took up this idea, seeing it as the long-term goal of the world.

The betrayal of 1919, however, caused Chen to become aware of the power relations that went along with cosmopolitanism. Chen continued to hold onto the Grand Unity as a distant goal, but for his own times followed Sun Yat-sen in advocating nationalism until China could be on an equal footing with the rest of the world.

The process by which Chen came to cosmopolitanism, however, shows the degree to which his ideas were shaped by both classical and European sources. Chen Duxiu may have led the movement against traditional Chinese culture, but he himself
was educated under the classical Chinese system. He would retain a lifelong interest in the etymology of Chinese characters, and introduce many Western ideas to his readers using classical concepts. The nuance with which Chen grappled with such contradictions also illustrates a basic method by which his mind functioned.

*A Mind that Changed only by Degrees*

Lee Feigon describes this period as Chen’s brief flirtation with cosmopolitanism.8 It is doubtful, however, that Chen ever had brief flirtations with anything in his life, except perhaps with liberated young women, who he went through in large numbers. Chen Duxiu, as this thesis argues, was a careful thinker whose ideologies changed only by degrees, and only after lengthy, painful consideration. Chen’s 1914 ideas on nationalism were new, but the basis existed as early as 1903, when he emphasized in an article that nations were established by the people, and were simply the private property of some potentate.9 “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” was only arrived at after several months in the doldrums, with Chen writing letters to friends that both predicted and welcomed the inevitable carving up of China by imperial powers.

To watch this careful thought process at work, one has to go past 1919 and into Chen Duxiu’s interactions with his own creation, the Chinese Communist Party, and one more moment of crisis in 1927. That year, the massacre of trade unionists in Shanghai sympathetic to the CCP, with the consent and support of the Guomindang, caused the First United Front carefully orchestrated by Stalin between the two parties to rupture. Stalin, facing his own political battles at home, made Chen Duxiu his scapegoat, and Chen was removed from office the same year.
Chen thus found himself in an intellectual bind similar to the one after the Xinhai Revolution sixteen years earlier, with flaws having been exposed in his main ideology. After two years of brooding, Chen reemerged at the head of a small, disorganized Trotskyist faction, believing that Trotsky’s analysis of China’s situation to be the most accurate. His opponents at this time would label him an “opportunist,” for his apparent willingness to switch sides for political expediency, an accusation that Feigon renders somewhat more kindly as “flexible in his thought.” Neither of these phrases, however, account for Chen’s simultaneous engagement with and detachment from events, and the quiet, brooding environment in which he slowly reshaped his ideas.

“Serious Mistakes”

In a stroke of extreme irony, Chen Duxiu in the last years of his life was accused of spying for Japanese as their official invasion of Chinese territory began. This hat stayed on him until his death in 1942, and remained there for the next forty years. Since the 1980s, the hat has come off, in a manner that reveals much about how Chen Duxiu and his times are remembered by the organization he created.

The burst of scholarship in the early 1980s revised much of Chen Duxiu’s evaluation, characterizing the accusation of Chen helping the Japanese as “framing” and attributing it to two long-since blacklisted party members. Since then, the CCP has reduced its founder’s deviant views to “serious mistakes,” and attributed his final break with the party as the fault of others. Chen Duxiu has been brought back into the party pantheon as its founder, and has been given monuments, scholarship, and pensions for his descendents. At the same time, however, he has been simplified,
reduced to a patriot who resisted imperialists, dictators, and invaders, as well as a
Communist who was partly responsible for the spread of Marxism in China.

Chen Duxiu’s evaluation reads somewhat like that of the movement he represents. In this evaluation, the May Fourth Movement begins in 1919 with roots that began two or three years earlier; its main figure is Lu Xun, its main magazine is *La Jeunesse (New Youth)*, and its main ideologies are nationalism, Marxism, and the rejection of classical Chinese culture. Chen Duxiu’s May Fourth Movement, as a close reading of key texts will show, might more appropriately be called the *Jiayin* Moment. It began with an intellectual crisis in 1914, followed by the publication of *La Jeunesse*, whose goal was not to ponder but to influence, and ended in 1919, with the main magazine of the May Fourth demonstrations being not the apolitical *La Jeunesse* but *The Weekly Critic*. It was influenced by both the war in Europe and classical Chinese culture, the latter both rejected and used as the situation required. It entailed an adoption of Marxism on what appeared to be its merits, and a thorough questioning of blind patriotism and the groupthink that it entailed.

Chen Duxiu’s inquiry into the nature of patriotism is largely ignored in present-day China, indicative perhaps of a penchant for a less complicated nationalism. Yet a small group of writers are disturbed by the virulent nationalism of their peers, and like the litarati of previous generations follow Li Dazhao’s exhortation to love their nation and seek its betterment. Such writers have rediscovered Chen and his emphasis on the engaged, reflective individual, who was active in the affairs of the nation but also able to think outside the confines of patriotic discourse.
Chen, with all of his contradictions, was representative of both his times and contemporary dilemmas. His struggles to balance the nation and the individual, Chinese and Western thought, nationalism and cosmopolitanism all mirror struggles that face Chinese thinkers to this day. His own personal contradictions were no less relevant: he was a writer who often commented upon the very events in which he participated, a scholar as well as an activist. Such complexities can be seen in the summations given by various Chinese scholars, from “Chen Duxiu: How can we characterize him?” to an even more hopeless “Chen Duxiu is a complicated figure.”

What follows is an exploration of some of the more black and white terms applied to Chen Duxiu – patriot, opportunist, traitor – and attempt to craft an image of the man that is decidedly gray.

Perhaps the most appropriate title for an article about Chen Duxiu is that given by Xu Zhiyuan, simply: “Chen Duxiu of Anqing.” This thesis, like Xu’s article, will begin in Chen Duxiu’s birthplace, in order to begin to make sense of some of the more subtle aspects of this complex figure.
Chapter 1:

New Texts, New Learning, and Many Obscure Characters
Chen Duxiu was born Chen Qiansheng on October 9, 1879 in Anqing, Anhui province, in the fifth year of the Qing emperor Guangxu.\(^1\) He would later take on the adult name (zì) of Zhongfu, as well as the more unique styles (hào) of Shi’an and Duxiu, all of which would represent phases in his life. In the same year, Leon Davidovich Bronstein, later known as Trotsky, was born in Yanovka, Kherson Province, then part of the Russian Empire. It was a fitting coincidence for two men whose lives and writings would cross to great effect half a century later.

According to Chen’s own biography, his father died when he was two months old, “a loss”, Feigon notes, “repeated, coincidentally, in the early lives of almost every other future leader of the May Fourth movement.”\(^2\) It is now widely accepted that Chen’s father died almost precisely three years later, on October 7, 1881, in the seventh year of the reign of Guangxu.\(^3\) He had been a minor official as well as a tutor to a wealthy family in Suzhou.\(^4\)

After his father’s death, Chen moved in with his paternal uncle, Chen Xifan, who despite his humble origins had managed to secure a juren degree through the imperial examination system and become a powerful local official and businessperson, able to amass wealth under both the old imperial system and through the new trade brought by Western powers.\(^5\) Chen Duxiu claims to have received his early education from a strict, opium-smoking grandfather until he was about eleven years of age, when upon the death of his grandfather his education was taken over by his elder brother.\(^6\)
Revolution Within: The New Text Movement

The same year that Chen’s elder brother began to tutor him, the scholar Kang Youwei (1858-1927) published his book *A Study of the Forged Classics of the Xin Dynasty*, a work that would label many of the orthodox texts of the Chinese canon as fakes created during the reign of the usurper Wang Mang.*7 The year was 1890, the sixteenth year of the reign of Guangxu, but Kang was drawing upon a line of scholarship that had begun over two hundred years before.

In the final days of the Ming, growing dissatisfaction by the Confucian gentry with the absolutism of the Ming emperors and the growing power of eunuchs at court led to a search among the classics for alternatives to the current system. The most prominent of these schools originated in the Yangzi River delta, which would remain a hotbed of radical thought for the rest of imperial China. The Hui family of Suzhou, the same city where Chen Duxiu’s father tutored, became known for their rejection of Song Dynasty Neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi and the Cheng brothers, on the grounds that it was too expansive and self-contradicting, as well as the more recent Confucian idealism of Wang Yangming (1472-1529), who contended that all knowledge of

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* Reigned 9-23 CE. Old Text Confucianism was first promoted during this period, although the texts themselves were said to have been discovered earlier, during the reign of Han Jingdi.
morality was internal, and could be discovered through the removal of mental obstructions.⁸

The Suzhou commentators turned instead to the much older and more methodical commentators of the Han dynasty, who had confined their studies to empirical research on the more literal meaning of the classics. This school became known as the Han Learning school (hanxue), in contrast to the Neo-Confucian views it opposed (songxue). The Wangs and Lius of Yangzhou, along with the notable scholar Dai Zhen expanded upon the Han Learning philosophy with their promotion of rigorous evidential research (kaozheng), which focused on the etymology and literal meaning of words in the classics, instead of the broad, often fanciful interpretations of the Song scholars.⁹ This rigorous etymological research would later become a lifelong interest of Chen Duxiu’s.

This focus on etymology and phonetics drew criticism for being both esoteric and impractical, but was responsible in part for the rise of a school with a much more political agenda. In Changzhou, Zhuang Cunyu (1719—1788) and Liu Fenglü, influenced by renewed focus on Han Dynasty texts, began promoting an alternate set of classics, with very concrete implications for their era. The New Text School drew upon both Han Learning ideas and kaozheng analysis to contend that many of the orthodox texts in the Chinese canon, the Zuozhuan commentary on the Analects in particular, were unreliable. Zhuang and Liu instead contended that another, overlooked commentary, the Gongyang Zhuan, was more authentic.

Such a contention was much more than theoretical hairsplitting – the Gongyang Zhuan and other works by Han Dynasty New Text scholars had cast Confucius as much less of a transmitter of ancient knowledge and more of an
innovator, giving agency to later scholars to change parts of Chinese society that they saw as detrimental. The texts also placed the figure of the emperor in a cosmological context that limited his power, an idea with particular resonance under the autocratic Ming and Qing. Finally, the New Texts promoted a view of history that described it as linear and progressive, not cyclical and repetitive, an idea that lent inspiration to reformers in Zhuang Cunyu’s time and after.

Zhuang himself, in the long-standing Chinese tradition of “pointing at the mulberry to rail at the locust” (zhì sàng mà huái), used such views to express his concern with the contemporary situation at court, where a corrupt eunuch held sway over an authoritarian emperor unreceptive to the protests of his officials. Kang Youwei represented a new reemergence of these ideas, an attempt to reform Chinese society by drawing on alternative sources from the Chinese canon. Their efforts would not be completely in vain; the theories of Kang and his predecessors would arguably have as much influence on Chen’s ideology as would Western thought.

An Eccentric Classical Education

Although for the moment blissfully unaware of Kang Youwei and his reform movement, Chen recalled becoming quickly bored with the traditional Eight-Legged essay format used by examination candidates, and “preferred to read the Zhaoming Wenxuan, a sixth-century collection of parallel verse containing many obscure characters.”¹⁰ Character etymology would be a lasting interest throughout Chen Duxiu’s life, particularly during his final years, and would serve as a refuge during times of intellectual frustration or political setbacks.
Chen also spent part of his time reading the works of Yuan Mei (1716 – 1797), an “eccentric eighteenth-century poet, who was an eloquent advocate of women’s rights, particularly of women’s literature, a critic of the examination system, and a proponent of writing that freely expressed emotion.” Chen himself in 1897 would marry the daughter of a former classmate of his uncle. His marriage to Gao Xiaomen would not be a happy one. She is remembered as:

...a very traditional woman who rarely set foot outside her house and had little sympathy for Chen’s radical ideas – the opposite, incidentally, of her younger, college-educated Western-dressed half-sister, with whom Chen would later have a long-lasting liaison. In 1902, when Chen wanted to go to Japan to study for the first time, his wife refused to part with some of her gold bracelets to finance his trip. Considering the reputation Chen would gain as a womanizer, it is hard for the reader to imagine that Chen’s wife refusal to loan her jewelry to Chen was entirely due to her traditional ideas. These early influences, however, may have contributed to the lifelong interest Chen would have in women’s rights and education.

Chen passed his xiucai exam in 1896, at age seventeen the top candidate in his district. The twenty-second year of the reign of Guangxu was a tumultuous one for the empire. It signaled the end of the first Sino-Japanese War and the signing of the Treaty of Shimonoseki, in which the Qing lost the island of Taiwan to the Japanese
Empire. Kang Youwei published *Confucius as a Reformer*, which expanded upon his New Text ideas and promoted the idea of Confucius as a political innovator much like himself.14

By this time, however, there were those willing to far beyond Kang’s calls for reform. One of the first and most influential of the Chinese radical nationalists was Zhang Taiyan (1868-1936), a virulent opponent of the Manchu regime, a position he was said to have gained from reading the writings of Ming loyalists from his home province of Zhejiang.15 While Kang Youwei and his followers looked for problems inside of Chinese society itself, Zhang saw the problem as being with China’s leadership: the Qing, as part of the ethnic Manchu group, were not native Chinese, or Han, and thus counted as a foreign invader.

Chen himself sat for his *juren* exam in 1897, an experience which marked him deeply. The conduct of his fellow candidates (who passed the time before the exams drinking and whoring), and the conditions of the exam itself, in which a candidate spent nine days in a small, dirty examination cell, where “he would sleep sitting on the board that was to be his writing table, cobwebs and soot covered the place so liberally that it was difficult to sweep it clean.”16 This description correlates well with Zou Rong’s characterization of the exam system six years later:

> [The candidates] are humiliated by the examination for the first degree, the provincial examination, and the palace examination (at this examination no seats are provided: candidates are treated like cattle), in order to make them behave like beggars, not to remember there is such a thing as shame.17

Adding insult to injury, Chen failed his *juren* exam, his last encounter with the imperial examination system.18
Seeking a New Truth

The examination system itself would be suspended temporarily a year later, as Kang Youwei and his followers briefly gained power in the capital, and carried out a brief reformist agenda known as the Hundred Days Reforms, which a coup by the Empress Dowager Cixi against her son Guangxu brought to an abrupt end. Kang had seen Guangxu as a potential Peter the Great, able to change the institutions of his country. Both, however, were the victims of their own political inexperience, in the face of an entrenched, savvy conservative opposition.

The radicals gained a convert, however, in the person of Chen Duxiu. In the wake of his failure at the juren examinations, he began reading the works of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, which introduced him to Western learning. Chen himself later related a moment of revelation that started him down the road to radicalism. At the testing grounds, the distorted appearance of an exam candidate:

…caused me to sit staring at it for an hour or two…and from these distorted appearances realized, from this group of animals achieving their ambitions, how the country and the people would suffer; and from this I realized, these so called ‘grand ceremonies’ were simply setting aside a few years to bring out this collection of monkeys and dogs to hold an animal exhibit. And from this I thought of the whole national system, and feared that the whole thing had these sorts of problems. And from this thought I finally thought that was written in the Chinese Progress of Kang Youwei and his group might in fact contain some truth.19

It is questionable passage on many fronts. It closely mirrors the “epiphanies” of many New Culture Movement figures, such as that of Lu Xun. Moreover, Chen Duxiu in his later life would not be one to change his opinions based on epiphanies or sudden inspirations, but through extensive, and often excruciating pondering and soul-searching.
Whether because of such an experience, his failure to get his *juren*, the
grueling and humiliating experience of the text, or some combination of the three,
Chen was finished with the examination system, and turned to other sources of
intellectual inspiration. This took the form of the writings of Kang Youwei, Liang
Qichao, and others. “Later Chen was to relate on several occasions that it was only
after reading the works of Kang Youwei that he learned for the first time that not
everyone who studied Western learning was a ‘slave to the foreign devil.’ For Kang
showed Chen that Western learning could be as respectable as the iconoclastic
Chinese studies he had coveted earlier.”

Returning to Anqing, Chen published a pamphlet entitled “An Account of the
Topography of the Yangzi River” (*Yangzi jiang xingshi lunlüe*), which detailed “the
points at which the Yangzi could and should be defended to protect the area from
foreign incursion…where military units should be stationed, how guns should be
positioned, and the kinds of naval vessels that could come up the river.” It is an
anomaly among Chen’s other writings, but not unusual for its era, when the primary
use of Western learning continued to be military and scientific, not political. For
Chen and his generation of scholars, it was an era that would not last past the turn of
the century.

Chen would not break officially with the examination system immediately; he
followed his uncle, who continued to tutor him, to Manchuria in 1898, the same
year as the birth of his first son, Chen Yannian. Returning south, he enrolled in the
Qiushi Academy in Hangzhou (the school’s name meant “seek the truth”), a new
school founded by the city’s governor the year before for the teaching of “new
learning” (*xinxue*), which was composed mainly of Western science, mathematics,
history, and languages. Chen himself studied English*, French, astronomy, and naval architecture.²⁴ Zhang Taiyan had been on the faculty, and although he had already left the academy by the time Chen Duxiu arrived, his influence lasted long beyond his tenure: in 1901 several students were expelled over an essay with an antigovernment phrase that circulated among the students, an incident that may have involved Chen Duxiu.*²⁵

Events in China had not stood still. In 1898, groups of young men in Shandong province banded together in groups known as “Righteous Harmony Societies”. Fueled by resentment over deteriorating economic conditions, foreign encroachment, and in particular the special privileges enjoyed by Christian converts, these groups began attacking missionaries and converts throughout the province.²⁶ By the summer of 1900, they had descended on Beijing and Tianjin and began to attack the foreigners stationed there, often with the tacit support of conservative factions in the Qing court.²⁷ After the “Boxers”, as they came to be known, attacked and killed the German ambassador, the Qing court threw their support openly behind this

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* Chen would become an accomplished translator of English, furnishing many of the translations of English articles, plays, and songs for La Jeunesse, in addition to editing and writing his own articles. It is less clear how proficient his French became, although he did in 1903 attempt a translation of a small section of Les Misérables with Su Manshu. Su left before the completion of the project, and the result was a translation of book 2, section 1. This section includes, as Yves Chevrier has pointed out, the introduction of a Chinese supporting character “Whom we are not quite certain how it is that he finds himself in France.” See Chevrier, “De l’occidentalisme a la solitude,” 70.
* The two main comprehensive sources about Chen’s early life are Lee Feigon’s Chen Duxiu: Founder of the Chinese Communist Party (1983), Tang Baolin’s Chen Duxiu Nianpu (1988). The two frequently disagree on the dates of events, particularly between 1898 and 1903. According to Feigon, Chen goes to Manchuria in 1898, after failing his juren exam, and only returns south with the death of his mother in 1899, finally attending the academy in 1900. Tang has Chen attending in 1898, and leaving for Manchuria shortly thereafter due to his involvement in a student movement. Both authors are surprisingly in agreement about many of the details about Chen’s time at Qiushi, but not about the years in which they happened. Both generally agree, however, that Chen was in Japan by 1902. For more on this issue, see footnote 41 in Feigon, Chen Duxiu, 35, and footnote 1 in Tang, Chen Duxiu Nianpu, 12.
militia, declaring war on the foreign powers on June 21, 1900. The Boxers and the Qing were crushed by an eight-nation expeditionary force, and the Qing were forced to sign the Boxer Protocol in September 1901, a treaty whose concessions included an enormous indemnity to be paid to the Western powers.

Part of the Boxer indemnity was used to fund Chinese students studying abroad, which would expose a whole generation of intellectuals directly to Western thought. The most common destination, however, remained Japan, whose modernization following the Meiji Restoration was widely discussed and admired throughout Asia. It was the site of a large Chinese intellectual community at the turn of the twentieth century, which Chen Duxiu would join a month after the end of the Boxer Rebellion.
Chapter 2:

Journals and Assassination Squads
In October 1901, Chen Duxiu left for Japan, where he attended both an English language school and Tokyo Higher Normal School, and walked into the middle of a turbulent intellectual environment. Five months earlier, Qin Lishan founded the revolutionary journal *Guomin Bao* (known in a later form simply as the *Min Bao*) in Tokyo, where he would later be assisted by such figures in the anti-Manchu movement as Zhang Taiyan, Wang Jingwei, and Sun Yat-sen. In February 1902, Liang Qichao arrived in Tokyo and began publishing the *New People’s Miscellany* (*xin min congbao*) as a mouthpiece for the reform movement.

Liang’s articles would introduce many European terms and concepts, such as “race” (*renzhong*), ethnicity (*minzu*, also translated as “nation”), state (*guojia*), and “nationalism” (*minzuzhuyi*). The propaganda battles over the next decade between the two papers resulted in several important developments in Chinese nationalist thought, particularly in terms of the relation between nation and ethnicity.

*A Compulsive Organizer*

In addition to debates on paper, there was much organizing and socializing among Chinese students in Japan. Chen Duxiu upon his arrival joined his Qiushi Academy classmates in forming a student group, the Youth Society (*Qingnian hui*), “the first avowedly revolutionary organization among Chinese students in Japan.” The organization included many famous figures in early Chinese nationalist movements, including Zhang Ji and Su Manshu. The group was concerned primarily with Russia’s occupation of parts of Manchuria after the Boxer Rebellion. “In April 1903 most of the group formed a student volunteer army, which later rather superciliously offered its services to the Qing government to help fight the Russians,
demonstrating not only their nationalist sentiments but also their condescending attitude toward their government.” This “army” was later disbanded by the Qing government, in a surprising show of concern for such a small group.

It was such an attitude that eventually forced Chen Duxiu to leave Tokyo. In 1902, he and his classmates Zou Rong and Zhang Ji caused a diplomatic incident by cutting off the queue of the Qing government agent charged with supervising Hubei students in Japan. “The man had made himself especially unpopular with his attempts to regulate the activities of all the Chinese students in Japan; the students also felt that he had been guilty of sexual improprieties. To punish the agent, Zhang Ji and Zou Rong held the man down, while Chen Duxiu manned the scissors…” The queue would later hang in the Chinese student union. Chen was expelled, and returned to Anqing in 1903.

Zou Rong and Zhang Ji would join Zhang Taiyan in Shanghai, where they would found the radical newspaper Subao. Chen Duxiu returned to his hometown of Anqing, which had since been made a British treaty port in 1902. He founded a small revolutionary library (the basis for the present Anhui Provincial Library), and in April 1903 organized students into Anhui’s first major revolutionary group, the Anhui Patriotic Society (Anhui aiguo she). The group’s activities, minutes, and speeches would frequently appear in the Subao for a brief period. In May 1903, a speech to the Society by Chen Duxiu appeared in the journal, highlighting that the primary concern of patriotic groups at the time continued to be Russia, and the threat to China’s sovereignty over its northeastern provinces. As Feigon points out, Chen’s concern with Manchuria may have stemmed from his own travels there with his uncle.
The Anhui Patriotic Society also had similarities with many revolutionary organizations of the twentieth century: it emphasized physical exercise, which would later be a primary concern of Mao Zedong. Certain regulations of the Society would be mirrored by groups as diverse as the Algerian National Liberation Front decades later, with its prohibition of “smoking, whoring, and gambling.”\textsuperscript{12} Certain regulations would prefigure Chen’s later ideas, such as the prohibitions against “not accepting reality” (\textit{shishi}), and “blindly hating the West.”\textsuperscript{13}

The \textit{Subao} would be shut down by the Qing barely a month after the publication of these rules, due in part to a pair of inflammatory articles: Zhang Taiyan’s preface to Zou Rong’s vitriolic anti-Manchu pamphlet “The Revolutionary Army”, and his refutation of Kang Youwei’s call for a constitutional monarchy. Zhang and Zou would be imprisoned, and Zou would die before his release, sealing his status as a patriotic martyr.\textsuperscript{14}

The editor of the journal, Zhang Shizhao, was somehow spared, and went on to cooperate with Zhang Ji, Su Manshu, and Chen Duxiu on a new paper, the \textit{China National Gazette} (\textit{Guomin riri bao}) in October 1903.\textsuperscript{15} The paper would fold less than two months later, but it was the beginning of many years of collaboration between Zhang Shizhao and Chen Duxiu, whose paths would cross each other in significant ways several times in the coming decades.

\textit{Discovering Nations}

Returning from Shanghai after working on the \textit{China National Gazette}, Chen founded his own paper, the \textit{Anhui Common Speech Journal} (\textit{Anhui suhua bao}), in February 1904. Chen put together and edited the journal in Anqing, before sending it
to Wuhu, where his friend and benefactor Wang Mengzou published it through his Science Book Company. Wang also provided Chen with a convenient distribution network: “…company haulers frequently traveled back and forth to Shanghai for supplies, and company salesmen plied a route that took them through many little towns in southern Anhui every six or seven days, bringing to the schools along the way the newest books, magazines, and newspapers.”¹⁶ Chen later moved to Wuhu and edited the journal from his room in the loft of the publishing house, fueled by two bowls of gruel a day provided by Wang.¹⁷

It is in the pages of the *Anhui Common Speech Journal* that Chen articulates many of his early nationalist ideas. In his June 1904 article “On Nations” (*Shuo guojia*), he traces his own realization of the existence of the concept of a “nation:”

Ten years ago, when I was at home studying, from day to day all I knew was sleeping and eating…Thus how could I know what sort of thing a nation was, and what it had to do with me?...It was not until the *jiawu* year [early 1895] that I heard someone say that there existed some ‘nation of Japan’, which had defeated our China. By the *gengzi* year [1900], there existed a certain ‘eight-nation allied force’, made up of Britain, Russia, France, Germany, Italy, United States, Austria, and Japan, which defeated China.”¹⁸
Chen might have been speaking for all of China in saying that he was hardly aware of the existence of nations until China began suffering losses at their hands.

The end of the First Opium War, in which the British empire had soundly defeated China in a dispute over the right to import narcotics, revealed first and foremost the enormous technological gap between the two powers. The defeat, however, shook the Chinese worldview in a much more fundamental way than simply realizing the need to purchase better firearms. The concepts that had been used to deal with the newcomers up until that point were rooted in a conception of China’s place in the world that would become harder and harder to maintain as the century wore on.

Joseph Levenson, whose writings fifty years later are still some of the most perceptive on the subject, writes:

Knowing little of the West in fact, China’s ruling class applied to it the ancient theory of tributary relations – the grand and ancient concept that the Middle Kingdom was indeed the center of civilization, that the Son of Heaven actually represented all mankind in his function as a moral and ceremonial intermediary between human society and the unseen forces of Nature, and that all the surrounding tribes and peoples should naturally recognize this central fact. The Chinese theory of state, in short, was that of a universal empire.19

The emperor of China was not the ruler of a state, a guo, but of “all under Heaven” (tianxia), and thus could expect the rulers of foreign states to interact with China in a way that showed their subordination to this universal ruler.

Previous conquests of China had done little to upset this conception. As Levenson notes:

When China was beaten before, her ‘place at the center of the world’ had not been jeopardized. No one had moved the center away; the conquerors simply moved into it. They borrowed the mantle of greatness, the mandate of Heaven...China was the prize, and China remained the center, even among – especially among – those victims of barbarians who resented the conquests most. And resentment turned to acceptance, as the barbarians’ sins were bleached (more or less) in
Foreign conquerors simply took the place of domestic ones, ruling through the same cosmological and ceremonial system that had been used before their arrival. One could not rule China from without, and not without at least putting on the appearance of becoming Chinese. The Manchus themselves, the caretakers of this system at the time, were a case in point.

What was different about defeat at the hands of the Europeans, Americans, and Japanese in the nineteenth century was that these powers felt neither a need to control China from within or to fit into the Chinese conception of how the world worked. “China could be manipulated from a distance. Unlike the Manchus, modern Europeans had no need to assimilate to China. And the Chinese, unable to take them in, were just as unable to throw them out as long as the technological gap endured.”

The fact that China could become the possession of another power without that power making China the center meant that China was in fact no longer the sole center, but one of many. To paraphrase Levenson, China ceased to be the world, and struggled to become a nation.

Having become aware of the existence of nations, Chen strove in his article to give them a definition, one largely imported from European ideas. Chen’s nation has land (tudi), a people (renmin), and sovereignty (zhuquan). His second component, “the people”, contained some revealing conditions. “A nation is built by the people. Although there may be land, if it is an uninhabited wasteland, how can there be a nation?” Chen’s emphasis on a nation as a collection of people would signal some of his more radical departures from conventional nationalist thought just a decade later, and is made explicit by his point that “This nation originally belonged to
everyone, and did not belong to the emperor personally, for the emperor was one of the people of the nation as well.”24 Zou Rong had written a year earlier that “Some say that there was such a thing as a citizen before the Qin and Han periods, but none afterwards.”25 In the great Confucian tradition of modifying the past to influence the present, it had become fashionable to portray pre-Qin China as a sort of semi-democratic state.

Chen’s definition of what sort of people should inhabit a nation, however, was consistent with the intellectual trends of 1904. “The people of a state, however, must be a nation [minzu], of one race [zhonglei], one history, one tradition [fengsu], and one language.”26 During his first stay in Japan, Chen had declined to join Sun Yat-sen’s Tongmenghui on account of its “narrow racism,”27 however his views were, for the moment, fairly consistent with those of Sun, Zhang Taiyan, and other anti-Manchuists.

The Chinese terms relating to nation, state, ethnicity, and race, almost universally imported from Japanese, are ambiguous and often overlapping, and Chen used them to mean various things at various times. Guojia could be used to mean nation, state, or nation-state; while minzu could mean either ethnicity or nation. Since minzu is here being used in conjunction with zhonglei (race), it has been translated as “nation” to avoid redundancy. However, since minzu is also being used with guojia, the latter is translated as “state” for the same reasons. All of these terms were relatively new to the Chinese lexicon, and much of the intellectual debate over the next few years would be over their meanings and relationship to one another.
“On Nations” told Chen’s readers that “Among today’s nations, those in which all people understand protecting the nation are strong, and those in which all people do not know protecting the nation are weak.” And thus Chen made it one of his missions in the Anhui Common Speech Journal to educate his readers about the history of the Chinese race, through a column called “Great Events in Chinese History”, which followed Zhang Taiyan among others in attempting to trace the origins of the Chinese people. Chen also, however, inaugurated a series about more recent events, specifically China’s fall.

“On a Fallen Nation” (Wangguo pian) represents Chen’s effort to trace the causes of China’s fall from one of the most advanced civilizations on earth to a state of semi-colonization. Chen opened this series with the same contention that a nation was not “an emperor’s private property”, but from a different angle. “This nation, regardless of who is emperor, need only be of this nation, and not do it harm.” If the emperor should be ousted by another person from the same nation, that is simply a dynasty change. “The nation must allow a foreigner to become emperor, or have its land or sovereignty encroached upon by foreigners, before it is called a ‘fallen nation.’” Chen went on to detail China’s losses of territory, infrastructure, control over trade, and sovereignty that qualified it for such a status.

Chen highlighted two factors that led to this state of being “fallen”. The first was that the Chinese “only know their clans, and do not know their nation.” Sun Yat-sen would later characterize the Chinese as a “sheet of loose sand”, unable to extend their loyalty past family, clan, village, or province. Chen himself, in attempting to explain to his readers just what a nation is, resorted to what bordered on
a pun: “a nation [guojia] is a great family [da jia] of all of its people.”\textsuperscript{33} Trying to encourage their countrymen to become more public-minded would become a constant source of frustration to early nationalists.

Chen also brought up a second theme that would characterize his thought for the rest of his life, that of the excessive passivity of Chinese philosophy, a fatalism Chen refered to as “only knowing how to listen to the decree of Heaven, not knowing how to exert the strength of people.”\textsuperscript{34}

\textit{Overthrowing the “Foreign” Ruler}

Chen at this time was doing more than simply writing articles; he was exerting his own strength in ways both figurative and literal. In early 1904, as the Russo-Japanese War began,\textsuperscript{35} Chen joined a secret assassination squad in Shanghai, at the invitation of his former editor Zhang Shizhao. The group also included Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), his brother Cai Yuankang, and Zhang Taiyan’s son-in-law Gong Baochuan.\textsuperscript{36} “During the time Chen was associated with the assassination society, the group studied bomb and weapons making and trained in calisthenics and paramilitary techniques. Presumably, the members also studied Russian anarchist and nihilist writings, which were gaining popularity among the Chinese students via Japanese sources.”\textsuperscript{37} The latter has led Feigon to suggest that like their Russian counterparts, members of such societies had “a naïve populist belief that the problems besetting Chinese society resulted from the actions of a few evil governmental officials and that the elimination of the latter would instantly improve the condition of the former.”\textsuperscript{38}

Such a belief certainly reflected the methods and goals of such societies. Chen left this first assassination society a few months after it began, after which the group
would become the Restoration Society under Cai Yuanpei, and grow into a major revolutionary group.³⁹ In early 1905, Chen organized the Warrior Yue Society (yue wang hui),⁴⁰ an organization that took its name from the Southern Song general Yue Fei (1103-1142), who had fought against Jurchen invasions and been executed by his own government for advocating the taking back of northern China. The Warrior Yue Society gained members in schools, governments, and military units. Like the Restoration Society, its primary methods were assassination and infiltration of the military.⁴¹

Unlike the Restoration Society, however, the Warrior Yue Society spread to military units both in the north and south, and carried out several spectacular (if failed) assassination attempts. The first of these, in September 1905, was against five members of the Qing government about to depart from Europe. The assassin’s bomb exploded in his own hands, but his testament, encouraging the killing of Manchus as a way to “build moral and promote bravery” was read by many. He was a student of Chen Duxiu, and the bomb may have been built in the loft of the Science Book Company where the latter lived.⁴²

1905 also marked the year of the defeat of Russia by Japan in the Russo-Japanese War, the first time in recent history that an Asian power had defeated a European one.⁴³ The victory would have impact all across East and Southeast Asia, and Chen himself would quote the Japanese general Nogi Maresuke in his later writings.⁴⁴

Feigon contends that following the assassination of the Qing governor Enming by a Warrior Yue Society member, Chen was forced to flee to Japan in the ensuing clampdown, in the fall of 1907.⁴⁵ Tang, however, claims that Chen had already left by
spring, following investigation of his activities at the Science Book Company by the still-living governor, perhaps in part as a move to protect his benefactor, Wang Mengzou.\textsuperscript{46} It is agreed that Chen was in Japan (and not in France, as earlier thought) by late 1907,\textsuperscript{47} the last full year of the reign of the Qing emperor Guangxu, whose infant successor Puyi would only see three years as emperor before his dynasty fell.

Even before the Qing fell, the question of what to do with the Manchus underwent significant changes. As seen by the note of the Warrior Yue Society assassin above, anti-Manchuism and early Chinese nationalism up to this point were practically synonymous. The Manchus through the writings of Zhang Taiyan had been painted as the “foreign invader” at the root of many of China’s problems, and distanced from the Chinese so thoroughly as to lead Zou Rong to characterize the ceding of Taiwan to Japan as the giving of gifts to “foreign friends.”\textsuperscript{48} China was thus not merely under despotic rule, but occupied by a foreign power.

Chen Duxiu himself had promoted this view in his \textit{Anhui Common Speech Journal} writings, characterizing a nation as requiring “one race, one history, one tradition, and one language,”\textsuperscript{49} and in defining a “fallen nation” as one ruled by a foreign emperor.\textsuperscript{50} The Chinese nation was thus an extremely racial entity; never before or since had the curious double meaning of the word \textit{minzu} (nation and ethnicity) seemed so appropriate. In the course of Chen’s second stay in Japan, however, these ideas would undergo a profound change, at the hands of a group similar to that which originally formulated them.
A Nation of Citizens

Even before Chen’s arrival, a lively propaganda battle and intellectual debate had been in progress between the reformist journal *The New People’s Miscellany* (*Xinmin congbao*) and the revolutionary journal *The People’s Journal* (*Min bao*). Among the writers for the latter was a member of the Tongmenghui and a disciple of Sun Yat-sen, Wang Jingwei. Wang (1883-1944), like Zhang Taiyan before him, had been influenced by Ming loyalist writings, particularly those of Wang Fuzhi and Gu Yanwu, but also showed great command over the works and ideas of Western political thinkers. Wang would later be condemned in Chinese historiography for his collaboration with the Japanese during the Second World War. Two years before the arrival of Chen Duxiu in Japan, however, he would begin to create a concept of nation and race entirely new to his peers.

Wang published the article “Citizens of a Nation” (*minzu de guomin*) in two parts in the first two issues of the *People’s Journal*, November 1905 and January 1906. In the course of this article, Wang defined two terms, with the first, *minzu*, being defined very much along the lines that Chen Duxiu had defined his *renmin* in the *Anhui Common Speech Journal*. People of the same *minzu*, according to Wang, should possess a shared “blood relationship, speak and write the same language, live
in a common territory, have common customs, share common religious beliefs as well as have a similar mentality and physique.” Wang’s ideas on minzu have survived to this day, virtually unchanged in their basic form, in Chinese government categorization of ethnic minorities.

In Chen Duxiu’s “On Nations” (not a groundbreaking article in its own right but a good indicator of its times), minzu is tied to the concept of guojia, or “state,” with all of the people of a state being of one minzu. Wang Jingwei, by contrast, defined the people of a state as guomin, or citizens, and did not impose the same requirements on them as he did on members of a minzu, and pointedly separated the two terms. “The concept of citizenry (guomin), Wang stated, was a legal term. Citizens were the constituent elements in a state (guojia). They were related to the state and had a legal entity. Citizens were also individuals, and they enjoyed independence and freedom if they were under the rule of a constitutional government.” The Manchus were thus of a separate ethnicity (minzu) from the Chinese. Wang opened up space, however, for them to be of the same guomin.

This was not Wang’s intention in the beginning. He continued to imitate his contemporaries in Japan in referring to the Manchus as a “contemptible race” (jianzu), and used the ideas of minzu and guojia not to call for their inclusion in a new state, but for their removal from power. This was in part in response to Liang Qichao and the reformist camp, who called for identification of the Qing regime as “Chinese.” A citizen, according to Wang, was defined by a consistent, subservient relationship to the state. The Manchus had only had this relationship briefly under the Ming, and not at all once they became China’s rulers. Nor had the Manchus made any
effort to integrate culturally. Thus, according to Wang, they should continue to be treated both as a separate *minzu* and a separate *guojia*.\(^{56}\)

Liang Qichao had previously introduced the ideas of the Swiss legal thinker Johann Kaspar Bluntschli (1808-1881) to his readers in Japan, who maintained that a collection of different ethnicities could form a single country providing there existed a “common will” between them. In a second article published in May 1907, “Materials on the Study of the Relationship between Race and Politics,” Wang incorporated this idea into a new vision for the future Chinese nation.\(^{57}\)

Inspired by Bluntschli’s ideas, Wang announced that the revolutionaries stood for the merging of all nationalities and races within China into one single nation and one citizenry. In this merging process, the Han people were to be the leading race and would absorb all other races and nationalities into it. Eventually, Wang confidently predicted, a common will would be formed and a new race called the Chinese people (*zhongguo zhi ren*) would be created.\(^{58}\)

The term would later be replaced by a new one, *zhonghua minzu*, but the concept remains unchanged to the present.

Wang thus in the space of a year redefined the future offered by the revolutionaries to China, as well as the meaning of anti-Manchuism itself: “Wang explained that anti-Manchuism was not to exclude the Manchus from China. It only meant the overthrow of the rule of a minority race, the Manchus, as well as the restoration of China and its government to the Han people. The Manchus would still be permitted to stay in the new Chinese nation after the revolution.”\(^{59}\) Nationalism, as the revolutionaries now promoted it, was not a vision of a nation for the Han Chinese race, but a nation composed of many ethnicities, albeit with the Han as the “leading race.”
Chen Duxiu and his friends, although conceivably aware of this debate, had a much more esoteric interest during this particular stay in Japan, namely the study of Buddhism. Chen, along with a group that included Su Manshu and Zhang Taiyan, began to learn Sanskrit and made an abortive attempt to start a small Sanskrit library. Chen himself continued his etymological studies of Chinese characters, some of which saw publication during his time in Japan.

Feigon has contended that these two interests “clearly have a similar root – a desire to find a Chinese national essence that would provide a basis for restoring the vitality and courage of the Chinese nation.” This contention seems slightly odd, given that Chen and his comrades were studying Sanskrit in order to better understand what was probably a Japanese school of a religion originating in India, and looked upon suspiciously by generations of Chinese rulers as destabilizing.

As will be seen, however, what Chen Duxiu does seem to have taken from Buddhism was the concept of the bodhisattva, the being that having reached enlightenment delayed his own entry into paradise in order to save others. One of the additional names Chen took for himself, Shi’an, may have come from this period, the name being made up of the characters for “truth” and “monastery.” His Buddhist training and Wang Jingwei’s ideas on nations would find a curious juncture shortly afterward, when an unexpected revolution announced the fall of the Qing state.
Chapter 3:

甲寅 1914
The Accidental Revolution

Jonathan Spence describes well the surprise that was the Xinhai Revolution: “The specific series of events that led to the fall of the two-and-a-half-centuries-old Qing dynasty was triggered by an accidental bomb explosion in Hankou, one of the three cities that composed the area of Wuhan, on October 9, 1911. This explosion might well have remained an isolated and forgotten incident, however, had it not been for the general agitation over constitutionalism, railways, the armies, Manchu power, and foreign encroachments.” The bomb went off in the Russian Concession in Hankou, set off while a group of revolutionaries, part of a group similar to those started by Chen Duxiu and others in Shanghai, were constructing several others. The resulting investigation by local authorities made the group realize that if it did not act immediately, its entire network would be taken apart.

And a large network it was. The local regiments mutinied, combining with the members of local revolutionary societies to take the entire tricity of Wuhan within days. Mutinies followed in Shaanxi and Hunan just over a week later, followed shortly by more in Shanxi, Jiangxi, and Yunnan. In Beijing, the Qing government was forced by its military commanders to accept a constitutional monarchy-like arrangement, with a national assembly and a retired military officer named Yuan Shikai as premier. Sun Yat-sen returned from a fundraising trip in the United States on Christmas day, arriving in Shanghai after making stops to ensure that neither Britain nor France would intervene to support the Manchu government. On January 1st, he assumed the presidency of a new Republic of China, which with its adoption of the solar calendar would celebrate the day as New Year’s Day for the first time.
With Sun’s inauguration speech came the announcement that the new China would be composed not of one ethnicity, but five: the Han, the Tibetans, the Mongols, the Hui, and the Manchus. This detail, never before seen in Sun’s writings, bore the mark of Wang Jingwei, who by his own testimony had in fact penned the speech. Although in 1912 the “five races” may well have been as much about political expediency as ideology, the idea would remain a part of Sun’s thought for the rest of his days.

China was now under both the Son of Heaven and the President of the Republic, an unsustainable situation as the rebellions and defections continued. In early February, the Qing court, after ensuring its own physical and financial security, announced the abdication of the child emperor Puyi. “Refusing to recognize Sun Yat-sen’s claims, a brief accompanying edict gave the retired general Yuan Shikai full powers ‘to organize a provisional republican government’ and to establish national unity with the Revolutionary Alliance and the other anti-imperial forces in central and south China.” Sun’s National Council in Nanjing ratified Yuan’s position as provisional president of the Republic of China, while Sun himself renounced the same title.

Anhui had been brought under the Revolutionary government on November 28, 1911. The new provincial government came under the management of Sun Yuyun, an old Warrior Yue associate of Chen Duxiu, who immediately called Chen back and made him the head of the Anhui provincial secretariat. By mid-1912, however, the situation had turned sour, with Yuan Shikai increasingly dominating both his cabinet and the temporary national assembly. In May, Sun Yuyun, following offers by Yuan Shikai of an official post in Beijing, deserted the Revolutionary camp.
and aligned himself with Yuan. Chen Duxiu left the government and became head of the Anhui Upper Level School (the present Anhui University). After the warlord Bo Wenwei stepped in to fill Sun’s place, Chen rejoined the government.8

In January 1913, China’s first election was held, with the newly-formed Guomindang taking the majority of seats. On March 20th, however, the party leader, Song Jiaoren, was shot by an assassin while standing on the platform waiting for the train that would take him to Beijing. He would die two days later, and his demise would be widely blamed on Yuan Shikai. Yuan himself proceeded to dismiss pro-Guomindang governors, forced Parliament to elect him for another five-year term instead of holding presidential elections, and in November outlawed the Guomindang as a seditious organization.9

Sun Yat-sen fled once again to Japan, followed by Chen Duxiu, who was forced to run for his life after the governor of Anhui was replaced by an ally of Yuan Shikai. The new governor began an investigation of Chen Duxiu’s affairs that would lead to his household in Anqing, forcing his sons to flee to the countryside.10 The warrant would refer to Chen as a “die-hard follower of the rebels Bo Wenwei and Gong Zhenpeng, a criminal who harbored ambitions of fomenting rebellion.”11

The mood among the revolutionaries who found themselves in Japan once more was one of both failure and betrayal. Chen Duxiu gave vent to particularly dark thoughts at the time, having seen both the failure of the revolution in 1911 and the defection of one of his friends, Sun Yuyun, to the side of an authoritarian government that in time would come resemble the just-departed Qing. Chen himself was given to particularly dark thoughts about the events of the previous two years, writing in a
short letter that “The last hope of the Chinese people is for the foreign powers to divide them up.”12

The Tiger

It fell to one of these refugees from Yuan Shikai’s crackdown, Zhang Shizhao (1881-1973), to begin to channel this disappointment and frustration into a discussion about just what went wrong. In July 1914, he founded the journal *Jiayin*, with the English title *The Tiger*. The name itself was a play on translation. The year 1914 was the *jiayin* year according to the ancient Chinese calendar, which employed sixty-year cycles, named by a cipher of two sets of Chinese characters. The first set, the Ten Celestial Stems, provided the character *jia*, the first character in the cycle. The Twelve Earthly Branches, the second set, corresponded with the Chinese Zodiac and provided the second character, *yin*, the tiger. Zhang Shizhao’s new journal was thus named not for an animal, but for the times to which it attempted to speak.

*Jiayin* has recently come to the attention of those studying modern China, with a strong agreement among scholars, Chinese or otherwise, that the *Jiayin* period has been deemphasized in favor of the New Culture Movement that came after it. Indeed, the trend over the last decade has been to begin to put this period in its place.
as the origin of the New Culture Movement, this time of turmoil being necessary for
the latter to happen at all. As Timothy Weston puts it:

Much has been written about the New Culture Movement of the late
1910s and early 1920s, but surprisingly little has been said about the
way that movement came into being. Indeed, it is customary to date
the beginning of the New Culture Movement from Chen Duxiu's
September 1915 founding of Youth Magazine (Qingnian zazhi) and
then to pass quickly to that periodical's more mature phase several
years later without paying serious attention to its journalistic
antecedents or the way its personnel came together.13

This shift in emphasis is echoed by the Chinese scholar Zhu Chengjia, writing in
2004 about the effect of Li Dazhao on Chen Duxiu’s subsequent actions:

For a long time, people have emphasized the immense historical
significance of Chen Duxiu’s founding New Youth, yet have ignored
the confused period and important help by Li Dazhao that came
before, have ignored the direct connection between New Youth’s basic
guiding philosophy and Li Dazhao’s patriotic thought.14

Leaving Zhu’s larger point about Li Dazhao’s significance aside (to return to it in the
next chapter), it is enough to note for the moment that Jiayin has been rediscovered
by scholars both inside and outside of China, which has resulted in a new view of the
origins of the New Culture Movement.

Zhang Shizhao, writing in one of the first issues of the periodical and with a
surprisingly detached view of what had just happened in China, expressed perfectly
the problem facing intellectuals at the time:

As for how they feel in their hearts, no one fails to recognize that the
current political situation is unstable; there is a definite disconnection
between the way they genuinely feel things ought to be, [on the one
hand,] and the situation into which they have been forced by actual
events, [on the other]….Everyone is concerned about careful study of
the reasons for the present political instability, and the reasons for the
disconnection [between the way things ought to be and the way things
are]. But virtually no one is able to express these logically or to
expound upon them systematically….When this happens for a long
period of time society takes on an apathetic appearance.15
What followed over the next two years was a remarkable conversation about the reasons for this “disconnection” between the China the literati had hoped and worked for, and the China before their eyes in 1914. Although it would begin as a fairly abstract discussion of certain classical Chinese ideas, the real topic of discussion was the present political situation.

Prioritizing the Public Over the Private

Chen Duxiu’s Anhui Patriotic Society had stated in its rules that members were not to “encourage individual freedom, or abandon the common benefit of the state.” The dichotomy between the public (gong), and private (si) was an ancient debate among literati, and one that usually ended in much the same way, with officials and commoners alike expected to subsume private interests to the public good.

It was a principle that had lasted to Zhang Shizhao’s time, and had found its way into the thought of many nationalist thinkers. Writers from Chen Duxiu to Sun Yat-sen had often complained of the excessive individualism of the Chinese, and their
insufficient concern for (or complete unawareness of) the national interest. Zhang Shizhao took a different view:

Thus readers who have read this far, if you ask anybody from where peace and harmony are derived, they will undoubtedly respond: ‘The country is the most important thing, so if politics is able to safeguard the country, then that means peace’...But how in fact are nations to survive, and how can they achieve peace and harmony? The common answer is: ‘In order to secure the country, it is necessary to sacrifice the interests of the individual. In order to give highest place to the country, it is the citizens’ primary duty to prioritize the public (gōng) over the private (si).’ This is truly a manner of speaking, and we are all accustomed to hearing it.17

A virtuous official in classical China was one who prioritized duty over personal gain. An ideal nationalist in the late Qing was one who prioritized the country over his province or clan.

Zhang Shizhao did not believe, however, that such thinking would lead to the peace and harmony that others claimed it would. Instead, he believed that it would lead to confusion, and a twisting of the boundaries between public and private. “...if people are not allowed to express their desires openly, they will express them in a twisted way; if they are not allowed to express them at a measured pace, they, of course, express them by explosive means.”18 An official not entitled to his own income will not live in poverty, but simply skim it off the public funds, thus blurring the border between public and private. Such an official, not allowed to express private desires, was merely disguising desires as public duty.

Zhang saw submitting the private to the public not just as a source of confusion, but as a prop to authoritarian regimes. Barely ten years after Zou Rong referred to the founder of the China’s first dynasty (the Qin) as an “autocrat” who had begun the 2000-year enslavement of the Chinese people,19 Zhang Shizhao believed he had found the reason why such regimes had been allowed to exist. The trouble with
the private being put aside in favor of the public, according to Zhang, was the definition of the word “public.” “Our conceptions of nation and sovereign (junzhu) are very unclear. We believe that the sovereign stands for the nation and that devotion to the nation is the same thing as devotion to the sovereign, that giving one’s life for the sovereign is no different from offering it for the nation.”20 “Public” was synonymous with “the state,” which in turn was inseparable from “the ruler.” As a result, “the interests of the common people are to be sacrificed for the benefit of those at the top of society.”21

Zhang lay the blame for the continuation of this system largely on Confucian scholars through the ages:

In his Yuan Dao, Han Yu wrote that commoners who fail to serve and esteem their rulers by producing grain and cloth and making household utensils and money should be put to death; this statement is preposterous that not even a child could be made to accept it. Yet for a thousand years esteemed scholars have come forth to praise Han Yu’s work for carrying on the way of Yu and Tang – one can imagine how much harmful influence this outlook has had on society.22

Although in propagating this lesson scholars and “merciless autocrats” had to some extent benefited themselves, scholars had in fact hurt themselves by leaving no space for dissenting opinion. In bringing up this point, Zhang touched on a second debate of classical origins, that of the value of factions (dang).

**A Common Path to Peace**

Confucian scholars through the ages had largely taken a dim view of factions or parties inside the government, believing that they promoted disunity and only served the private interests of those in each faction, thus rendering the debate inseparable from the question of public versus private. An exception to this rule was
the Song scholar Ouyang Xiu (1007-1072), who distinguished between parties composed of “gentlemen,” which were formed out of common principles, and parties of “inferior people,” which were formed for common profit. Inferior people, in Ouyang’s memorial, could only form parties temporarily, as common profit could not hold people together for long:

But this is not true of gentlemen, who abide by the Way and rightness, who practice loyalty and good faith, and care only for honor and integrity. When they employ these qualities in their personal conduct they share a common principle and improve each other, and when they turn them to the use of the state, they unite in common ideals and mutual assistance and from beginning to end act as one.\(^23\)

Thus parties could be used to reinforce the principles of a group of gentlemen, and in fact promote unity among their ranks.

Zhang Shizhao would write to the same sense in 1914: “In fact, the nation’s value lies in its bringing together different viewpoints so they can compete, make concessions to one another, and together achieve the goal of a common path to peace.”\(^24\) However, Zhang was no modern day Ouyang Xiu, and the latter may well have been horrified by the lengths to which his idea was taken. For while Zhang may have approved of a political discourse that resembled Ouyang’s “parties of gentlemen,” his idea of an entire nation bore an uncanny resemblance to Ouyang’s “parties of inferior people.”

If the Chinese were always sacrificing the private to the public, and were confused about whether the public was the state or the ruler, this was, in Zhang’s view, because they did not understand what a state was. And Zhang’s state was, in fact, an entity much like a giant faction of inferior people, centered around profit:

…a nation depends on organization. The organization must arise from a group of people who recognize their innate interests (guyou zhi li), and seek a means of protecting them…Thus a nation’s responsibility
(zhiwu) is to consolidate individuals’ personal rights (siquan), on the one hand, and to uphold social order, on the other.25

A nation was thus a body of people who have come together to promote their common interests, in addition to upholding order.

Zhang justified this definition in two ways. He echoed Chen Duxiu’s earlier comment that “nations are built by the people,” noting that “A nation is a type of political organization. All people in the country are part of this organization. The first requirement is that everyone in the country approves of their organizers.”26 Wang Jingwei had recently moved the definition of a state from being composed of one ethnicity to a “unity of races.” Zhang separated the state from race entirely, reducing it to a practical organization of people.

Zhang also directly attacked the notion that seeking profit was harmful or immoral: “If the people’s interests (li) are not promoted, how is the nation going to pursue its interests? If the people’s strength is not substantial, from where will the nation’s strength come? When the people increase their strength, that, in turn, safeguards the nation.”27 With these words, Zhang effectively denied that there need be an opposition between public and private interests – one supported the other.

Toward the end of the same year, Chen Duxiu, who had been up until that point expressing his frustration through poetry and brief letters, responded to Zhang’s article with one of his own. Chen, a subtle thinker but an unsubtle writer, took on Zhang Shizhao’s ideas in his typical polemical style. “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” (aiguoxin yu zijuexin), published in late 1914, appeared to take two the terms nation (guojia) and self-awareness (zijue) and give them explicit definitions. In reality, however, they represented the results of Chen’s own thoughts and modifications.
Safeguarding the People’s Rights and Providing for their Prosperity

The concept of the Chinese state was by this point greatly altered. Barely fifty years before, the state was still synonymous with the cultural empire built by the Qing. Zhang Taiyan’s theories remade the state into a racial entity, with China becoming the state of the Han people. Wang Jingwei’s modifications had changed the state into a legal entity to which its subjects had a “subordinate relationship,” separating race and state. Finally, Zhang Shizhao had reduced the state to simply a “political organization” with its leaders reduced to mere “organizers” who served at the pleasure of the people. What the people owed to the state was not to sacrifice their own interests, but to pursue them, which would make the state stronger.

Chen Duxiu’s definition of a nation had also changed since days editing the Anhui Common Speech Journal. At the time, he had echoed the common definition that nations were composed of “land, the people, and sovereignty,” although with the corollary that nations were established by the people, and were not simply the private property of their rulers. In 1914, however, Chen had modified his opinion to say that “Land, people, and sovereignty are but the form of a nation.” A true nation was established by the people “to safeguard their rights and provide for their prosperity; this is the spirit of establishing a nation.” Chen’s definition cleaved closely to Zhang Shizhao’s, but the emphasis throughout his article would be different; while Zhang focused on changing the notion of what the people owed to their nation, Chen was more interested in what nations owed to their people. The definition of a key term – zijue – would reflect this change.
Zijue

Zhang Shizhao’s article was entitled “Self-Awareness” (zijue), a term that he did not bring up until the final sentence of his essay. “If there are people who truly understand the meaning of this article, they possess zijue.”30 Zhang did not explicitly define his term anywhere in his article, but the text provides clues. Zhang Shizhao had identified two principal problems with the current situation in China: the first is that his colleagues could not rationally discuss China’s political and social problems; the second was that they did not understand the proper relationship between the state and the individuals living in it. It thus seems safe to assume that Zhang’s zijue implied the ability to rationally assess one’s environment, as well as the ability to understand one’s role in that environment. This role, in Zhang’s view, was to pursue one’s interests, and in doing so further the interests of the state.

The title of Chen Duxiu’s article used the term “zijuexin,” which is perhaps best rendered as “a sense of self-awareness.” Chen used it interchangeably with zijue throughout the article, and there does not appear to have been a substantial difference in their definitions. Chen Duxiu’s zijue defined in isolation appears to be simply a concrete definition of Zhang’s term, put into a more explicitly nationalist context: “What is a person with self-awareness? One who thinks of his country’s purpose and situation.”31 The role of zijue in Chen’s context, however, was greatly expanded from Zhang’s original definition, which required the definition of another relevant term: patriotism.

“What is a person with self-awareness? One who thinks of his country’s purpose and situation.”31

“Patriotism and Self-Awareness” seems to start on a different topic than Zhang’s “Self-Awareness”:

In the minds of all people, there is emotion (qing) and wisdom (zhi). The great men of ancient times all followed this path. They died for
emotion, the lonely martyred ministers, the excessively hasty knight-errants, all taking their own lives while preserving their commitments, with no regard to the benefits or losses from their actions. Emotion’s application is the virtue of all things, but its deficiency is stupidity. Wisdom’s use is discerning the truth of the thousand things, but its deficiency is waste. In the human emotions of ancient times, there were none who seemed to participate calmly, angry at the world and worrying about the kingdom, to the point of addiction.\textsuperscript{32}

Chinese officials and scholars had since ancient times worried about the fate of the empire, and in many cases had sacrificed themselves to make their opinions heard by the emperor. This sort of worry and sacrifice, to Chen, represented a form of excess emotionalism, in which ministers so moved by their sense of responsibility had sacrificed their lives, despite not knowing whether this would in fact serve their cause. What these ministers lacked, in Chen’s view, was wisdom (\textit{zhī}), which would allow them to think in terms of actually accomplishing their goals. Wisdom had its own extreme, however. Sages like Laozi, who had great insight into the workings of the world, simply distanced themselves from it, eventually leaving altogether.

Chen saw the same dichotomy at work in modern China, between another pair of terms:

\begin{quote}
In today’s China, popular feeling is in disarray, neither feelings nor wisdom are blind to this. If they are heartless, because they regard the public danger as having nothing to do with their own happiness or grief, this is called not having a sense of patriotism. If they have no knowledge, unable to distinguish this from that, this is called not having a sense of self-awareness.\textsuperscript{33}
\end{quote}

Patriotism was the emotion that caused ministers to worry about the fate of their nation. \textit{Zìjüe} represented the wisdom that allowed them to distinguish between reality and falsehood, informing their decisions about how to best rule the nation. Chen went on to make this relationship between these two sets of terms even more explicit:

\begin{quote}
Patriotism is affiliated with emotions. Self-awareness is affiliated with knowledge. What is a patriot? One who loves the union that protects
my people’s rights and provides for their prosperity. What is a person with self-awareness? One who thinks of his country’s purpose and situation. This is the reason one does not know a country’s purpose but loves it is thus deceived, and one who does not know a country’s situation but loves it is thus dangerous. Thus the shortcomings of the two are the same.34

Chen, the organizer of so many patriotic societies, did not see patriotism as a harmful thing in itself. Indeed, it was necessary for a nation’s survival. “The state whose people do not have a sense of patriotism, that country will always perish.”35 Patriotism was necessary to the founding and maintenance of a nation, for if nobody loved the nation, they would do nothing to preserve it.

Patriotism, however, had to represent loyalty to the right kind of nation, the type envisioned by both Zhang and Chen. In order to recognize which actions promoted this sort of nation and which did not, zijue was required. While Zhang Shizhao’s zijue simply represented an ability to recognize one’s individuality inside a nation and think critically about its condition, Chen’s zijue was much more specific. It called for citizens to understand that the nation existed for their safety and prosperity, and to be able to recognize when and why it was not living up to that responsibility. Chen thus saw patriotism and self-awareness as both necessary components to a healthy nation and as necessary limits on each other.

**Not Knowing a Nation’s Purpose Yet Loving It…**

Chen found concrete examples of nations with unbalanced emotion and wisdom easy to find in 1914. August marked the beginning of what would be known variously as the Great War, the War to End All Wars, and in retrospect World War I. For Chen, it represented the result of forgetting a nation’s purpose, and thus confusing patriotism and imperialism:
Not knowing a country’s purpose yet loving it, the people of Germany, Austria, and Japan are thus. Are not Germany, Austria, and Japan all constitutional nations? Is their citizens’ patriotism not known throughout the world? Yet the Germans were deceived by their rulers, abandoning all semblance of reason, and as a result hated strong Russia, and wished to fight fortunate Britain and push her off the seas, causing today’s severe war, bloodshed covering the fields, both sides hearing sounds of grief, either isolating cities or shattering lives in faraway places. In name they fight for the honor of the German people, but in reality they fight to assert the divine right of the Kaiser and his wild schemes.36

The Germans were not sacrificing themselves for the public good of their country, but for the benefit of their rulers. And the victims included not only the Germans, but also those in the countries they invaded. “To go to war because others are encroaching on one’s independence, that is patriotism. To go to war to encroach on the independence of others, that is imperialism.”37

This did not mean that fighting for one’s country was always harmful, provided it was for reasons of self-defense. “Patriotism and self-defense are to take the people’s well-being as one’s purpose…”38 Invasion was harmful to the people of a nation, and thus the people had an interest in defending against it. The Germans, however, had forgotten that nations existed for their people, were sacrificing themselves for the benefit of a few.

What Chen saw as the ultimate result of forgetting a nation’s prerogative to protect itself and provide for its people, others regarded as a shining example for the rest of Asia, Japan:

Since Japan reformed, it could establish a constitutional government, and ensure the people’s rights. It could in one move break China, in another push down strong Russia. There are perhaps none who would insult the nation’s power. Like Zhang Huangliu, a feast for the eyes, yet it is exhausting the inner to adorn the outer, for taxes are heavy and the people are exhausted. I fear that their Japan is strong, but the people are all freezing and starving to death. These are the people of a strong nation, yet where is their welfare? They all mistakenly regard
imperialism as patriotism, and thus offer themselves as sacrifices to their rulers’ brilliant show of military power.39

Japan since it had reformed and Westernized, in Chen’s view, had the most potential of any Asian nation to protect its people from foreign violations of their rights while providing for their prosperity. Yet instead, it had chosen to embark upon military campaigns and encroach upon the territory of others. The victims were the people, who starved, froze, and fought pointlessly.

Equal amounts of damage could potentially be done by those who were patriotic but ignorant of their own situation. Such an example could be found in Chen’s perception of Korea since it was colonized by Japan:

Korea is a small country with a thieving people, with greedy and oppressive rulers and ministers, in these respects they were matchless. Since becoming part of Japan, much has improved. Thieves lie low, courts and prisons have no cases to examine, to the Korean people’s great happiness. It is true that they must long to restore the old rulers, and strive to resist the powerful neighbor, but they should honestly look at their loss, and not gamble their profit.40

The Koreans, as Chen saw it, failed to appreciate the fact that the Japanese had in some sense done them a favor by removing their old rulers. While they might wish to also rid themselves of the Japanese, a Korean who could take an objective view of history would not advocate the restoration of the old rulers.

Zhang Shizhao, in criticizing the expectation that individuals should sacrifice their own interests for the public good, characterized those who promoted such an idea as using nationalism to harm the people. “All those who propose damaging the people while worshipping the nation are false nationalists. Regardless of the motivations of those who promote that sort of bogus idea, we must dismiss it and keep away from it.”41 Chen Duxiu echoed this sentiment, noting that “My country since ancient times had many who cried out to build up the nation, who repeated it

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tens of times, yet each one not only did not provide for my people’s well-being, but also became thieves who harmed the welfare of my people.” Such people, in Chen’s view, used the idea of public good for personal gain, and their victims were deceived because they did not understand what a nation was for, and what their place in it was. In short, they lacked zijue.

“A Declining Nation Behaves Like a Slave, Terrified of Everything”

Having established his framework, Chen Duxiu almost abruptly switched to a stinging criticism of China’s current situation, where he saw the forces he described alive and well. In Chen’s view, the crisis in Chinese politics had split its leaders and intellectuals into two groups: those who conducted an ambitious agenda as though China were already a powerful, prosperous nation, and those who were aware that it was not and had become utterly hopeless.

A tendency to overestimate China’s capacity could be found in the current regime of Yuan Shikai. “Deprived of any mass base of financial support, Yuan’s government lived largely on loans. At the beginning of his presidency, the state had an annual income of around 260 million yuan…By 1913 only 2 million yuan or less were coming in from provincial land taxes, and the government was running a deficit of 13 million yuan each month.” Yuan Shikai did not have access to customs revenues (which were deposited in foreign banks), or to the salt tax that had been the mainstay of so many Chinese dynasties; both were under foreign control, and used to put pressure on Yuan.
Despite this situation, Yuan continued to attempt to modernize China, with ambitious plans for the judiciary, the military, the economy, public education, and the prevention of opium smoking (the last of these was in fact highly effective).\(^{42}\) It was perhaps in response to this ambition on borrowed money that Chen Duxiu felt the need to inject some realism into the discussion of China’s development:

> My country’s days in seclusion have been long, my people have not advanced in government, in domestic or foreign situation, and are unaware of either one. One generation of elites, however, each managing to speak deceptively, seem to take an optimistic view, and frivolously discuss the issues of the present age, believing in a nation of boundless power, where things are abundant and the people many, and do not plan shrewdly, as though foreign aggression had ended.\(^{45}\)

Chen proceeded to expound upon in great detail the debt saddling the current Chinese government, the seeming unwillingness of anyone to discuss it, and the willingness of those same people to propose projects well beyond China’s means.

> It was, in Chen Duxiu’s view, a textbook case of wanting to do good for a nation but not understanding its actual condition and needs. China had its own elites engaged in “exhausting the inner to adorn the outer,” and “exploiting the poor, wearing out the peasants, oppressing the people and glorifying the military, believing China to be rich and powerful. It is like a sick man dying, drinking poison for pleasure.”\(^{46}\) Those who allowed such elites to continue such policies lacked the zijue
to examine their policies critically. The elites themselves either lacked this trait as well or were cynically manipulating others for their own ends.

Another group existed, that being those that were well aware of China’s dire situation, but were paralyzed by their own fear and pessimism:

Or they are perhaps aroused by unforeseen events, excessively pessimistic, fearful of the danger of the partition, thinking of the sorrow of a kingdom heading towards destruction, believing China is not aroused, and will in the future be part of the series of India and Korea. This such people ponder earnestly, yet their way of seeing things is extremely stupid…A declining nation behaves like a slave, terrified by everything, this is what confuses me.47

Chen saw this group as suffering from an excess of zijue. Like Laozi, who understood everything and left the country, such people had become completely hopeless, and simply waited for partition to come. This particular passage may have been somewhat self-referential on Chen’s part: just a few months before, he had written an extraordinarily cynical letter to Jiayin, claiming that China’s situation was so hopeless that the best it could hope for was for the Europeans and Japanese to partition it. Chen now attacked equally cynical proposals coming from others on how to deal with China’s situation.

“A nation of this sort, my people without it cannot be sorrowful, and with it cannot be happy”

Chen Duxiu was equally unimpressed with the proposed solutions to China’s problems of government, which in their own way reflected a lack of understanding of a nation’s situation or purpose. The first such solution was to simply restore the Qing, which would in fact happen briefly two years later. To Chen, this represented a failure to understand just how much China and the world had changed in the past few
decades: an imperial government “cannot protect the nation in these times.” The Qing had fallen because they could neither protect China from foreign invasion nor quell the discontent within.

The second popular solution was simply to replace the current government with another republican government:

One could say: This state of affairs certainly does not bring order; abolish it, for the nation is giving itself these difficulties. These words are strong, and cannot be considered false. Yet I fear the nation’s people’s ambition does not go far. If those who replace the old government also do not have the honesty to save the people from fire and water, and for their own benefit harm people as of old, are hostile toward difference as of old, glorify the military and oppress the people as of old, ignore the rule of law as of old, leave the public finances in disorder as of old, then the harm will be even greater.

Even before the era known as the New Culture Movement got its name, Chen was aware that China could replace its government dozens of times with the same result. The officials might change, but the culture of corruption, ignorance, and oppression would continue. The problem lay in people’s fundamental way of perceiving their government, their nation, and their place in it. As long as the Chinese continued to misunderstand the purpose of a nation and remain ignorant of its situation, they would continue to elect governments that ignored their interests.

The change that Chen Duxiu was looking for was much more drastic: he wanted both a nation that took responsibility for the welfare of its people and a people that held it accountable. Otherwise, China would do its people more harm than good. Zhang Shizhao had written, “If a nation does not function as a proper nation, it should be destroyed; if a government does not function as a proper government, it should be abolished…” Nations as Zhang conceived them had no inherent value, but were merely organizations founded to accomplish a specific goal – that of promoting its
members’ interests. If the nation did not accomplish this goal, there was no reason for it to continue to exist.

Chen Duxiu repeated this in a much harsher way in *Patriotism and Self-Awareness*:

Perhaps one will say: a loathsome nation is better than no nation. I however, say: with the disaster of oppressing the people, a loathsome nation is worse than no nation…A nation of this behavior and this sort of law, my people without it cannot be sorrowful, and with it cannot be happy.51

China, in Chen’s eyes, was causing its people more harm than good. Thus, short of a fundamental change in mindset, the people would be better off without their nation. Oddly enough, he recycled an old example from the *Anhui Common Speech Journal* to prove his point. “Did the Jews not lose their nation? They live all over the Earth, and many are wealthy…”52 While Chen had previously used the Jews as an example of the consequences of lacking national spirit, he here was inclined to view them in a more sympathetic light.

Chen Duxiu was given to hyperbole, and seeing as he himself had written against those paralyzed with hopelessness earlier in his article, it is doubtful that he in fact wished to see China collapse and its people scattered throughout the world. His language, however, drove home the point that the situation as it stood was not acceptable, and would require far more than a simple change of government: what was needed was a change in the entire way of viewing nations. Chen’s hyperbole, however, would attract the ire of another student in Japan, Li Dazhao, whose response would shift the conversation about nations in a critical new direction.
Chapter 4:

World-Weariness and Self-Awareness
Chen Duxiu’s nihilistic statement that the people were better off with no nation than a harmful one provoked the ire of another contributor to Jiayin, Li Dazhao. Born in 1889 in Leting, Hebei province, Li was ten years Chen’s junior, and eight years younger than Zhang Shizhao. Unlike Zhang and Chen, Li was in Japan studying, not fleeing, and wrote extensively on politics, economics, and history. He and Chen Duxiu would later become close associates, Li becoming the librarian at Peking University at the same time that Chen Duxiu was dean. The two men would collaborate on two journals, and finally in 1921 would found the first two cells of the Chinese Communist Party, Li in Beijing and Chen in Shanghai.

For the moment, however, Li took great issue with the writings of both Chen and Zhang. In an impeccably polite but scathing letter to Jiayin in late 1915, he attacked what he saw as the excessively nihilistic and pessimistic views of the two men. His letter, mockingly entitled “Pessimism and Self-Awareness” (Yanshixin yu Zijuexin), made use of a compound that literally meant “to hate the world” (yanshi). The word in historical usage has generally carried the connotation of passivity and pessimism, or even “world-weariness.”
This “world weariness” is implied in Li’s opening statement, which describes the feeling of reading Chen’s article:

Mr. Chen Duxiu’s “Patriotism and Self-Consciousness”, found in this great journal four issues ago, when its well-crafted language is read aloud, is absolutely heart rending! The country being like this, then those scholars who deeply reflected and greatly loved it, if they reflected upon the question, then they would all without exception be exhausted in emotion and reason, and if they did not drown themselves like Qu Yuan, then they would, like Laozi, mount an ox and leave the country. ³

Despite this mocking overture, which imitated Chen’s own introduction, it is remarkable the extent to which Li Dazhao agreed that the situation was dire. He wrote that “the crimes of government are already great,” and that “To use government to disperse corruption, when it has already attained this level…there are few who do not feel the same as Mr. Duxiu.”⁴ Li was well aware of China’s problems, and thus hardly disagreed with the veracity of Chen’s statements on the current state of affairs.

It appears initially that Li Dazhao did not greatly appreciate the idea of self-awareness. “If one’s thinking reaches this point and stops, then one from there casts oneself into a bottomless well, taking national doom and racial extinction as acceptable; it is thus that one uses this nation-dooming, race-extinguishing zijue to act.”⁵ And yet Li did not take issue with the basic idea behind Zhang Shizhao’s zijue, or indeed Chen Duxiu’s dichotomy between it and patriotism. Preceding the above passage, he echoed the statements of the previous two in saying, “In the beginning one asks rhetorically, I need a nation, it must have its goal, provided it meets its goal, than the nation would be lovable. [After a nation] is established and diverges [from its purpose], how can one love it?”⁶ A nation that did not fulfill its purpose (Li never challenged the purposes proposed by Chen and Zhang) was not one that is worth loving. Li moreover noted that one who characterizes Chen’s attitude as “nation-
dooming and race extinguishing” (as he just had) had not read Chen’s article well.

“Grumbling and depression are not the deeper meaning behind his words.”

Yves Chevrier characterizes Li’s “Pessimism and Self-Awareness” as a “mise-au-point,” and not as a rebuttal. This is correct in terms of the discussion of the meaning of zijue, in which Li echoes many of the sentiments of his peers:

The nation is a thing, is a requirement for survival, and attaching the word “evil” to it is going beyond appropriate. In terms of the purpose of a nation, the government and social spirit of the East and West are fundamentally different. The characteristic of the East is to lower oneself in order to submit to others, while the characteristic of the West is to preserve oneself in order to have mutual peace.

Here one could see both Zhang’s practical political organization and Chen’s unity for mutual defense and prosperity at work. One also could see a direct and sympathetic reference to Zhang’s promotion of individual interests over “public” (or elite) interests.

Li objected, however, to the notion that nations failing to serve their purpose should simply be abandoned, or be corrected through drastic change. “The meaning of zijue is to change the spirit of founding a nation, to strive toward a nation one can love and love it. It is not suitable that because one does not love one’s nation sufficiently, to give up on one’s nation and not love it.” As Li saw it, founding a nation was a process, and all nations would begin as imperfect, even harmful entities. The solution was not to abandon it, as Chen proposed, but to work to improve it. His particular turn of phrase, “to work toward a nation one can love and love it” (qiú yì ke’ai zhì guójia ér ài zhì) is interesting in that it can be translated as “look for a lovable nation and love it” or as “strive toward a lovable nation and love it.” The former characterizes Chen Duxiu’s view of the world as Li perceives it, while the latter represents Li’s own ideal.
Chen Duxiu had been skeptical of the ability of Chinese people to found and hold a nation together. “Can the people’s intellect, viewed from every angle, in the twentieth century establish a nation? One cannot honestly not have suspicions about the arrogance of this idea…when partition approaches, the unworthy will hasten its arrival, while the worthy will be hard pressed to prevent it.” Li Dazhao, by contrast, had great faith in individual Chinese people to found a nation and perfect it:

It is even less suitable to take the fact that my people have never enjoyed a lovable nation, and thus have rejected and done violence to themselves, and thus have become grouped into a nationless people, to mean that they are lacking the ability to build a lovable nation. Thus the accomplishments of a nation are achieved by people, the self dominates [the universe], in the midst of the cosmos are contained people such as ourselves, and thus they can create a nation.

In Li’s view, if there existed people such as he, Chen, and by implication Zhang Shizhao, then there was a chance to found a nation. “If we are indeed not making ourselves weak, but have our own power of zijue, exerting ourselves and advancing bravely toward our target, when we will achieve our aims, one does not have the time to ask.” Li showed great faith in the power of individuals (or at least, those who were educated and aware), a view that counteracted Chen’s somewhat dimmer view of human nature, but to some extent confirmed Zhang’s belief in individual agency.

Indeed, taking the idea long promoted by Chen that “nations are built by the people,” Li turned it around to support his view of nations as a progressive project:

Nations did not arise in the beginning with the cosmos, nor were they simply bestowed by Heaven. In the beginning was a foundation, also created by people, and there are no nations that do not rely on the patriotism of citizens to develop and enlarge them, until in the end there is success.

People did not just have the agency to found nations, but to improve upon them as well. Li Dazhao’s view of the nation was essentially the same as Zhang and Chen’s,
but his view of citizens was different. Instead of the drastic change upon which Chen insisted, Li saw the building of nations as a long, gradual project, which started with the founding of an imperfect nation and ended with the ideal envisioned by Chen. Thus a nation that protected the people’s rights and provided for their welfare was not a requirement, but a goal.

**The Responsibility of a Writer**

Precisely because Li believed in the power of people, and in that of the writers in particular, he took much stronger issue with Chen’s attitude, which he saw as not befitting a literatus with *zijue*, and bordering on dangerous:

There are friends who say, to characterize [Chen’s] article, it is overly depressing. The crimes of government are already great, a pessimistic trend in thought lurks in society, and inside this dark, blind, baseless movement, those among the depressed people who still have interest in living increasingly use pessimistic speech, which most easily moves the hearts of people.15

The power of writers was to influence opinion, and Chen, in Li’s eyes, was spreading hopelessness. “Literature is a thing that moves people deeply.”16 In some cases, Li believed, it could move people to a hopelessness that would cause them to take their own lives, just for the sake of escaping the situation:

If one indulges in pessimistic thought and sad articles, grieving people’s hearts, one cannot only not call people out from their illusions and spur their intelligence, but also cause their grief and sorrow to kill them. This is the responsibility of contemporary writers, [in which] they cannot not be cautious. Accidents have consequences, and to put out such a chaotic work, which only describes emotions, [such a person] should not publish again.17

To Li, writing in a journal to simply give vent to one’s emotions was irresponsible. As a writer, Chen had a responsibility to inspire and motivate, not to deepen his readers’ despair.
Such writings, according to Li, had already had an impact, driving many to despair, and even suicide:

Literature is a thing that moves people deeply, and when people suffer under abusive government... One or two literati, their chests full of grief and anger, say ‘Alas, there is nothing’, and publish articles, using their deceiving pens to write of their interest in dying... The youth in secondary school, of simple intelligence, are often those moved by such writing, and thus take suicide to be commonplace.\textsuperscript{18}

Li Dazhao did not object greatly to Chen Duxiu’s dichotomies between emotion and wisdom, patriotism and \textit{zijue}, or indeed any of his assessments. He did object, however, to what he perceived as Chen’s utterly hopeless attitude. How Chen responded to such criticism – if at all – is the subject of a lively debate among contemporary scholars.

\textit{Resurgence or Resurrection?}

While most scholars agree that the conversation between Zhang Shizhao, Chen Duxiu, and Li Dazhao is significant, there is much disagreement about what that significance is, and how to make sense of it in relation to surrounding events. In January 1915, just a few months after the publication of Chen’s article, Japan presented its Twenty-One Demands to Yuan Shikai’s government, seeking even more concessions of territory, sovereignty, and economic privileges.\textsuperscript{19} Despite a relatively successful nationwide boycott of Japanese goods, Yuan yielded to the Japanese ultimatum with only the lightest of modifications, dealing a severe blow to his prestige.\textsuperscript{20}

Five months later, in mid-June, Chen Duxiu returned to China, taking up residence in the relative safety of Shanghai’s French Concession. His return was ostensibly due to his second wife Gao Junman’s illness, and he took up residence
with her and his four children. Tensions within the household, however, resulted in Chen living in a separate quarters from most of his family.\textsuperscript{21} He took advantage of his location to organize all of the Anhui revolutionaries living in Shanghai, earning him the nickname Lu Su, after a strategist and statesman of the Warring States kingdom of Eastern Wu.

On August 10\textsuperscript{th}, Li Dazhao’s *Yanshixin yu Zijuexin* was published in Japan, in the seventh issue of *Jiayin*. Just over a month later, Chen Duxiu launched his own new journal, the one that would become the most famous of his career. *Youth* (*Qingnian*), later renamed *La Jeunesse* (*Xin Qingnian*, literally *New Youth*), would become the symbol of an era in Chinese intellectual history. Chen would advertise his new journal in the final issues of *Jiayin*.

One can see the gap between the Chen Duxiu who in 1914 morbidly predicted China’s division and welcomed its coming and the Chen Duxiu who in mid-1915 returned to China, began organizing again, and published a magazine specifically targeted at the younger generation. This gap has not been lost on later writers. The Beijing University writer Xu Zhiyuan, writing in 2009, made note of this gap and the change it represented:

And yet a year later, the magazine *New Youth* began publishing, almost immediately symbolizing the arrival of yet another transforming generation…Chen Duxiu placed his hopes on a new group – the young. When it comes to a stable agrarian society, completely dependent on habit, the old are the center of power, their experience and values being the source of knowledge. But in this era of stressful change and competition, the young were where hope could be found. Their intelligence and temperament not yet fully fixed, they could bring new possibilities.\textsuperscript{22}

*La Jeunesse*, unlike *Jiayin*, was not an intellectual journal, but a magazine whose intention was not to think but to influence thought. Xu’s narrative is one of Chen
Duxiu giving up on the old and turning to the young, hoping to influence the next generation into having a greater sense of zijue.

Chen may well have had reason to feel validated. Three months after he founded La Jeunesse, at the close of 1915, Yuan Shikai declared himself emperor, an announcement supposedly endorsed by a unanimous vote by a special “Representative Assembly” of 1,993 people. His advisors had believed that a strong symbol of authority would help strengthen China’s unity. The result was the opposite. Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi all declared their independence from Yuan’s rule within the next three months, beginning one of the most politically and intellectually complicated eras of modern Chinese history. For the moment, however, it confirmed Chen’s warning that those wanting to restore the imperial system were tragically ignorant of the direction popular thought was taking.

Chen found similar confirmation of his fear of blind patriotism leading to exploitation by unscrupulous leaders, as the news of Yuan Shikai’s signing of the Twenty-One Demands began to spread. As Xu Jilin characterized the reaction to “Patriotism and Self-Awareness”:

The article provoked a storm. Zhang Shizhao, for his part, declared: 'Chen Duxiu alone is our "Rooster of Runan", the first to raise the alarm', but readers' letters flooded in accusing Chen of being a madman who 'misunderstands patriotism.' However, before long the news of Yuan Shikai's betrayal leaked out, and public opinion began to shift and there was a baleful realized [sic] that Chen had been prescient in his warnings about the perils of blind patriotism.

Zhang Shizhao, in the same article, noted that similar sentiments had recently been expressed by no other than Liang Qichao, who would continue to work for the reform of Chinese society along more conservative lines. As Zhang put it, when two such
figures so far from each other on the political spectrum felt the need to provide warnings about the same issue, there had to be some truth to their words.25

Zhang Shizhao had characterized Chen Duxiu as China’s “Rooster of Runan, the first to raise the alarm.”26 Chen Duxiu himself, however, seems to have moved on from his own article. Instead of waiting for the fall of the nation or abandoning China as unworthy of patriotic sentiment, Chen’s founding of La Jeunesse represented a new willingness to work with what was at hand. Zhu Chengjia, writing in 2004, attributed many of Chen’s subsequent actions to the influence of Li Dazhao’s “Pessimism and Self-Awareness.” “The reasons for Chen Duxiu’s thought changing and taking off are many. Li Dazhao’s helpful criticism, however, was at that vital moment in fact of the greatest help.”27 Zhu portrayed Li’s criticism as a friendly reprimand from a friend, which drew Chen Duxiu out of his doldrums and started him on the path to writing positively and constructively. Moreover, as seen above, Zhu attributes the “basic guiding philosophy” of New Youth to Li’s ideas on patriotism, as set out in “Pessimism and Self-Awareness.”28

Zhu’s work is riddled with leaps of logic that harm his argument, but provide useful insights:

Li Dazhao’s article, as the publication date on the journal makes clear, was published on August 10th, 1915. Judging by the article’s content, however, he would have written it around May 1915, that is to say, about a month before Chen Duxiu left Japan and returned to China. The article was sent to Zhang Shizhao, but such an article, targeting Chen Duxiu so specifically for discussion and criticism, would have certainly been seen by the latter before publication.29

Zhu builds an argument starting from the conclusion and working back. Li Dazhao must have influenced Chen Duxiu, therefore Chen Duxiu must have seen “Pessimism and Self-Awareness” before leaving Japan, and he must have left not due to his wife’s
illness, but to found a revolutionary journal. Zhu argues that if Chen Duxiu had seen “Pessimism and Self-Awareness” at the same time as everyone else, he would have had only a month and a half to throw together the first issue of *Youth Magazine* (later renamed *La Jeunesse*), which he not only took charge of editing, but for which he also wrote most of the articles.

Zhu’s hypothesis is possible, but lacks any of the empirical evidence required to make it plausible. It is not the purpose of this thesis, however, to substantiate or debate his timeline. It is instead more concerned with Zhu’s main contention, that Li Dazhao provided a “basic guiding philosophy” for Chen’s later actions. In other words, that Li Dazhao had a significant, altering influence on Chen Duxiu’s ideas. Chen may have been right in his assessment of China’s situation, but he himself agreed with Li Dazhao’s exhortations to be less pessimistic and write constructively, and to be less nihilistic and work with the China that he had. The founding of *La Jeunesse* on the face of it appears to express such a willingness to try and influence popular opinion.

Yet some would contend that this willingness was not unprecedented, nor did Chen Duxiu’s crisis of 1914 represent a significant change in his thinking. The French scholar Yves Chevrier, disagreeing with Zhu, contends that what changed was not Chen’s basic ideas, but his consciousness and focus. “Is this to say that Chen Duxiu’s Japanese resurrection was simply a resurgence? In terms of the themes, yes. In terms of Chen’s consciousness of these themes, and their import, no.”[^30] Chevrier sees the transition in 1915 not as a major change, but as a systematization of Chen’s earlier ideas, and a readiness to propagate them.[^31]
In asking the questions of just how much Chen Duxiu’s thinking about nations and nationalism changed, and how much of this change reflected Li Dazhao’s influence, it is instructive to consider one more text, Zhang Shizhao’s reply to Li Dazhao’s “Pessimism and Self-Awareness.”

**On the Virtues of Suicide**

Zhang Shizhao’s reply to Li Dazhao was taken for a brief period to be a reply from Chen Duxiu himself. It is now commonly accepted that Zhang Shizhao wrote the piece, which appeared directly after Li Dazhao’s article (“Pessimism and Self-Awareness” originally took the form of a letter to the editor). Zhang in his commentary unleashed a stinging criticism of Li Dazhao’s letter. “Your letter, containing deep pity for the times, sent to act as advice for the saving of the nation, are the words of a benevolent person, yet the benefit is meager.”

Li Dazhao had written in a relatively polite but mocking style, and with Zhang’s reply, this veneer of civility became even thinner. Zhang, having added further thoughts to the debate over nations and nationalism in a second article, “The Nation and I”, focused his criticism on Li’s fear of negative articles encouraging suicide, and turned Li’s argument on its head.

Li Dazhao had portrayed suicide as a result of hopelessness, as a way to remove oneself from a situation without a way forward. Zhang Shizhao took the opposite view:

But as for the sender rebuking suicide, taking it to be proof of self-destruction, I say it is not exactly like this. The great worry of my country is simply that it has become accustomed to tolerating its miserable existence! [In light of this] suicide is naturally flourishing, one can still correct this or that, yet it seems that these turbid, muddy, spineless people are without a particle of will to see things as lacking
and make them well. Throw the people to the tigers, and the tigers won’t eat them; exile them to the north, and the north won’t be able to stand them.\textsuperscript{34}

Those who had truly given up were not those committing suicide, but those who simply accepted the situation as it was and continued on with their lives. To Zhang, those who “tolerated their miserable existence” were simply showing their lack of will or courage to do anything about their own situation. This was so contemptible in Zhang’s eyes that if one were to throw these people to the tigers, the tigers would not even deign to eat them.

What then of those who committed suicide? The seeming willingness of the Japanese to sacrifice their lives for their country had been a topic for the entire series of articles that lead up to Zhang’s reply, with Chen Duxiu in particular seeing it as a foolish practice that showed lack of understanding of a nation’s purpose. Zhang argued for a slightly different interpretation:

This fool believes, Japan’s people vigorously commit suicide for the direct purpose of strengthening the nation, and for the indirect purpose of understanding that their lives and reason have no particular purpose. For my part, having not the leisure to die of guilt, studying it without success, what is wrong with that?\textsuperscript{35}

Japan, in Zhang’s view, was stronger for the willingness of its people to sacrifice their lives for it, a claim China could not make. In addition, it reflected an understanding by the average Japanese person that living out their lives passively carried no particular meaning. Suicide was thus a method of breaking out of this passivity, and giving meaning to a life otherwise without.

With this point, Zhang had reversed Li’s argument. While the latter had taken suicide as a result of \textit{yanshi}, or passive pessimism, Zhang saw suicide as deliberate
act, to be contrasted with the passivity of simply doing nothing. Passivity, after all,

had a long history in China as a method of survival:

Wishing at present to seriously inform the public, that Japan is
worshipping and praising suicide, in fact has to do with its method of
establishing a nation, and not with my people’s “animals watching the
birds sleeping” [passive, detached] method of looking at it. The saying
“ordinary person,” this is half of the lesson to the people. From ancient
times to the present a generations of Feng Daos and Hu Guangs have
relied on this [passivity] to preserve their lives.36

Suicide was to be associated with the establishment of nations. What the Chinese did,
by contrast, was to be “animals watching the birds sleeping”, which might be taken to
mean watching their prey sleep without pouncing. Not standing up against such
changes, however, had preserved the lives of generations of peasants, to say nothing
of intellectuals. Sima Qian (135-86 BCE), the writer of the first comprehensive
historical work in classical China, had accepted his lot as a eunuch in order to finish
his father’s work and be remembered forever to posterity. Only a few, such the
celebrated minister Qu Yuan (340-278 BCE) had chosen suicide as a way to make a
powerful statement to their rulers.

For suicide was a difficult and violent act, an act not of giving up, but of
steeling one’s will:

Why does the sender not say: while waiting for death, why not turn
one’s blade sideways to spur on one’s horse, giving one’s all on the
battlefield? I don’t know whether those without determination to
commit suicide, have ever seen the ability to give one’s all.37

Why, Zhang seemed to ask, did one wait to die a miserable death of old age, instead
of choosing a death that would have meaning? One who had never contemplated
giving one’s life, then, was one who had never been truly devoted to the cause.

Zhang was well aware of his redefinition of suicide, as seen with manipulation
of the word “pessimism” (yanshi):
Thus at present my country is suffering not due to pessimism, but from a lack of pessimism. If there were true pessimists, they could on one hand return from the highest point, enter the world, and accept the task of saving people…\textsuperscript{38}

To Zhang, China had no pessimists, \textit{as Li defined them}. In other words, there were none who were about to commit suicide or speak the hard truths that would encourage others to do so. If there were, then they would use their knowledge to attempt to influence events. If should be noted that Zhang appears to be talking about the same group as Li: those literati aware of the true situation and thus in a position to change it.

Perhaps even more notable in the above passage is the Buddhist imagery that Zhang’s article made use of. To reject \textit{nirvana} even after attaining enlightenment, and to re-enter the world to save others was the hallmark of the \textit{bodhisattva} of Mahayana Buddhism, which had influenced Chinese thought greatly throughout the ages. The Buddhist tone was even more blatant in Zhang’s characterization of those committing suicide as having “previously purified their lives and lost their safe harbors [jinggang], angrily throwing themselves into the Xiang.”\textsuperscript{39} Here Zhang showed the influence of the Buddhist study group that he and Chen Duxiu had been members of on their last excursion to Japan seven years before.

\textit{Entering the World Again}

In following the conversation between Chen Duxiu, Zhang Shizhao, and Li Dazhao, several questions arise. How significant a change in Chen Duxiu’s ideas did the conversation represent? To what extent were his ideas and actions influenced by Zhang and Li’s commentary? What does this conversation say about the way Chen’s ideology changed and evolved throughout his life?
Zhu’s theory relies upon the assumption that Chen Duxiu would not have time after reading Li Dazhao’s article in August to found *La Jeunesse* in September. It is equally questionable, however, to contend that Chen (at the earliest) read Li Dazhao’s article in May and decided within a month to return to Shanghai, began organizing the local revolutionaries, and started work on a revolutionary journal. Chen Duxiu was a blunt, polemical writer, given to urging his readers to action. He was not, however, himself given to rapid changes of opinion or hasty actions. The failure of the Xinhai Revolution to change the situation of China had been the subject of his writings and thoughts for nearly three years before he finally returned to China, and in future situations he would show a tendency to evaluate new ideas slowly and skeptically.

Chen Duxiu would in fact return to China with many of his previous ideas intact, but as Chevrier has noted, they had undergone great development in from 1914 to 1915. Vague notions of nations being “built by the people” had turned into the confident assertion that the purpose of nations was to “protect the people’s rights and provide for their prosperity.” This development owed itself heavily to Zhang Shizhao’s formulation of the concept of *zijue*, which would function as the foundation of Chen Duxiu’s new articulation of his ideas.

Zhu also overstates the extent to which Li Dazhao modified the ideas of Chen Duxiu and Zhang Shizhao. While Chen had in fact taken Zhang’s ideas in a radically different direction by situating them in the context of nationalist thought, Li only added a small corollary to Chen Duxiu’s theories, by stating that protecting the people’s rights and providing for their happiness was a goal, not a condition of founding a nation. Thus the nation was to be founded first, and then developed to the
point where it fulfilled both requirements. Li believed in the ability of people to improve upon the nation given to them, and thus accepted a nation’s flaws as temporary.

Where both Li and Zhang attempted to modify Chen’s article the most was in fact in the details. The three men all have drastically different opinions on suicide, with Chen seeing it as displaying excessive emotion and insufficient reason, Li taking it to be a passive way to flee one’s situation, and Zhang overturning this argument to portray suicide as the one decisive action one can take to change a situation. While the three agreed that writers and intellectuals had important roles to play in lifting a society out of its fallen state, they disagreed sharply on how to go about it. Zhang and Chen saw writers as obligated to speak hard truths and jolt people to their senses, while Li only saw use for “productive” writing not excessively based on emotion.

It is not possible for historians to return to Chen Duxiu’s side as he reads the reactions to his article, and assess how much he was influenced by either Zhang or Li’s critiques. Chen’s writings over the next five years, however, provide ample enough material to answer the questions of what Chen’s influences were, and what sort of a thinker he was. These five years, although usually known as the New Culture Movement, would in terms of Chen’s ideas bring about very little “new” that did not already come about in Jiayin period.
Chapter 5:

“Turning One’s Blade Sideways and Charging into Battle”
**Dead Cells in Need of Removal**

The October issue of *Jiayin* that carried both Zhang Shizhao and Li Dazhao’s articles was one of the final issues to be published. A month earlier, Zhang Shizhao had published another article, *Refuting the Emperor System*, in which he had compared Yuan Shikai to Louis Napoléon, who in 1851 had abolished the French constitution and made himself dictator.¹ Zhang also compared Yuan to the Mexican dictator Porfiro Díaz, who had claimed that Mexico’s economic and political situation did not allow for a republic. Zhang noted, in a barely concealed warning, that Díaz had recently been brought down by a revolution. The article resulted in Yuan issuing a warrant for Zhang Shizhao’s arrest, and orders for all copies of *Jiayin* to be intercepted by the postal service.²

Up until late 1915, *Jiayin* had been a relatively moderate newspaper, which had allowed articles, poems, and letters from a range of viewpoints, from Chen Duxiu to Liang Qichao to Zhang Taiyan. Once Yuan started showing signs of his determination to restore the imperial system (his intention confirmed three months after Zhang Shizhao accused him of it), *Jiayin* became whole-heartedly against Yuan.

Why then would Yuan be worried about the influence of one journal, written in classical Chinese sprinkled liberally with imported Japanese words, and thus accessible to so few? *Jiayin*, as Timothy Weston suggests, was in fact quite widely read among those educated enough to read it, with distribution in such far-flung places as Beijing, Shanghai, Changsha, Guangzhou, Chongqing, and Chengdu. In Changsha, a young student named Mao Zedong read it on a regular basis.³ The journal sold out in most of these cities, and was considered to be one of the most
influential publications among intellectuals at the time. It is thus not surprising that Yuan would take notice of criticism in the pages of *Jiayin*.

After the warrant was issued for his arrest, Zhang Shizhao closed his journal and returned to China to organize for the National Protection Army, an anti-Yuan organization. Chen Duxiu, meanwhile, had in September begun publishing a new journal in Shanghai, with the trendy French title of *La Jeunesse* (*Qingnian* – “Youth” in both languages), which he subsequently advertised in the final issues of *Jiayin*.4 The journal has been hailed by subsequent historians as revolutionary, and as marking the beginning of the period known as the New Culture Movement.

The similarities between *La Jeunesse* and *Jiayin*, however, are striking enough to question this view. *La Jeunesse* was edited by Chen Duxiu, formerly the assistant editor of *Jiayin*. A look at the table of contents of any of the early issues of *La Jeunesse* may lead the reader to mistake it for *Jiayin*, so similar are the contributors. “Indeed, the continuity in personnel between the two magazines is striking; among those who published in early issues of Chen's magazine after having previously written for *Jiayin* were Gao Yihan, Yi Baisha, Li Dazhao, Hu Shi, Yang Changji, Cheng Yansheng, Wu Yu, Wu Zhihui, Su Manshu, Xie Wuliang, and Liu Wendian.”5
La Jeunesse early on was also written in classical Chinese, much like its predecessor. Like Jiayin, it contained summaries of world and national events in the back, the long editorial collaboration between Chen Duxiu and Zhang Shizhao imbuing them with similar habits. Jiayin had been bankrolled partly by Zhang and Chen’s common benefactor Wang Mengzou, and the latter introduced Chen Duxiu to another Shanghai publisher to print his magazine. The magazine only enjoyed limited circulation in the beginning, and the writer Lu Xun, in his preface to his first collection of short stories, notes that at the time of his first writing for the magazine, “…hitherto there seemed to have been no reaction, favorable or otherwise, and I guessed they must be feeling lonely.”

La Jeunesse at the outset was neither influential nor revolutionary. But it was different. “A Call to Youth,” (jinggao qingnian) Chen Duxiu’s greeting to his readers in the first issue, spoke of both a new discourse and a new readership. The language itself was much more polemical and passionate, and much less scholarly, than that found in Jiayin, with deliberately short and dramatic sentences and frequent exclamations. “A Call to Youth” was pointedly directed at a different audience, the young, and Chen was not interested in academic discussion, but in changing minds. Support for Xu Zhiyuan’s suggestion of Chen turning away from the old and finding hope in the young can be found in Chen’s own language: he described his readers’ elders as dead cells in need of weeding out by metabolism, to be replaced by ones that were young and healthy.

The concept of zijue also made an appearance in “A Call to Youth,” but received a new definition. According to Chen, the youth would “make use of zijue to strive and struggle. What is zijue? It is youth’s fresh, lively value and responsibility.”
Chen Duxiu had not given up on the idea of *zijue*, although he gave it a somewhat more positive, active character than before. Li Dazhao had believed that the Chinese were fully capable of founding a nation and making it better, while Zhang Shizhao had believed that those same people would not even be palatable to the tigers if thrown to them. In Chen’s new *zijue*, he cleaved more closely to Li’s definition, giving some credence to the idea that Chen’s thought was altered somewhat by Li Dazhao.

**Resilience**

Chen continued to explore the issue of what individuals should do to change their nation in an article published two months later in the November 15th issue of *La Jeunesse*, entitled “Resilience” (*dikangli*). The term itself was an interesting one, referring in modern Chinese to the ability of organisms to protect themselves against disease. For Chen, it was the ability to “avoid harm, resist insult, and survive.” Resilience was connected directly to evolution, and Social Darwinist messages were just as prevalent in Chen’s writings as before the Xinhai Revolution.

Much of the content of *La Jeunesse* was aimed at the abandoning of traditional Chinese thought and the adoption of “modern” Western ideas. What often happened in reality, however, was a melding of the two. Chen Duxiu in particular, etymologist that he was, was fond of using old terms to explain new ones, and vice versa. In this case, “resilience,” a very new Japanese loanword, was combined with two very old terms, *tiandao* and *rendao*. The former referred to the “way of Heaven,” or things outside human control, while the latter referred to the “way of men,” or things inside human control. What the two had in common, according to Chen, was
resilience, which determined the survival or destruction of everything from planets to animals to dynasties.\textsuperscript{11} To support his point, Chen quoted such a wide variety of figures as Napoléon Bonaparte, Andrew Carnegie, Nogi Maresuke (a Japanese general whose exploits included the invasion and governorship of Taiwan), and Mencius. Chen appeared to take no issue with drawing wisdom from sources that were Western, old, or from the pens of China’s enemies.

Almost no article written by Chen for La Jeunesse lacked a political punch, and Chen in this case was interested in the reasons for the obvious decline in China’s “resilience”. The answer, in his view, lay in three factors: the following of old doctrines, military rule and the suppression of dissent, and finally disunity and warlordism. The “following of old doctrines” would become a constant theme in Chen’s writings over the next few years, although his choice of inspirations was much more eclectic than the phrase suggests. His view that military rule and suppression of dissent were harmful to a nation’s survival could have been pulled out of many articles from Jiayin, in particular Zhang Shizhao’s controversial support of factions and parties. Chen’s inclusion of “disunity” in the same list as “suppression of dissent” suggests that he did not see dissent and unity as incompatible, a key component to Zhang’s argument for self-awareness.

Chen called on making use of the attribute of resilience for reforming China, although he noted that as in the case of the French Revolution and Meiji reforms that came before, such a reform would not happen overnight, seeming to reflect his absorption of Li Dazhao’s point that nation building took time.
The Final Realization

China’s own store of “resilience” was perhaps at an all time low as Chen was writing. A month after the article was published, Yuan Shikai, who had already taken up the habit of presiding over rituals at the Qing Temple of Heaven, was declared emperor, starting a series of defections by provincial warlords. Old doctrines, military rule, and disunity had come together to produce much the sort of effect that Chen had predicted.

It was perhaps these events that provoked Chen Duxiu to write “The Final Realization of My People” in the February 1916 issue of La Jeunesse. It was an appropriate title, as it would be published in the final issue of La Jeunesse to bear the Chinese name Qingnian (Youth). It opened with a much deeper message than simple politics. “Human life must end with death, yet one does not to live in order to die, nor can one apathetically say that one lives for the sake of living. Man’s actions must have their purpose, and their lives must also be lived correctly.” It was a phrase reminiscent of Zhang Shizhao’s somewhat hopeless call for his readers to “turn their blades sideways and charge into battle.”

Like all of Chen’s articles, however, “The Final Realization of My People” did contain a political message, one that readers of Jiayin would recognize instantly. China was still theoretically a republic, but Chen saw a key component missing: the participation of the people. Chen was concerned that people were simply taking the same attitude toward the new republic as they did toward the old imperial system: always looking to the government to solve their problems and trusting it completely:

If a constitutional government’s main drive comes from the government and not from the people, not only is the constitution a worthless piece of paper, with no lasting guarantees, but as for the freedom and rights within, people will not regard them as things of
importance, will not support them with their lives, and thus the spirit of constitutional government will be entirely lost.14

A constitutional government required active participants. Chen, entirely in line with his earlier writings, still believed that governments were established by the people and should be run by them.

Jonathan Spence points out that at the time, “Yuan Shikai and his advisors…believed that China was yearning for a symbol of central authority transcending the president and that, therefore, the restoration of the emperorship would be welcomed.”15 To judge by the outcry and defections, China disagreed, Chen Duxiu perhaps most of all. It was a reaction that Chen himself had predicted in 1914, when he wrote that restoring the monarchy would only show ignorance of the national situation and mood on the part of those governing.

Chen’s espousal of such democratic principles, in his view, put him on a collision course with another social system, that of Confucian ethics. Thus while his first point was a “political realization,” Chen also believed that his readers had to come to an “ethical realization,” which was that Confucian ethics were incompatible with his principles for a modern republic. “The fundamental meaning of the Three Guides is a class system. The so-called Rectification of Names and the so-called Rites, they are all but a system for separating seniors and juniors, the noble and the lowly.”16 It is tempting to take this as a sign of Chen’s beginning to espouse Marxist theory, and it is indeed possible that he was reading Marx at the time. However, the principle with which Chen was contrasting Confucian ethics (lunli) was not socialism, but independence, equality, and freedom (duli, pingdeng, ziyou). While Chen and many others would later attack Confucian morals as antisocialist, Chen for the moment preferred to attack them as undemocratic.
Chen was not content with China simply disagreeing with the imperial system or Confucian ethics, however. Disagreeing in one’s mind required zijue, but disagreeing with one’s actions required something else. Thus Chen introduced another word, zidong, to represent acting on one’s beliefs. Zidong, ironically, is often used in modern Chinese to refer to automation, while Chen Duxiu clearly had the opposite in mind. “If a constitutional republic does not arise from the zijue and zidong of the majority of its citizens, than it is a false republic, a false constitution, a window dressing for the government…” The sort of republic Chen had in mind required the right of active participation by its citizens, and moreover required citizens to take advantage of that right. Otherwise, a republic simply became a respectable front for an authoritarian regime.

The term zijue itself would undergo a metamorphosis throughout this period. It would be gradually replaced by the word juewu, although the concept of zijue would persist. The word “realization” (juewu) can also be rendered in English as “awareness,” and would become increasingly common in Chen’s La Jeunesse lexicon. It reflects to some extent the thoughts of all three participants of the early Jiayin debate, who perceived themselves as lonely individuals who saw problems and flaws which the rest of society did not. Thus while zijue implied an ability to think independently, juewu implied the act of catching on to something others had already noticed. While Chen would continue to value zijue as a concept, his use of juewu reflected his view of his role in this period: in a time of relative certainty about his principles, Chen’s role was not to ponder questions, but to enlighten others.

In September 1916, Chen Duxiu changed the Chinese name of La Jeunesse from Qingnian (Youth) to its more famous name Xin Qingnian (New Youth). The
reason for the change was a mundane one: in March, a rival Shanghai magazine called *Shanghai Youth* wrote to the editors of *Youth* that their name was a duplicate of theirs, and requested that they change it. Chen Duxiu seems to have risen to the occasion to make another political point.

In explaining the change, Chen Duxiu let his readers know that he expected youth to not just be an age, but an attitude. Thus their thoughts had to be those of China’s new youth, not simply those of young people of any given period. This in some sense reflected Chen’s earlier challenge to his readers, which was to simultaneously live out the English saying “keep young while growing old” and the Chinese idiom *shao nian lao cheng* (mature beyond one’s years). A “new youth” was one that “exterminated…those officials who promoted corrupt thought.” He aimed to develop himself and promote the welfare of individuals, but not at the expense of the country. Here the regulations of Chen Duxiu’s Anhui Patriotic Society (which prohibited the promotion of individual freedom at the expense of the nation) and the value Chen placed on the individual found an uneasy balance, replaying once again the complex relation between patriotism and *zijue* that Chen had identified in 1914. Chen in the following month would refer back to another *Jiayin* debate: the question of martyrdom.
My Patriotism

The October 1st issue of La Jeunesse began with Chen’s “My Patriotism” (wo zhi aiguozhuyi), in which he continued to bring together his early nationalist thought and his Jiayin experience. “My Patriotism” was largely about martyrdom as an expression of patriotism, something Chen Duxiu and his assassination societies favored heavily in the early part of the century. Ten years later, Chen may have been writing with Li Dazhao and Zhang Shizhao’s very different takes on suicide in mind. While the former had seen suicide as a dangerous trend encouraged by depressed, nihilistic writers, the latter had seen it as infinitely preferable to a life of passivity. Zhang had highlighted the frequent martyrdom of Japanese soldiers as an example. Chen’s opinion fell in the middle of his two friends, providing perhaps the most nuanced of the three:

A nation’s prosperity or ruin does not wait for a war’s resolution. A nation’s prosperity has reasons, as does a nation’s ruin. But if the causes of ruin already exist, than although there may be martyrs sacrificing themselves for the country, there is not one who can save it…one hopes that loving one’s country prevents its ruin, and is not simply seeing one’s nation in ruin before finally sacrificing oneself for it.20

Sacrificing one’s life was patriotic, provided it in fact benefited the nation. Seeing a nation in decline and proceeding to kill oneself was simply getting out, while staying and preventing the decline of the nation was more truly patriotic. In the end, a nation would depend more on those who lived. Thus martyrdom could be both passive and active, depending on the use to which it was put.
Stepping from the Darkness and into the Light

La Jeunesse presided over one of the most confusing periods in modern Chinese history, both for those living in it and those studying it. Yuan Shikai had died in humiliation of uremia in June 1916, and was replaced by Li Yuanhong, his vice president. Li recalled parliament and reaffirmed the constitution as the binding law in China, only to be ousted by Zhang Xun, a Qing supporter who placed the eleven-year-old emperor Puyi back on the throne of China in June 1917. Zhang himself was defeated barely a month later, and Puyi once again found himself in relatively luxurious exile, to be replaced by Duan Qirui (1865-1936), a former protégé of Yuan Shikai.21

The situation for most Chinese, however, did not change greatly from dictator to dictator, leading Chen in December 1916 to announce sarcastically that “Yuan Shikai has come back to life.”22 Both regime change and the restoring of the old regime had been tried, with the results Chen had predicted in 1914. Chen, who like many of his contemporaries had a penchant for lists, saw his agenda at the time as promoting equality under the law, the recognition of the individual in ethics, and freedom of thought through eradicating superstition.

These by now were familiar themes for Chen Duxiu, who had been advocating individual equality and freedom since his days writing for Jiayin. “These three principles were the essential reasons for the evolution of European culture, but all three for the sake of Yuan Shikai – the first and the second – respecting national essence and the state of the nation were not permissible.”23 Yuan Shikai, to Chen, had represented an obstruction (zhang’ai) to his three values. Yuan was now dead, but the zhang’ai remained, implying that Chen found Zhang Xun to be no different than
Yuan, referring to the former as simply a reincarnation of the latter. In a touch that could be interpreted variously as Buddhist or French Enlightenment, Chen urged his readers not to follow tradition (sui su), but “step from the darkness and into the light.”

1915 and 1916 were probably the most political periods for *La Jeunesse*, largely due to Chen Duxiu’s polemical articles opening every issue. At the end of 1916 and the beginning of 1917, however, two events would change both the nature of the magazine and of Chen Duxiu’s ideas. In late December 1916, Cai Yuanpei, recently returned from his studies in France, visited Chen in Shanghai. According to Chen’s friend and benefactor Wang Mengzou, the two spoke for several days, often arising early in the morning to continue talking.

Cai had just been appointed the head of Peking University, and wished for Chen Duxiu to take the position of Dean of Humanities. Chen at first declined, due to his responsibilities as editor, so Cai proposed to simply move the magazine to Beijing. The position was made official in January, and in the same month both Chen Duxiu and *La Jeunesse* moved to Beijing and took up residence in the red brick campus of Peking University, just north of the Forbidden City in central Beijing.

In the same month, a former medical student named Zhou Shuren sent ten copies of *La Jeunesse* to his brother Zhou Zuoren. The two would later have extensive contact with *La Jeunesse*, with the latter contributing a prodigious number of articles to the magazine. Zhou Shuren, for his part, would go on to be *La Jeunesse* and modern China’s most famous writer, better known by his pen name, Lu Xun.

The second event to affect *La Jeunesse*, Chen Duxiu, and China’s intellectuals was the February Revolution in Russia, which began on March eighth and ended on
March twelfth, with the forced abdication of Tsar Nicholas II. While it is tempting to ascribe the enthusiastic Chinese response to an interest in socialism, this appears not to have been the case with Chen Duxiu. It is true that in 1915 for the first issue of *La Jeunesse*, Chen praised the French for giving the world “three great advances in civilization” (*san da wenming*): human rights, evolution, and socialism.27

Yet “The Russian Revolution and the Realization of My Nation’s Citizens,” published a month after the fact, did not seem as concerned with socialism. Instead, it was concerned with a more immediate event, the continuing war in Europe. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Russia ceased to participate in the war. Chen Duxiu had supported the war at its beginning, his “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” using Germany as a prime example of a nation that misused patriotism to deceive its own people and oppress other nations. By 1917, however, Chen noted, almost like an admission of guilt, that *La Jeunesse* had supported China entering the war against Germany, but he himself now felt that certain domestic powers had used the opportunity to make a power grab.28

Thus Chen approved of Russia’s new pacifism, believing that it would not hurt the war against Germany, but instead inspire the citizens of the Triple Alliance to topple their own “tyrannical regimes.”29 In the time before the second Russian revolution, which would bring the Communists to power, Chen’s interest was more in the democratic overthrow of a dictatorial government than in the triumph of any particular ideology.

Yet in a strange foreshadowing, the April 1st issue of *La Jeunesse*, in which Chen praised the Russian revolution, also carried an article called “Research on
Physical Education,” the single contribution of an obscure Hunan librarian named Mao Zedong.30

**Life’s True Purpose**

*La Jeunesse’s* move to Peking University was followed by the magazine being put under collective editorship at the beginning of 1918, with each issue under a different editor.31 The editors at this time also consciously eschewed writing about politics, focusing instead on social and individual issues.

Chen Duxiu, whose interests also included such issues, wrote about them for a time, with his February 1918 article “Life’s True Purpose” being perhaps the most abstract and humanistic expression of his views on the individual. He considered the answers to such a question from individuals ranging from Mencius to Nietzsche, but Chen’s own answer seems remarkably connected to his views on the nation and the individual. Individuals, according to Chen, created the prosperity in a society, and thus were entitled to enjoy it. Individuals, however, had obligations to support the prosperity of other individuals, including those of future generations. Laws, moral codes, and religion could moderate this entitlement and obligation, but only to the extent that they were necessary.32

Chen, along with many of his Peking University colleagues, also joined Cai Yuanpei’s Virtue Society, an organization that prohibited its members, among other things, from gambling, whoring, drinking, smoking, and eating meat. In an indication of the times, it also forbade members from becoming government officials or parliamentarians.33
1918 was one of the most famous years for *La Jeunesse*, and the year when its writers turned completely inward, examining the consciousness of Chinese people from various angles. Zhou Shuren, using the name Lu Xun for the first time, published “A Madman’s Diary” in the May issue of the magazine, attacking what he saw as the selfish to the point of cannibalistic tendencies of Chinese society. A month later, *La Jeunesse* presented a translation of Henrik Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, with profound effects on the women’s movement. When *La Jeunesse* is talked about in textbooks on Chinese history, it is almost always focused on this year.

1918 also marked the first year that Chen Duxiu did not write the opening article for every issue of the magazine, that task often going to the likes of Gao Yihan and Hu Shi. In general, Chen Duxiu became less involved with the periodical at this time, becoming involved in the founding of other journals and writing for other periodicals besides *La Jeunesse*. By the end of the year, Chen had moved on to found another magazine with Li Dazhao, *The Weekly Critic*, for the express purpose of talking about the one thing discouraged in *La Jeunesse*: politics.
Chapter 6:

Why Must We Read Politics?
Why Must We Read Politics?

1918 was a year with more than enough politics to discuss. Duan Qirui had become premier of China after Yuan Shikai’s death in 1916, although Li Yuanhong remained the titular president. Zhang Xun’s coup and subsequent defeat, however, put Duan at the de facto head of the Chinese government. His most important policy was to declare war on Germany in late 1917, persuaded in part by the possibilities of reclaiming Chinese territory previously occupied by Germany, and partly by Japanese loans made directly to him.¹ The result was an army of Chinese laborers sent to work behind the lines in France, who would later return “literate and wise in the ways of the world, often with a decent balance of cash stored up safely with their families.”² Such newly educated commoners would later become targets for recruitment by Chinese socialists.

The first issue of The Weekly Critic was released on December 22, 1918, just over a month after the Armistice that ended the First World War. Two days after the signing of the Armistice, Peking University declared a three-day holiday, during which students gathered in front of the Gate of Heavenly Peace to celebrate, some carrying posters with slogans ranging from the European “The world must be made safe for democracy” to the more Confucian “unify the world” (shijie datong). It seemed that the time for Kang Youwei’s “Grand Unity” had arrived.
In the introduction to his new magazine, Chen Duxiu, now writing largely in vernacular, connected it directly to the sentiment following the war’s end. “Since the defeat of Germany, the phrase ‘right overcomes might’ has practically become every man’s mantra.”*3 Despite his sarcasm, Chen found himself wholly in agreement with the phrase, although he saw it as more of a goal than a statement of fact. He showed great admiration for Woodrow Wilson, whose Fourteen Points had been read in China:

[Wilson] can be called the first good man of the modern world. He has much to say, among which the most important are two principles: the first is to prohibit all nations from using force to encroach upon the freedom and equality of other nations. The second is to prohibit the governments of all nations from using force to encroach upon the freedom and equality of their people. These two principles, are they not speaking of right and not of might?4

* The specific phrase for “mantra” is koutouchan, the type of mantra found in Chan or Zen Buddhism.
Among Wilson’s Fourteen Points, Chen saw the principles that he had been promoting for years, and would write optimistically about them for several more articles. *The Weekly Critic* itself, however, recognized that such conditions did not yet exist. Thus its goal, as laid out by Chen, was to “promote right, and oppose might.”5 The word translated as “right” to fit the phrase is *gongli*, denoting a self-evident truth.

Despite this introduction, Chen’s more direct reasons for founding *The Weekly Critic* could be found in the pages of *La Jeunesse* five months earlier. “Political Problems in Today’s China” quotes what Chen sees as a typical reader of *La Jeunesse*: “We of the younger generation are cultivating our knowledge and changing society from its foundations. Why must we read politics?”6 Zhang Shizhao had quoted a similar hypothetical reader in 1914: “These days everyone says, ‘I don’t talk about politics because politics has nothing to do with me.’ But everything they do takes place within the realm of politics and will be directly influenced by good or bad politics.”7

Four years later, Chen Duxiu felt that he had to administer the lesson again, and reminded his readers that the problems he was writing about were not those of government administration, but fundamental questions of a nation’s survival. Thus, one had to talk about politics, and *The Weekly Critic* would appear just in time to observe, comment upon, and in some ways cause the tumultuous events of 1919.

At the end of 1918, Chen Duxiu’s political outlook remained guardedly optimistic, and, as usual, he saw the events of the last few months as an opportunity for his readers to gain a lesson. Wilson’s Fourteen Points had promised an end to many of the old colonial privileges, and Chen saw himself in a position to call for an end to the “unequal treaties” China had signed with various powers,
extraterritoriality, restrictions on immigration (to the United States in particular), and discrimination against the East by the West. He warned, with words that now read as eerily prophetic, that “As long as there is inequality in the world there will be protest; I fear that another Great War lies before us.”

Chen also saw the failure of the German war machine as a lesson for his own country: that military governments were not suitable for modern nations. He argued that wars erode a nation’s domestic economy and erode popular support for governments, and that military juntas themselves damaged the rule of law and were “no better than horse thieves.” Chen’s predictions were mixed in their accuracy: he would be proven right about a second World War just over fifteen years later, while his suspicions about thieving military juntas would be confirmed in a mere five months. At the same time, however, his optimism about world equality would be shattered painfully.

“The Shandong Question is not merely a matter of the survival of the people of Shandong”

As negotiations began at Versailles in January, Chinese delegates called for much the same things as Chen Duxiu had: the end of imperialist institutions and the return of the province of Shandong, which had begun the war as a German possession and ended in the hands of the Japanese. Instead, the Japanese delegate to the conference announced that Japan had concluded a secret treaty with France, Great Britain, and Italy in early 1917, promising support for Japan’s claims to Shandong in exchange for naval assistance during the war.
The delegate went on to announce that Japan also made secret agreements with Duan Qirui allowing the Japanese additional rights in parts of Shandong, in exchange for forgiveness of Chinese debt and the loans made to Duan Qirui himself. The Chinese delegates had come to the conference completely unaware of any of these facts. On April 30, Woodrow Wilson, the “first good man of the modern world” and initially sympathetic to Chinese demands, agreed with France and Great Britain to transfer all of Germany’s former territory and rights to Japan.

Secret treaties had been one of the causes of the Great War, and as their heyday drew to a close, they provoked one last outburst. News of the deals between Japan, the European powers, and Duan Qirui reached China quickly, and triggered enormous protests in Beijing on May 4. Students from thirteen colleges in Beijing met on that morning and agreed on five resolutions: “one protested the Shandong settlement at the Versailles conference; a second sought to awaken ‘the masses all over the country’ to an awareness of China’s plight; a third proposed holding a mass meeting of the people of Beijing; a fourth urged the formation of a Beijing student union; and a fifth called for a demonstration that afternoon in protest of the Versailles treaty terms.” All of these resolutions were carried out, starting with a 3000-person march that afternoon.

It was a situation created for – and in part created by – Chen Duxiu, who let his indignation show in an article for The Weekly Critic two weeks later: “Ha! This is still a world of bandits! Now is still the era when right cannot overcome might!” Chen’s disillusionment came with a rallying cry for the student demonstrators, whom he urged to turn out in larger numbers. “Under no circumstances can we take the
Shandong Question to be a matter of the survival of just the people of Shandong.”¹⁴

Shandong was a national issue, not a provincial one.

Chen Duxiu, ironically, had been playing over the past year with the idea of simply allowing China to split in two, in order to stop the infighting between Duan Qirui’s Beiyang clique and the southern warlords more loyal to Sun Yat-sen. He had gone as far as to say that the goal of uniting China at all costs was standing in the way of China’s growth.¹⁵ In an article a year earlier, Chen had repeated his long-held belief that nations were mere collections of people, which had become objects of worship in themselves, to the great injury of many. Such objects of worship, Chen contended, would become outmoded and useless as people began to adopt the concept of cosmopolitanism.¹⁶

Chen believed in a practical definition of nations, leading him to sympathize with the cosmopolitanism popular among European intellectuals at the time. Thus when it was a matter of oppression by domestic warlords, Chen was critical of nationalism. When the oppression came from foreign powers, however, Chen was unambiguously nationalist.

Chen was also quick to use the Shandong Question (as it was referred to in large letters in The Weekly Critic) as proof of two truths about politics. The first seemed to be a genuine revelation: that one could not count on universal truths (gongli) alone to insure justice. At times, a nation had to back up its rights with force.
The Common People Govern the Government

Having lamented the fact that force still seemed to be trumping the rights of nations in the world, Chen then turned his attention to the party that he saw as most at fault in this situation: China’s own government. Yuan Shikai had accepted Japan’s Twenty-One Demands with little objection, while Duan Qirui had actively strengthened Japan’s claims to Shandong in exchange for personal loans. Just as the treaties that lost China Shandong were formulated in secret by a small group of heads of state, the agreements through which Duan’s government had sold out Shandong were also done without the knowledge or consent of even their own diplomats.

Thus the second “realization” (Chen once again was using the term juewu) was in fact a very old contention on Chen Duxiu’s part: that government could not be entrusted to a small, privileged few. Chen, referencing the two thousand-year-old conclusions of Xunzi, saw the entire situation as proof that man’s nature was inherently selfish and evil, and thus required society to keep it in check. Ruling oligarchies were answerable to no one, and thus had been allowed to get out of hand. The only solution to this situation, according to Chen, lay in a catchy slogan: “the common people govern the government” (pingmin zhengfu zhengfu).\textsuperscript{17} Governments had to be watched over by the people, in order to ensure that they did not begin acting
for selfish ends. Chen saw the result of the Versailles negotiations as an argument for democracy.

The capstone of this six-month train of thought came on June 8, when *The Weekly Critic* published Chen Duxiu’s “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?”

Upon the first reading of this article, given no context, one would think that it was simply a version of “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” written in the vernacular:

> Emotion and reason are both important parts of the human spirit, moreover the two are often in conflict. Patriotism is more often than not the product of emotion, although reason occupies a small part. Sometimes patriotism does not in fact conform to reason at all... Human behavior is the natural result of emotional impulse. I believe that if one uses reason as the foundation of emotion, then emotion can at last be firm and not waver from start to finish.\(^{18}\)

The dichotomy between emotion and reason is taken directly from “Patriotism and Self-Awareness.” So is Chen’s definition of a nation: “Originally a nation was nothing more than an organ for people to unite and resist foreign oppression, and to harmonize domestic disputes.”\(^{19}\) Although “promoting the people’s welfare” is not included in this incarnation, it is found frequently in other articles Chen wrote during this period. Chen’s thoughts on nations and their purpose appear to be more or less unchanged over the preceding five years.

The context had changed, however. “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?” was published a month after the May 4 protests. At the end of the month, Chinese delegates to the Versailles conference were prevented from signing the Treaty of Versailles. Student demonstrations stopped them from leaving their hotel in Paris. Thus China became the only nation involved in World War I not to sign the treaty.\(^{20}\) At the height of protests based on virulent (although perhaps justified) nationalism, Chen, who had been key to organizing and encouraging the
demonstrations, asked his readers the following baffling question: “Thus in the midst of everyone’s zealous, slavish, unquestioning, ‘patriotic’ clamor, I would like to have a reasoned discussion: in the end, should we really be patriotic?”

It was an appropriate moment to ask such a question, Chen contended, because “If one does not have a rational discussion about the slavish, much-acclaimed patriotism in society, then whether officials forbid patriotism or encourage it, it will not last as a credible motive for our actions.” The fight over patriotism was at this time in full swing, with “patriotic” student protesters being repressed by an equally “patriotic” military government. Yet on the other side of the world, patriotism was being rejected wholesale by a similar class of intellectuals:

Recently there has been a group of people of lofty thought, who seem to believe in individualism or in cosmopolitanism. They seem to have divined that the nation is man-made and not natural [“has no value”], and have seen and heard much darkness and sin both in domestic and foreign affairs, all of which are done in the name of the nation. Since they oppose the nation, they naturally do not advocate patriotism. In their eyes, patriotism seems to be another word for harming others. Thus they consider patriotic killing to be fanaticism and madness.

Such a spirit was indeed to be found in Europe, where in the same month the French writer and recent Nobel Laureate Romain Rolland (1866-1944), in a “Proud Declaration of Intellectuals,” would call on his fellow intellectuals around the world, “separated for five years by the armies, censure, and hate of nations at war,” to “reform our fraternal union – but a new union, stronger and more reliable than that which existed before.”
Such was the patriotism of “lofty thinkers,” those who saw the harm caused in the name of the nation and thus advocated cosmopolitanism instead. In China, there were also those who opposed patriotism, but for reasons that Chen did not see as nearly so worthy. “We Chinese people have no education, no knowledge, and no unity. We do not love our country, but not in the same sense as those lofty thinkers. When officials block patriotic movements, it need not be said that their intentions are different from those thinkers.” Among the unpatriotic, there were two types: those too ignorant to understand the affairs of a nation, and those who opposed patriotic movements as a threat to their own power. Thus one had to guard “against the government using statism and the people’s patriotism to go and oppress the people of other nations.”

What We Love is a Country that Seeks Happiness for the People

The “patriots” did not fare much better in Chen’s analysis. From the beginning of the article Chen expressed his aggravation with how much the term was being thrown around. “Patriotism! Patriotism! This sort of clamor in recent years has nearly stuffed the society of our country full. It is corrupt, useless officials and rough soldiers, who in speech often hang the banner of patriotism. Even the Traitor Party does not dare openly say that one need not love the country.” Chen, in an echo from
four years before, noted that patriotism can be used both to justify the invasion of
other nations and the oppression of one’s own. He could not help but make the
sarcastic observation, however, that China was in no position to oppress other
nations, and could only oppress its own people.

Having panned both the patriots and the non-patriots, Chen may have left his
reader wondering what exactly he was trying to accomplish. Chen Duxiu may have
been conscious of this problem, as he concluded his article by restating his question
and physically underlining the answer. “Should we, in the end, love our country? We
answer even more loudly: what we love is a country where the people use patriotism
to resist oppression, not a country that uses patriotism to oppress. What we love is a
country that seeks happiness for the people, not a country for which the people
sacrifice themselves” (underlined in the original).28 These two sentences were a
succinct summary of both the article that contained them, and its model from five
years before.

Chen Duxiu appeared to have higher goals for his people than this sort of
patriotism, however. “If our countrymen from now on are educated, knowledgeable,
and united, then we finally will be qualified to join the lofty thinkers of all nations
and unify the world.”29 The phrase “unify the world” is shijie datong in Chinese, a
direct reference to Kang Youwei’s famous summation of New Text Confucianism,
which remained a topic of discussion all through the first half of the twentieth
century. Chen, however, was by this time almost as leery about cosmopolitanism as
he was about patriotism. Chen still believed in cosmopolitanism, but having been
disillusioned by the behavior of European nations, he wanted to make sure that it was
cosmopolitanism in which China was on an equal footing with the rest of the world.
Chen’s article marked both a summation of his writings over the past five years, and a transition for the rest of China’s intellectual community.

**The Beginning, or the End?**

Jonathan Spence, in characterizing what would become known as the May Fourth Movement, had the following to say:

A new generation of Chinese activists was henceforth to direct probing questions at the nature of Western moral values, disgusted as much by the bloodshed of which Western nations had proved capable as by their duplicity. And the date of May 4...was to give its name to a new movement in China, one in which the juxtaposition of nationalism and cultural self-analysis took the Chinese people in yet another new direction.  

In reading Chen Duxiu’s works over five years, from 1914 to 1919, one has to wonder whether it is more accurate to say that May 4 was the beginning of a new direction, or simply the summation of a new path upon which Chinese intellectuals had set out some time before. In Chen Duxiu’s case, certainly, the time of deepest self-analysis seems to have come between 1914 and 1915, while *Jiayin* was being published. The New Culture Movement between 1915 and 1919, by contrast, represented a time when Chen was relatively confident in his own beliefs and ready to spread them.

This change is suggested by the difference in key terms from period to period. The *zijue* of 1914 and 1915 entails an understanding of a nation’s situation and purpose, as well as an individual’s purpose inside it. The *juewu* of the New Culture Period, by contrast, suggests “enlightenment” or “awakening,” as though Chen had heeded Zhang Shizhao’s exhortation to “reenter the world and save people.” The New
Culture Chen Duxiu expected not just zijue or his readers, but zidong, or individual action.

The change in terms implies less a change in ideology than a change in methods and goals. Chen’s ideas on zijue’s complement, patriotism, undergo relatively little change from 1914 to 1919. Chen’s 1914 “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” and 1919 “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?” are so similar in their content and choice of metaphors that one suspects that Chen wrote the latter with a copy of the former close at hand. The situation in June 1919, however, was rather different from that of November 1914, and the fact that Chen chose to recycle his old article suggests that he still believed it to be relevant.

Chen’s choice to republish a vernacular version of “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” five years later calls into serious question Zhu Chengjia’s claim that Chen’s “basic” guiding philosophy came from Li Dazhao. Indeed Chen’s thoughts on patriotism, worked out in 1914, remain rather consistent over this period, for the simple reason that Li Dazhao never seriously challenged them to begin with. Li completely accepted Chen’s conclusions on both patriotism and zijue, while criticizing the latter’s methods for bringing about change. Li contended that nations were to be changed gradually, working with what one had. His exhortation to “strive toward a lovable nation and love it” seems to have found a listener in Chen, who proceeded to attempt to do just that for the next five years. Li’s exhortation to stop writing pessimistic, critical articles, by contrast, seems to have fallen on deaf ears.

On a key disagreement between Li Dazhao and Zhang Shizhao, Chen Duxiu in the end seems to have fallen somewhere in the middle. “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” opens with a passage mocking upright officials who martyr themselves
out of concern for their kingdom, with Chen remarking that their excess of emotion resulted in actions perhaps not of the most benefit to the kingdom. Li Dazhao had seen such suicide as a way to remove oneself from an unpleasant situation, while Zhang Shizhao had interpreted it as one of the few ways for individual Chinese to regain their agency. “My Patriotism,” asked the reader to choose between the two, and questioned the relevance of the issue. In Chen’s view, China’s fate would be decided long before such a choice would be presented. Martyrdom could only be active and praiseworthy to the extent that it was useful.

Chen Duxiu’s adult name, or zi, was Zhongfu, the character zhong referring to an intermediary, or somebody in the middle. It was a title that could be applied to many of Chen’s political opinions, which retained a great degree of independence throughout his life.

“We Will Finally be Qualified to Join the Lofty Thinkers of the World”

The repetition of “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” is also important when evaluating a claim made about this period by Feigon in particular. “…during the period in which he edited the journal New Youth…Chen in fact was an ardent nationalist whose seeming cosmopolitanism was skin-deep at best.” Feigon tempers this argument by adding that Chen opposed proposals that would not “preserve what he deemed the true essence of the Chinese nation.” If one focuses on Chen’s writings about nationalism and patriotism, however, it seems that Chen during this period and the Jiayin period that came before is much more interested in questions of good government and foreign encroachment than he is in abstract questions of “national essence.”
As for Chen’s supposedly “skin-deep” cosmopolitanism, it seems worthwhile to note the repetition of a key passage in both “Patriotism and Self-Awareness” and “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?” In the former, Chen wrote that “If one speaks from the theory of patriotism, the world has not yet ascended to datong, thus to resist foreign aggression is good.”33 This passage seems to suggest a nationalism that is only necessary for as long as cosmopolitanism is not possible.

This point is driven home even more five years later when in the midst of the May 4th demonstrations, Chen cynically predicted, “If our countrymen from now on are educated, knowledgeable, and united, then we finally will be qualified to join the lofty thinkers of all nations and unify the world (datong shijie).”34 Chen at the time was distinguishing between those who opposed nationalism on intellectual grounds and those who opposed it out of ignorance or apathy. The long-term goal, however, remained the same: a cosmopolitan world, perhaps partly from the mind of Kang Youwei and partly from that of Romain Rolland. As will be seen in the following chapter, this would be a key criticism by Chen Duxiu of Sun Yat-sen when evaluating the latter’s life.

By the time 1919 came about, Chen Duxiu had already stopped focusing on its most famous publication, La Jeunesse, and dived into concrete politics once again, and begun to take an interest in another alternative that he thought might be able to secure China and provide for its welfare – the communism of the neighboring Soviet Union. In considering Chen’s experience with communism, one learns less about his nationalist views, which remain relatively consistent throughout the rest of his life, and more about the sort of mind that brought forth these views.
Chapter 7:

“He Did Not Want Chen Duxiu to Open His Mouth”
Abstract Ideas and Concrete Diplomacy

The label that has stuck most tenaciously to Chen Duxiu from the late 1920s until well past his death is that of “opportunist” (jihuizhuyizhe). It was an accusation made throughout Chen’s later life, referring to his perceived willingness to work with many different ideologies and the frequency with which he switched political sides. One small section of this chapter will deal with how this label came to be applied, but the larger scope of this chapter is to explore just how much of an opportunist Chen Duxiu actually was. Answering this question requires first and foremost an introduction to Chen’s experience with communism. This, in turn, requires two additional passes through the year 1919.

Interest in Marxism as an abstract concept was a fairly recent phenomenon in China by 1919. Marx himself was first mentioned in a Chinese journal in 1899, erroneously identified as an Englishman. A partial translation of the Communist Manifesto was finished in 1906. As was the case with many new ideas at the time, however, the first extensive contact with Marxism came through Japan, where a Socialist Party was founded in 1906. Both socialism and anarchism gained some currency among Chinese students studying in Tokyo.1

After the February Revolution, however, interest in Marxism grew, the main promoter being Li Dazhao, who by 1917 was the head librarian at Peking University. In addition to providing La Jeunesse with some of the most well-articulated adaptations of Marxism to the Chinese situation, he also started a weekly Marxist study group in his office. This group was attended by, among others, future Chinese Communist Party leaders such as Qu Qiubai, Zhang Guotao, and Mao Zedong. The
group caught Chen Duxiu’s interest, and the latter decided to have Li Dazhao edit a special edition of *La Jeunesse* on Marxism, which came out on May 1, 1919.²

No political ideology gains currency on purely theoretical grounds, however, and events would help the spread of communism considerably. Chen Duxiu’s interest in the February Revolution, as seen above, was in large part because the Russians seemed to have accomplished what the Chinese hoped to see done in their own country: the displacement of the forces that produced an endless cycle of tyrants. An even more convincing step was Russia’s subsequent withdrawal from World War I, which would dissociate Russia from the betrayal at Versailles and from a conflict symbolic of the bloodshed caused by nationalism.

Arguably the most convincing event, however, was the July 1919 announcement by the newly-formed Soviet Union that it was renouncing all claims made by the previous regimes to territory and special privileges inside China.³ This provoked a wave of sympathy toward the Soviet Union, rooted not in Communism, but in nationalism. Chinese intellectuals welcomed the first nation to confront its own domestic oppressors and cease oppressing its neighbors. It is significant that the Soviet Union’s subsequent reneging on this promise would cause a major breach with a key future ally: Chen Duxiu.

As many recent histories have shown, however, ideas do not simply spread on their own theoretical or concrete merits, but through personal relationships. And one last pass through 1919 is necessary to complete the story of Chen Duxiu’s adoption of communism in particular.
“Scratched Her Across the Lower Body”

In March 1919, a sensational event was reported by the Peking University student newspaper: the Dean of Humanities, Chen Duxiu, had recently caused a great commotion in an ally in Beijing. In one of the more lurid renderings of the story, Chen had an altercation with a prostitute he was visiting, and in a fit of anger “scratched her across the lower body.” The scandal let conservatives at Peking University to call for Chen Duxiu’s removal.

Cai Yuanpei, president of the university, had no desire to comply, having hired Chen just two years before. As head of the Virtue Society, however, of which Chen was also a member, Cai found himself in an awkward position. The Society’s regulations banned its members from visiting prostitutes, and the main complaint against Chen Duxiu was that his “personal virtue was too corrupt” (si de tai huai). Cai, not wanting to be seen as a hypocrite, had no choice but to remove Chen.

Chen’s troubles were not over. After his removal, he continued to edit both La Jeunesse and The Weekly Critic, and to organize students in Beijing. These activities led to his arrest on June 11, 1919, just three days after the publication of “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?” He was released three months later, at which point he left for Shanghai and later Wuhan, where he made well-publicized speeches critical of the Beijing junta. As a result, upon his return to Beijing, guards posted at every gate were instructed to prevent his exit. Gao Yihan (1885-1968), writing in 1963, would narrate Chen Duxiu’s stealthy departure from Beijing in high dramatic fashion:

“Li Dazhao was from Leting, and thus spoke the northern dialect. He dressed simply, and thus could pass for a merchant. The prepared in Wang Xinggong’s house. It was the beginning of the year by the lunar calendar, the time when Beijing’s merchants set out to sell their wares...
in all manner of places. The two of them borrowed a cart, and set out toward the south from Chaoyang Gate. Chen Duxiu also disguised himself, wearing a felt hat on his head and a vest borrowed from the cook at Wang Xinggong’s house…At each checkpoint, it was always Li Dazhao who got out to put their affairs in order. He did not want Chen Duxiu to open his mouth, afraid that it would reveal his southern accent.”

Chen returned to Shanghai, where he edited La Jeunesse full time, and the magazine swung sharply to the political left, the final issue in 1921 being simply a laundry list of reports on the conditions of workers in various provinces. Hu Shi, writing about this series of events later in his life, reflected that Chen’s removal as Dean and his subsequent departure from Beijing may have had something to do with this shift in thought. Once away from the “moderating influence” of the Peking University faculty, whose ideologies ranged across a broad spectrum, Chen Duxiu was more inclined to pursue extreme ideologies such as Marxism-Leninism. Hu Shi’s memoire inspired at least one Chinese website to publish an article in 2010 under the sensational title “Chen Duxiu’s Whoring: Did it Change Chinese History?”

It is doubtful that Chen Duxiu, whose writings up until this point had shown a singular independent-mindedness, would turn to Marxism just because he had no “moderate” colleagues about to tell him no. Chen in 1920 was “in a restless intellectual state, exploring a wide range of socialist options, including Japanese theories of model village formation, Korean-Christian socialism, and John Dewey’s guild socialism.” It was at this point that he received the visit of Grigori Voitinsky and Yang Mingzha, who introduced him firsthand to Leninist techniques of organization.

* The article, found on the popular Chinese website 163, was published in January 2010, although it was not available as of February of the same year. At the time, if one typed “Chen
The Visitors from Russia

Voitinsky and Yang’s arrival in China was the result of Soviet policies adopted a year before. Lenin had convened the Third International of the Communist Party (Comintern) in March 1919, which issued a manifesto pledging to support workers’ movements all over the world, including anti-imperialist movements in countries such as China. The two men had first arrived in Beijing in 1920, where they were directed by a Russian émigré to Li Dazhao, who in turn suggested they visit Chen Duxiu, advice they acted upon in May.\(^{10}\)

The visitors from Russia were able to give Chen “a clearer sense of direction and the techniques to bind together a political organization from the uncoordinated mixture of socialist groups that already existed in China.”\(^{11}\) In the same month, the first cell of what would be the Chinese Communist Party was founded in Shanghai, with Chen Duxiu as its first General Secretary. Li Dazhao would found a second cell in Beijing shortly thereafter. The relationship between Chen Duxiu and the Soviet Union would be tense, punctuated by frequent conflict, and revealing of Chen’s way of thinking.

Soon after the CCP was organized, it was ordered by Stalin through Comintern agents to cooperate with Sun Yat-sen’s Guomindang, to which the Soviet Union was beginning to give some support. “Among the CCP’s four priorities for China…it made sense for the party to address the national-reunification problem first, in order to give China some chance of proceeding with the other three.”\(^{12}\) The CCP

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Duxiu” into the Chinese search engine Baidu, the first suggestion provided by the engine was “Chen Duxiu goes whoring” (Chen Duxiu piao chang).
by 1923 had only 300 members, and thus was not a powerful organization in its own right.

The move was also partly out of recognition by Stalin that the largest threat to the Soviet Union itself was Japan, and that China stood as the only buffer between the two. The rapprochement was managed by the Comintern agent Borodin (Mikhail Gruzenberg), who worked actively with both Sun Yat-sen and Chen Duxiu to organize their parties.\(^{13}\) Sun and Borodin got along famously, perhaps due to their similar temperaments as political animals. The Comintern’s assistance was welcomed by Sun, who found the Russian Communist Party’s principles to be similar enough to his own, and more importantly had organized and carried out a successful revolution. Borodin and Chen, by contrast, would often clash, Chen’s focus on theory and ideology leading Borodin to often conduct party affairs entirely outside the former’s command.

“A Great Man”

Sun was relatively sympathetic to the Comintern, calling Lenin “a great man” on the occasion of his death. Sun himself, however, was not long for this world. He was found to have terminal liver cancer in January 1925, and died in March of the same year.\(^{14}\) His death was followed by a rush to claim his legacy. Graduates of the Russian-founded Whampoa Military Academy formed the Society for the Study of Sun Yat-senism, with the intention of purging the communists, along with any other Soviet influence, from the Guomindang. Chen Duxiu himself responded with a seemingly unrelated question: was Sun’s nationalism in fact statism? Although seemingly abstract, the question in 1926 had a concrete relevance. The Guomindang
was already splitting into “leftist” and “rightist” factions, and Chen’s question was a coded way to ask which side Sun would have supported.

Sun Yat-sen, in Chen’s view, was unequivocally a nationalist who loved his country (zuguo, meaning “ancestral nation,” was by now in use, and remains to this day one of the most popular terms in China to talk about one’s country). He was also highly critical of cosmopolitan thought, whether the cosmopolitanism of Europe or Kang Youwei’s datong.\(^\text{15}\) Sun did, however, clearly separate the terms minzu (nation or ethnicity) from the term guojia (nation-state), implying that he felt that the two were separate entities.

Chen also attempted to claim Sun on theoretical grounds: there were, according to Chen, three eras of nationalism (minzuzhuyi): that of early Chinese theocratic societies, that of Chinese military governments (one assumes he meant the imperial era), and that of imperialists and capitalists. The latter was the nationalism of the present age, and was associated with statism. Since Sun was not an imperialist, he could not have been a statist.\(^\text{16}\) Chen, perhaps fittingly, would be condemned as a traitor on similarly theoretical grounds just over ten years later.

Meanwhile, Chiang Kai-shek, the leader of the Whampoa graduates, decided not to wait for the theoretical issues to be resolved. He scored several victories
against local warlords near Guangzhou in early 1925, and in 1926 would launch a campaign to defeat the northern warlords and unite the country, in what would become known as the Northern Expedition.17

The Theory of National Revolution

The Northern Expedition involved many steps, but perhaps most important to the fate of Chen Duxiu was its final stages in Shanghai in 1927. The CCP-organized General Labor Union launched a general strike there on March 21, 1927, in anticipation of the arrival of Chiang’s forces, who began to enter the city a day later. The city fell peacefully, and the unions were praised for their “constructive achievements.”18 Chiang, in the meantime, met with the major industrialists, moderate political figures, foreign leaders, and underworld figures in Shanghai. Following these meetings, these groups launched a major purge of union leaders throughout the city, resulting in many member killed, headquarters destroyed, and unions themselves being declared illegal throughout the city.

The Shanghai purge caused great consternation in the CCP leadership, at that time based in Wuhan. The alliance between the CCP and the Guomindang (known in retrospect as the First United Front) was damaged, and this damage carried implications that were both concrete and theoretical, and affected politics in both China and the Soviet Union. All actions taken by the CCP had to be justified according to Marxist theory, particularly an alliance with a “bourgeois-democratic” party such as the Guomindang. The United Front itself had been justified with a political innovation from Moscow called the “Theory of National Revolution,” brought back to China by a group of Chinese cadres that included Chen Duxiu’s two
sons, Chen Yannian and Chen Qiaonian. With the rupture of relations between the Guomindang and the CCP, the theory seemed to have been disproved.

Stalin, at the same time, was fighting his own battle back in the Soviet Union, a theoretical battle against Leon Trotsky. In Communist Parties, however, politicians gain and lose power, live and die over questions of Marxist theory. Stalin found himself under attack over his conduct of operations in China, with his Theory of National Revolution opposed by both Trotsky and the Communist Youth League loyal to him. Stalin thus had to justify the setbacks of 1927 according to this theory, as did his Chinese counterparts. This largely involved splitting the Guomindang into “true revolutionaries” and rightists. Thus cooperation with the Guomindang was redefined as cooperation with the leftmost factions.

Chen the Opportunist

A victim of the this redefinition was Chen Duxiu, who at this point in time was accused of “right opportunism,” ostensibly for his alliances with Guomindang figures who turned out to be political rightists. The label of “opportunist” (jihuizhuyizhe) would stick to Chen for the rest of his life and beyond, and would serve as a cover-all label for all of the ideological problems associated with him. In the short term, however, it resulted in his removal as General Secretary of the CCP.

Some histories claim that he was removed as General Secretary at the August 7, 1927 Conference of the party, although Cai Hesen (1895-1931), a leading figure in the CCP at the time, claims that Chen resigned a month earlier. Zheng Chaolin, who was present at the conference, claims that Chen’s name was not even mentioned, although he was certainly criticized indirectly. Both of these claims are discussed by
Tang Baolin in his chronology, and supports Zheng’s contention with other sources.\(^{22}\) Regardless, it is generally agreed that the primary reason Chen ceased to be General Secretary was that the Comintern wanted him removed.

**Chen the Trotskyist**

Two years after these events, Chen Duxiu emerged as a Trotskyist. This prompted more accusations — at the time and long after the fact — of opportunism, the assumption being that Chen Duxiu simply sought and found another power base. As documents related to the intervening two years illustrate, however, Chen was a skilled organizer, thinker, and writer, a man constantly focused on politics, but not a politician. He placed great importance of the intellectual underpinnings of whatever ideology he chose to adopt, and rather less importance on political expediency.

According to the memoirs of Zheng Chaolin (1901-1998, pictured below), an early member of the CCP, Chen actually accepted his effective removal from his post as Secretary of the CCP fairly passively, diving once again into his etymological studies of obscure characters. Several efforts were made by others to restore him to power, but the greatest obstacle turned out to be Chen Duxiu himself. “For example, when Luo Qiyuan tried to discuss inner-Party matters with him, he took out his scheme for spelling Chinese characters and started asking Luo how you said this character or that character in Cantonese.”\(^{23}\)
The reason given by Zheng for Chen’s passivity, which of the possibilities seems the most reasonable, was that Chen could not function again politically without working out intellectually the issues brought up by the events of 1927. This was the third time in Chen’s life that such a pause occurred, and as in 1914 and 1919 he showed a remarkable ability to block out the noise of events around him. In May 1929, however, some “poorly translated and poorly mimeographed” documents made it to Shanghai, which detailed the views of the Trotskyist opposition in Russia. Zheng Chaolin described his own reaction, which was typical of those who would later join Trotskyist organizations in China:

It turned out that Trotsky had publicly pointed out long before the defeat of the revolution that the Comintern’s basic line on the Chinese Revolution was wrong, and that after the defeat of the revolution he had publicly point out that Bukharin and Stalin should take the blame for it. It also turned out that Trotsky had pointed out even after the Wuhan debacle that the Chinese Revolution had already been defeated. This was exactly what Chen Duxiu and his followers thought.24

Zheng and many of his companions, by his own testimony, were converted soon after reading Trotsky. Chen Duxiu, however, took more time, arguing various points and writing articles for a limited number of people over the course of May and June of
1929. By 1930, however, Chen seems to have been confident enough to write to the Comintern expressing his differing views:

After the tragic and shameful defeat of the Chinese Revolution in 1927 for a while I was really at a loss as to what course of action to follow since I myself bore a heavy responsibility for the defeat. So I spent almost a year personally reflecting on these events. Although I did not thoroughly grasp the lessons of the defeat in time, and failed to discover a new way forward, I am deeply aware on the basis of my own experience that this defeat was the inevitable outcome of the entire political line of the period.\textsuperscript{25}

Chen went on to criticize the Comintern for not allowing Trotskyist materials into China, and to redefine the basic issues facing the CCP. Chen, once again, had undergone a period of confusion, and once again had emerged with ideas that developed through a long period of contemplation.

Chen’s mind was perhaps not helped by the murder of his two eldest sons Chen Yannian (below, left) in 1927 and Chen Qiaonian (below, right) in 1928. Both had become members of the CCP early on, travelling to Paris in 1920. Chen Qiaonian had also been to Moscow, and had gained high standing in the party, although details found in Zheng’s memoirs suggest that neither son got along well with their father. Both were caught up in the Guomindang crackdown, imprisoned, and executed.
By the time Chen Duxiu wrote his letter to the Comintern, he was no longer a member of the Chinese Communist Party, with whom he would break over an issue that had defined his early life: imperialism. Russia had been the first power that Chen had publically opposed, when he and his friends had formed a volunteer army to fight Russia for the Qing in 1903. Nearly thirty years later, the Soviet Union, having promised in 1919 to give up its concessions in Manchuria, had still not done so. In May 1929, however, local Chinese armies seized the Chinese Eastern Railway. The Soviet Union thus pressured the CCP to oppose the seizure, and to adopt the slogan “Defend the Soviet Union with Arms.”

Chen Duxiu opposed this policy in a series of three letters to the CCP Central Committee, beginning with a mild rebuke accusing the party of adopting a policy that “would alienate the nationalistic feelings of the masses.” The letters soon evolved, however, into a broad Trotskyist criticism of party theory and policy. The CCP, making one last attempt at reconciliation, offered Chen the opportunity to criticize the Trotskyist factions within the Party, which Chen, as the main leader of these factions, refused. He was expelled from the Party in on November 15, 1929.

Endangering the Republic

The disputes between Chen and the CCP were not happening in a vacuum. The first United Front between the GMD and the CCP had ended with the massacre of labor organizers in Shanghai in 1927, and the GMD continued to round up any communists that it could. In October 1932, Chen Duxiu and other leaders of Trotskyist parties in Shanghai were rounded up and arrested by GMD forces. The Trotskyists had up until that point been prevented from becoming a serious political
force due to their own disunity – Chen’s location was given away by a disgruntled member of one such faction.\textsuperscript{29}

The arrest of Chen Duxiu was a tumultuous event among China’s intellectuals and politicians, with many writing articles to express their views on the pending trial. So wide and so diverse was the commentary that one editor, Chen Dongxiao, was inspired to collect them for a book, published in 1932 as \textit{Chen Duxiu Commentary}. In his introduction to the text, Chen Dongxiao expressed his amazement at the controversy aroused by the figure of Chen Duxiu. The majority of articles, according to the editor, expressed no particular opinion regarding the charges leveled against Chen of “endangering The Republic.” This group, exemplified by Hu Shi and Fu Sinian, wished to draw attention to the great influence Chen Duxiu had exercised on the events of the twentieth century, and called for a fair trial.\textsuperscript{30}

This was by far the most moderate opinion expressed. Guomindang spokespeople, associating Chen with the CCP, took him and his former party to be dangerous criminals and called for Chen’s execution. Yet as Chen Dongxiao pointed out, Chen Duxiu was hardly the average communist. Indeed, the third group of articles that the editor gathered were criticisms from Chen’s former comrades, represented by Cai Hesen, whose article was a scathing criticism of “Chen Duxiuism.” Even more extreme writers referred to Chen as a “traitor to the revolution.”\textsuperscript{31} Lastly, there were fervent expressions of support from Chen’s own loose faction, the Trotskyists. Chen Duxiu, who thought moderately but rarely wrote as such, did not inspire moderate writing.

Chen Dongxiao perhaps understated the feelings of the majority of the articles: pressure from the group represented by Hu Shi and Fu Sinian was so great
that Chiang Kai-shek, at the time not given to fair trials, allowed Chen Duxiu a legal team of five lawyers, headed by Chen’s old friend and intellectual influence Zhang Shizhao. Zhang’s legal brief was considered at the time to be a masterpiece of legal argumentation, and cemented his reputation as a lawyer. Chen, however, is said to have torn up the brief, and given a stirring defense to the jury, in which he admitted to wanting to overthrow the Guomindang, due to their failure to defend China against Japanese encroachment and their suppression of the basic rights of the people.³²

It was a criticism that could have fit into any point in Chen Duxiu’s life and political development, and one that still resonated with those following the trial. Bowing to public pressure, the jury, far from sentencing Chen to death, gave him a moderate prison sentence. Chen was allowed to continue his etymological research while in prison, as well as see visitors, including his adult son Chen Songnian for the first time since the boy was two years of age. Chen’s time in prison would be short, and his final political defeat would not occur until his release.

Eradicate the Japanese Bandit

It is either fitting or ironic that Chen Duxiu, a man whose life was defined by the struggle for a lovable nation and yet frequently questioned the nature of that love, would be accused of treason in the last four years of his life. Chen, originally sentenced to thirteen years confinement, was in fact released after four, in August 1937. That year, a general amnesty signaled the beginning of the second United Front between the CCP and GMD against the Japanese invasion. His positions in regards to politics were relatively neutral ones at the time, supporting the unity of various
factions against Japan, particularly a new United Front between the Guomindang and the CCP.

In 1938, one of Chen’s former disciples, Luo Han, believing Chen’s position to be essentially the same as that of the CCP, attempted to reconcile the two sides. There is disagreement about whether these efforts ever stood much of a chance. Wang Fanxi, Chen’s former Trotskyist associate, has said that the CCP was only willing to accept Chen provided he admitted past mistakes, a position that only angered Chen further. Others, however, have said that Chen was initially receptive to the CCP’s conditions.³³

Whatever the case, any hope of reconciliation was dashed by a series of articles appearing in Wuhan in 1938, accusing Chen of being a Japanese collaborator. This smear campaign has been taken by later party historians to have been engineered by Wang Ming (1904-1974), Mao’s rival for power in the CCP, in order to undermine the latter’s position. The most cited of these smear articles, however, is one written by Kang Sheng (1898-1975), who began as one of Wang Ming’s allies but later, perhaps seeing where his fortunes lay, would become Mao’s head of security.³⁴

The article, “Eradicate the Japanese Bandit, Investigate the Nation’s Public Enemy, the Trotskyist Gangster,” condemns Chen Duxiu as a hanjian, a word that must be distinguished from the normal words for “traitor” (pantu, panni). The word itself combines the characters han, which referred to the majority ethnicity in China, with jian, a word that in classical Chinese referred to sexual crimes. In legal codes, it became associated with treason, but as Peter Purdue points out, it had a broader meaning. “It connotes betrayal of underlying norms governing civilized society, and these norms are specifically identified as Han, as opposed to those of alien
barbarians…Han migrants to frontier regions who married native women.”35 Chen Duxiu was being accused of treason to his race, not simply his state or former party. It is significant that the “nation” that Kang Sheng used in his article title is minzu, that ambiguous term that means both “nation” and “ethnicity.”

Equally revealing is the way that Kang went about proving his case that Chen Duxiu was a traitor. Hu Shi almost twenty years earlier had warned against the excessive use of “isms” (zhuyi), and Kang’s article condemned Chen on almost entirely theoretical grounds. His argument, somewhat simplified, ran as follows. Cai Hesen had contended earlier that “Chen Duxiuism” and “Trotskyism” added up to “fascism.” In the intricate Marxist lexicon, however, Chen Duxiu was a “socialist fascist” as opposed to a “nationalist fascist.” Cai also labeled Chen as a “Menshevik,” referring to the liberal “White Russians” who fought the Bolsheviks in the October Revolution. Kang took this argument further, saying that Chen was a “European” fascist. European fascists were also imperialists, and thus Chen was an imperialist as well. And since the Japanese were also imperialists, Chen clearly had to be helping them.36 In a slight nod to the value of empirical evidence, Kang also contended that Chen was receiving a stipend from the Japanese in Shanghai.

The attacks against Chen were also attacks against Mao, whom Wang Ming accused of “negotiating with traitors.” Mao responded by accusing Wang Ming of imitating Chen’s “right opportunism.”37 The accusations against Chen were enough to drive a permanent wedge between him and the CCP, with Mao seeing his position as not worth risking for Chen’s sake. Being smeared as a hanjian prevented Chen from
being anything but a liability to any political organization, and thus ended his political career.

Chen would spend the last years of his life in Jiangjin, Sichuan, with his third “wife” Pan Lanzhen, a factory worker whom Chen’s fellow party members had procured for him in the early 1930s after both of his previous wives had left him.³⁸ He wrote some political articles, which Hu Shi would later claim showed his late-life reconversion to democracy.³⁹ Mostly, however, Chen pursued his lifelong occupation of researching character etymologies, with the goal of Romanizing the entire Chinese language. He died, forgotten, on May 27, 1942, at 9:40 in the evening.
Conclusion:

Solitary Beauty
Chen’s Duxiu’s gravesite in his hometown of Anqing is perhaps one of the most renovated sites in the world. Chen was in fact initially buried in Jiangjin, Sichuan, in a grave at the foot of a hill outside the city, with a simple inscription: “Mr. Chen Duxiu’s Grave.” The grave was erected on a plot of land belonging to a friend, with donations from many others. The calligraphy of the inscription was that of the son of a close friend. Despite his being untouchable politically, a photo taken of the burial suggests that Chen did not end his life friendless. The grave remains in Jiangjin, and in 1989 was renovated by the local CCP committee. Before the renovation, the calligraphy had been worn down to half of one character, the radical for “dog” that makes up half of the “du” in “Duxiu.”

Chen Duxiu’s earthly remains, however, are no longer in Jiangjin, but across the country in his birthplace of Anqing, Anhui province. They were moved there in 1947 by his son Chen Songnian, and buried next to his first wife Gao Xiaolan on the outskirts of the city. In 1953, Mao Zedong visited Anqing, and ordered a plaque to be put up outside of Chen Songnian’s home. The plaque labels the residence as that of...
“the sole surviving son of a martyr of the Chinese Revolution,” indicative, perhaps, of an era when the CCP was still trying to cater to China’s intellectuals and toying with popular elections. Chen Songnian was given a pension for the rest of his life, although Chen’s descendents were not.2

Chen Songnian brought his children to the grave every year during the Qingming Festival, when families would traditionally sweep the tombs of their ancestors and offer sacrifices of paper money. Chen Songnian continued this practice until 1966, after which during the ten years of the Cultural Revolution he did not dare go. During that time, his father’s grave was desecrated by Red Guards. By the time Chen Songnian could go back, the tomb had been overgrown, and he could only find it with the guidance of a peasant who had assisted in carrying the coffin thirty years before.

In 1979, on the occasion of Chen Duxiu’s one hundredth birthday, the Anqing city government subsidized the renovation of the tomb, putting in a new stone one meter high that read “The Tomb of Chen Zhongfu and His First Wife, Maiden Name Gao,” Chen Duxiu had been born with the name Chen Qiansheng, but later had various styles, Duxiu and Zhongfu being two of them. At the same time as the tomb’s renovation, pensions were given to the descendents of Chen Yannian, Chen Qiaonian, and Chen Henian. Originally, only Chen Songnian had enjoyed this privilege.3
An Explosion of Scholarship

In 1978 Mao Zedong died, the Cultural Revolution ended, and the silence was followed by a cacophony of scholarship on Chen Duxiu. Fifty years after Chen Dongxiao’s *Chen Duxiu Commentary* had exposed the wide variety of opinions that Chen Duxiu could provoke, Wang Shudi edited a new volume, *Selected Commentary on Chen Duxiu*. In his opening article, Wang noted that Chen Duxiu was a figure that in just sixty years had elicited no less than eight hundred articles of commentary.

Much more significant, however, was the breakdown of these articles by era: there were three hundred from 1915, the year *La Jeunesse* was first published, to 1949, the year the People’s Republic of China was founded. The years 1950 to 1965 and the years 1966 to 1976 (significant as the generally accepted dates of the Cultural Revolution) accounted for about one hundred articles each. Most amazingly, in the span of three years between 1977 and 1980, there had been no less than two hundred and fifty articles, a veritable explosion of scholarship.4

Interest was soon followed by rehabilitation. One of the first labels on Chen Duxiu to be swiftly dispatched by 1980s scholars was that of *hanjian*. Wang Ming, the originator of these accusations, had long since been defeated in a power struggle
against Mao Zedong, and condemned to infamy in CCP history. Kang Sheng, after spending many years as the head of Mao’s equivalent of the KGB, was condemned for his close association with the Cultural Revolution’s “Gang of Four.”

With the shift of power, a party historian named Sun Qiming felt that he could refute Kang’s argument and evidence in no uncertain terms: “In short, ‘Eradicate the Japanese Bandit, Investigate the Nation’s Public Enemy, the Trotskyist Gangster’ and its writer’s accusation of Chen Duxiu being a hanjian are without evidence, have no basis in facts or reason, and thus naturally do not hold up.”5 Tang Baolin, exploring the motives for these accusations, was able to put Wang’s war against Chen in the context of Stalin’s war against Trotsky, although leaving out Wang Ming’s struggle against Mao. Tang also pointed out that the party had been ready to reconcile with Chen, and the latter had been receptive to the idea.6

The Tomb of Chen Duxiu

In 1981, Chen Duxiu’s grandson Zhang Jun petitioned successfully to have Chen Duxiu’s tomb declared a historical relic, and renovations once again began on the tomb. This time, the site grew from a simple stone to a 120 square meter area, with two tiers, a thirty-meter passage leading to the tombstone, and a protective fence. The stone itself grew to a meter and a half tall and three meters in diameter. The inscription was changed to “The Tomb of Chen Duxiu,” the occupant no longer named as a private citizen buried with his wife, but a historical figure. The calligraphy this time was done not by a family friend, but by a member of the provincial calligraphy school.7
In 1998 responsibility for the tomb passed from the state to the province, and a new renovation began. This time, the renovation was initiated by no less than two members of the CCP Politburo, Zheng Qinghong and Li Tieying, and the panel convened to plan the new tomb included experts sent by the central government division for cultural heritage. Thirteen separate projects were proposed for the new tomb, which came to occupy over a thousand square meters, including pavilions and exhibits dedicated to Chen Duxiu and his two martyred sons. The materials used were granite and marble, a step up from the sandstone previously used. The calligraphy of the Tang Dynasty scholar Ouyang Xun (557-641), reproduced digitally, was used for the inscription. The gravestone of one Chen Zhongfu, forgotten for over forty years by all but his descendents, had become an enormous monument of national importance, costing over a million RMB.

Chen Duxiu has gone from being a forgotten figure to one growing in stature in highly visual, striking ways. But how is he to be remembered? Chen Duxiu’s memory has not just been revived by the CCP; it has changed as well. The tourism website for the city of Anqing describes Chen Duxiu in the following terms:
The founder of the Chinese Communist Party and one of its early leaders... He studied abroad in Japan. In 1903 he joined the movement to repulse Russia, and helped Zhang Shizhao edit journals. He was part of the struggle to oppose the Qing Dynasty, as well as the struggle against Yuan Shikai. In 1915 he began publishing the magazine *New Youth*, and raised the flag of “Science and Democracy.” In 1917 he took up the post of Dean of Arts and Sciences at Peking University. In 1918 he and Li Dazhao founded *The Weekly Critic*, he promoted the New Culture, disseminated Marxism, and was one of the main leaders of the May Fourth New Culture Movement. In 1920, with the help of the Communist International, he established a Chinese Communist cell in Shanghai, and instigated the founding of the party.  

Chen Duxiu, in his final (or at least current) evaluation, was a patriot, a revolutionary against tyranny, a promoter of new culture, and a founder of the CCP. What then of his break with the party? 

At the time of the First United Front during the First Revolution... in the face of the Guomindang led by Chiang Kai-shek he implemented retreatist policies, committed grave right-wing and surrenderist errors, and caused the revolution to meet with defeat. In 1927, he was removed as General Secretary at the August 7 meeting of the CCP. Afterwards, he persisted in his errors, showing a pessimistic and dispirited attitude toward the revolution, and accepted the views of the international Trotskyist clique... In October 1929, he was expelled from the CCP. In 1939, during the Shanghai campaign, he supported the Anti-Japanese War, denounced Chiang Kai-shek’s treasonous dictatorship, and was arrested by the Guomindang government. In August 1937 he was released from prison, and endorsed the Second United Front with the Guomindang against Japan, and cut off relations with the Trotskyist clique... In 1938 he was framed by Wang Ming and Kang Sheng as a Japanese spy, and from that point thoroughly cut off relations with the CCP.

It is interesting to note that although Chen Duxiu is still blamed for the failure of the “Second Revolution” in 1927, he is not referred to once as an opportunist throughout this description, even in the sections that have been omitted. His arrest by the Guomindang is cast as a direct result of his opposition to Chiang Kai-shek, and not to tensions within his own faction, with whom he later “cut off relations.” Finally, he ends his life as a patriot, supporting the United Front against Japan. His break with
the CCP is the fault of neither side, but of his defamation by two long-condemned deviants.

In this evaluation, Chen Duxiu begins and ends his life as a patriot, having begun by resisting Russia, the Qing, and the imperialists, and ending by resisting the Japanese. In a post-Mao Chinese political establishment that has adopted nationalism as part of its ideology, it is a comfortable way to remember both Chen Duxiu and the May Fourth Movement in general. It allows the CCP to both glorify its founder and conform his ideas to the current nationalist ideology. The legacy of Chen Duxiu, however, has come to mean different things to different people.

_Raising His Arm and Shouting_

Inside the grounds of Chen Duxiu’s tomb stands a larger-than-life statue of the man himself. He stands dressed in western attire, with his back straight, legs wide apart, head cocked slightly to the side, his left hand in his pocket, and his right hand brandishing a magazine like a weapon. He looks every bit the fiery revolutionary who with his words fought the Russians, the Japanese, the Qing, the warlords, the imperialists, and Chinese culture itself.
Many contemporary Chinese writers, however, see a warrior of a different sort. Sun Yu wrote in 2009 that “It was Chen Duxiu’s raising his arm and shouting from which appeared new people, new ideas, new ways of thinking; many difficult questions of the spirit all took the stage here.” Aside from his prose, Sun admires something else of Chen Duxiu’s generation: the courage to tackle questions that would be considered too large and unmanageable by scholars today. “When we of later times face this magazine [La Jeunesse], we sometimes cannot help but feel somewhat ashamed. Why? Because today’s people have lost their language. In expressing the individual, they do not have the clear insight and profound knowledge of the people of that era.” Sun’s worries about his own times, however, find an interesting parallel in those of Chen and his contemporaries. As Chinese writing made the transition between classical and vernacular, the writers of Jiayin and La Jeunesse both lost their language and found it again, the transition in language mirroring the transition in ideas.

What Sun looks back upon with shame, however, is how such writers confronted the transition. In Chen Duxiu’s time, intellectuals had the courage and ability to take on questions such as “the true meaning of life” in a manner meaningful to their readers and themselves. Chen Duxiu’s statue is not just confronting human enemies, but questions about life itself.

This thesis has attempted to challenge the perceived chronology of twentieth century Chinese intellectual history, and thus the validity of such statements. The New Culture Period, when La Jeunesse was being published, was not for Chen an era of questioning, but an era of great confidence and a desire to change the minds of those around him. The period from 1914 to 1915, by contrast, represented the time...
when Chen was formulating his ideas on nations and individuals. It was in the pages of *Jiayin* that so many of the “new people, new ideas, new ways of thinking” first appeared. By 1918 and 1919, the years that the New Culture Movement and its apex the May Fourth Movement are known for, Chen had already moved on to a new magazine and a new focus on organization.

The difference in Chen’s attitude from period to period can be seen in his choice of words. From 1914 to 1915, the word that characterized his thought was *zijue*, or self-awareness, which Chen defined as understanding a nation’s purpose and situation. The term came from Zhang Shizhao, however, who defined it more broadly as being able to approach problems objectively and critically, as well as understanding one’s place inside a larger organization such as a nation. The *Jiayin* period was one of attempting to understand what had gone wrong with China.

After 1915, by contrast, Chen’s new word to express the same purpose is *juewu*, meaning enlightenment or realization. Chen, like the bodhisattva he had studied in Japan, had reached a sort of enlightenment (for a little while, at least), and was determined to show others the knowledge he had gained. Thus, his goal for the duration of New Culture Movement was to provoke such “realizations” in his readers. Chen’s own intellectual breakthroughs, however, were rarely so sudden, and happened in a different way.

*Original and Solitary*

Chen Duxiu’s statue in Anqing is an eloquent representation of his writing: clear and combative, inciting others to action. It also represents a facet of his personality, that of the compulsive organizer and activist, bringing together
assassination squads in Anhui, scholars in Tokyo, or students in Beijing. Chen Duxiu was a man who not only could not stop himself from writing about politics, but also could not help but get involved himself. Wang Shudi’s 1982 collection of writings about Chen includes the documents pertaining to all five of his arrests. Chen’s hands were dirty: he wrote about and participated in the revolutionary governments set up after the Xinhai Revolution. Ten years later, he helped introduce Marxism to China, and then founded, led, and was expelled from the Chinese Communist Party, before turning to the printed word once more in order to criticize it.

Behind this fighter’s front, however, lived a quiet, methodical mind not represented on the Anqing statue. Three moments in Chen Duxiu’s life show that mind at work. Chen up until 1914 was much the sort of person that the Anqing tourism bureau describes: a revolutionary patriot fighting imperialism without and tyranny within. The failure of the Xinhai Revolution, however, forced Chen to rethink the nature of patriotism, and to find a way forward against the problems facing China in 1914. Zhang Shizhao’s consideration of the relationship between the individual and the state had given Chen a framework within which to begin to answer this question, leading him to new insights on what a nation was, and the ability of patriotism to both protect a nation’s people and harm them.

Chen’s new formulation was critiqued by both Li Dazhao and Zhang Shizhao, but neither man influenced Chen as much as has been contended. Chen’s New Culture period’s nationalist thought was not, as claimed by Zhu Chengjia, formulated by Li Dazhao. Li’s criticisms, to begin with, were not of Chen’s basic view of nations, but of Chen’s own behavior. Chen appears to have agreed with Li’s exhortation to “strive for a lovable nation,” taking the nation one had as a starting point and
improving from there. Yet Chen completely ignored Li’s call for an end to critical, pessimistic writing. Chen was likewise unimpressed with Zhang Shizhao’s defense of martyrdom and suicide against Li’s criticism, believing that nations’ fates were decided long before the time for such heroics arrived.

Five years later, with the betrayal at Versailles, Chen was caught up briefly in the anti-foreign outburst before slowly turning around to point his finger directly at the succession of governments who had manipulated the patriotism of the Chinese to serve their own ends. Finally, in 1927, after Chen saw his guiding ideology go to shambles in front of him, it took two years before he could find a solution that was acceptable intellectually, this time suggested by the man born within the same year as Chen himself, Leon Trotsky.

Neither, in the end, judged the situation fairly. But the moment serves to illustrate that Chen Duxiu, for all of his polemical writing and organizing, judged ideas not based on expediency, but on their intellectual worth. Chen’s dirty hands were not of the sort that Sartre had in mind, which rejected ideological purity in favor of political expediency. For a man so tied to politics, his was not the mind of a politician. It was a quality that would make him unusually level-headed during times of great intellectual and political upheaval, but perhaps contributed to his downfall as a leader of parties and people. Chen Duxiu was not an “opportunist,” and would be supplanted by far more opportunistic opponents. Yves Chevrier’s formulation is perhaps the best: “Original and solitary, Chen – in another sign of maturity – knows who he is: Duxiu, the name of a mountain in Huaining…meaning ‘solitary beauty.’”  

13
Wang Shudi opened his 1982 anthology with a warning to his readers: “In the Chinese Communist Party and Chinese modern history, Chen Duxiu is a complicated character.” It may be the only accurate characterization possible. Chen Duxiu was a man who had advocated the rejection of classical Chinese culture, yet throughout his life found solace in etymological research on obscure Chinese characters. He formed and joined societies with strict rules on drinking, gambling, and whoring, and yet did all three frequently. He was a nationalist, but only for the sake of a particular kind of nation. He was a patriot, and yet provided one of the most detailed critiques of the concept of any of his contemporaries. He was a straightforward, aggressive writer with a slow, careful mind that changed slowly and by degrees.

Lee Feigon has characterized Chen Duxiu as having “tremendous influence over the course of modern Chinese history – an influence which is probably second in this century only to that of Mao Zedong.” Mao Zedong himself dubbed Chen Duxiu “the commander-in-chief of the May Fourth Movement.” It is not the purpose of this thesis to debate either one of these points. Chen Duxiu, however, for the duration of his life, in some sense was modern Chinese history, very much connected to events and by virtue of his many editorships was always in a position to comment on them.

Chen remains in this position even after his death, and by 2010 he is simultaneously canonized and marginalized by a government eager to both canonize and marginalize the May Fourth era. This new rehabilitation is largely based on Chen’s image as a patriot and a nationalist. Chen’s own writings, however, particularly those between 1914 and 1919, make this new label deeply ironic.
Not a Country that Uses Patriotism to Oppress

Chen Duxiu was not a simplistic nationalist, with unconditional loyalty to the country of his birth. The closing passage to his post-May Fourth article “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?” expresses this best: “What we love is a country where the people use patriotism to resist oppression, not a country that uses patriotism to oppress. What we love is a country that seeks happiness for the people, not a country for which the people sacrifice themselves.” It is a call that resonates with many characters of twentieth-century Chinese history, who strove toward a lovable nation and loved it, yet found that for some reason, the nation did not love them back. In Chen’s conception of a nation, the love and support were mutual.

Chen Duxiu lived at a time when the concept of a nation state was a new one to China. Once a vaguely defined empire whose borders and hegemony were often more cultural than political, China had, as Chen remarked astutely in 1903, been forced to consider itself a nation only after other nations began encroaching upon it.

Free to define what sort of nation China should become, Chen had emphasized from the beginning that nations were entities established by the people to serve their interests, and were not simply the private property of their rulers. It took the failure of the Xinhai Revolution of 1911, however, to force Chen and others to consider what they wanted their new state to look like. Zhang Shizhao began by defining nations as collections of individuals pursuing their own interests, terming this awareness of the self within a larger organization zijue, or self-awareness.

Chen Duxiu borrowed the term and applied it concretely to the situation at hand. Self-awareness was not simply awareness of the self within the nation – it was also awareness of the state of that nation and what purpose it served. Chen by this
time had concluded that the purpose of a nation was to “safeguard the people’s rights and promote their happiness,” a view that would not change significantly for the last thirty years of his life.

Chen Duxiu also would not have objected to the label of patriot, having taken the title himself on many occasions. But like his nationalism, Chen’s patriotism had been subjected to extensive scrutiny. Chen was a patriot with the awareness that patriotism was prerequisite to a nation’s existence, but could easily be used to oppress the people of both a nation and its neighbors. It was to counterbalance such excesses of emotion that Chen prescribed zijue, representing the wisdom and knowledge to direct patriotism wisely.

It was a lesson that Chen Duxiu drew from the beginning of World War I and its ending, in watching the nations of Europe tear each other apart and China itself betrayed by its own government, which had willingly sold parts of Shandong in exchange for private loans from Japan. Patriotism, despite its importance, could be misused, and even with good intentions could be misdirected.

Chen Duxiu’s concerns reflect those of the present. In 2009, the ninetieth anniversary of the May Fourth demonstrations and Chen Duxiu’s one hundred and thirtieth birthday, the Beijing writer Xu Zhiyuan remarked on a new patriotic tide surging through China:

It was just the time when ‘patriotism’ was becoming fashionable again, when a new generation of youth added red stars to their MSN signatures and were loudly insulting Carrefour supermarkets… Individuals had disappeared; they had simply merged into a group. The meaning of ‘patriotism’ had disappeared as well; it felt as though it had just become a slogan.18

A search for “aiguoxin” (patriotism) on the Chinese search engine Baidu will turn up images not of Chen Duxiu or anyone else associated with the term, but of a flag of the
People’s Republic of China, a literal “patriotic heart.” Xu’s worry mirrored Chen’s: that people overcome by their emotions will forget their ability to think rationally and individually – their zijue.

Chen has been described as “a nationalist who briefly flirted with cosmopolitanism.”

It was no brief flirtation – articles by Chen on this theme span over twenty years. Chen was greatly affected by Kang Youwei’s vision of the Grand Unity, in which all borders between peoples would be erased, and continued to hold it out in his writings as the ultimate goal of humanity. Time, however, made Chen a realist on this point. Seeing the result of the Great War, which turned out not to be the War to End All Wars, led Chen to recognize the power relations inherent in cosmopolitanism, and like Sun Yat-sen called for nationalism until China was powerful enough to be cosmopolitan on an equal footing. Chen Duxiu was a nationalist, but only as long as China needed nationalism.

Chen’s cosmopolitanism, coming as it did from both European and classical Chinese ideas, demonstrated his willingness throughout his life to draw inspiration from a variety of sources. Chen’s early life, as shown by Feigon, was shaped by reading earlier Chinese iconoclasts, such as Yuan Mei, and more contemporary reformers, such as Kang Youwei. Chen maintained an active interest in Chinese character etymology throughout his life, sometimes for its own sake, sometimes with such goals as romanizing the entire language. During the New Culture period, he
would often explain European concepts in terms of classical Chinese ideas, with the separation between the two often quite blurry. Neither Chen nor his times represented an outright rejection of classical Chinese thought, but an attempt to make Western ideas fit inside a preexisting context.

The crowning irony of Chen Duxiu’s rehabilitation is that a man who held such a nuanced view of patriotism can only be remembered safely as a patriot. Ironic, because for much of his life Chen had been interested in nationalism’s opposite, cosmopolitanism, for reasons that were themselves cosmopolitan. Conflicted nationalist that he was, Chen worried about the effects of excessive patriotism. Following the publication of “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?” and Chen’s arrest in 1919, Li Xinbai memorialized Chen’s worry in terms of “we” (the people), “you” (Chen Duxiu), and “they” (those whose harmful policies Chen Duxiu had criticized):

When we follow their ideas, we the people are miserable.  
When we follow your ideas, they are miserable.  
They are unwilling to be miserable, so you are miserable.  
Your misery stands in for our misery.20

Li’s poem has not lost its edge of compassionate concern many decades later.
**Glossary**

*aiguo* 爱国: Patriotism. Contains the characters 爱 to love and 国 kingdom. Variants include 爱国主义 (aiguozhuyi) and 爱国精神 (aiguo jingshen).

*aiguoxin* 爱国心: Variant of “patriotism” used by Chen Duxiu to describe patriotism based on emotions. In addition to 爱国, also contains 心 heart. This term also refers to heart-shaped P.R.C. flags used commonly on buttons and Internet icons.

*dang* 党: In classical usage, a faction or clique. In modern usage, a political party. The earlier form was the subject of extensive debate among classical Chinese political thinkers regarding their function in court.

*datong* 大同: The “Grand Unity” proposed by Kang Youwei, based on New Text conceptions of history. Contains the characters 大 great, large and 同 identical, unified.

*dikangli* 抵抗力: Resilience. Used by Chen Duxiu to describe the ability of all entities to compete and survive. Used in modern Chinese biological terminology to refer to an organism’s ability to resist disease. Contains the compound 抵抗 to resist and the character 力 strength.

*gong* 公: Public. Used by classical Chinese thinkers and later by Zhang Shizhao to refer to things concerning society at large.

*gongli* 公理: A universal truth. Used by Chen Duxiu to refer to objective morality. Contains the characters 公 public and 理 reason or truth.

*guo* 国: Classical term for a kingdom.

*guojia* 国家: Japanese loanword for the European concept of “nation-state.” Combines the terms 国 kingdom and 家 family.

*hanjian* 汉奸: A race-traitor, specifically to the Han (Chinese) race. Combines the terms 汉 Han and 奸 adultery.

*hanxue* 汉学: “Han Learning.” An early Qing Dynasty intellectual movement focusing on Han Dynasty commentaries on the Confucian classics.

*jihuizhuyi* 机会主义: Opportunism. Used as an all-inclusive term for Chen Duxiu’s disagreements with the Chinese Communist Party, although initially it referred to Chen’s involvement in the First United Front with the Guomindang. Contains the compounds 机会 opportunity and 主义 ideology.
jinwen 近文: New Texts. Refers to both a set of the Confucian classics copied down from memory following the fall of the Qin Dynasty and a movement promoting them during the mid to late Qing Dynasty. Contains the characters 近 recent and 文 texts.

juewu 觉悟: Enlightenment, realization. Used by Chen Duxiu to refer to realizations in a political context. Contains the characters 觉 to awaken or be conscious and 悟 to realize or awaken.

juren 举人: “Elevated scholar.” Refers to one who has passed the provincial-level Confucian civil service exams. Such exams existed in China until the early twentieth century, when they were abolished by the Qing. Contains the characters 举 to lift and 人 person.

kaozheng 考证: Evidential research. Refers to an intellectual movement in the early Qing Dynasty that emphasized rigid empirical and etymological analysis of the Confucian classics. Contains the characters 考 to test and 证 evidence.

minzu 民族: A Japanese loanword meaning nationality or ethnicity. Contains the characters 民 “the masses” and 族 clan or group. The meaning depends upon context.

minzuzhuyi 民族主义: A Japanese loanword meaning nationalism. Combines the compound 民族 nation or ethnicity and 主义 ideology.

qing 情: Emotion or passion. Used by Chen Duxiu in contrast with 智, or reason.

renzhong 人种: Race. Combines the characters 人 person and 种 type.

shao nian lao cheng 少年老成 Chinese idiom meaning “mature beyond one’s years.”

si 私: Private. Used in classical Chinese writing and Zhang Shizhao to refer to personal affairs. Carries a slightly negative connotation in classical Chinese.

songxue 宋学: Song Learning. Generally translated into English as Neo-Confucianism. Refers to commentaries on the Confucian classics made during the Song Dynasty and later, most famously by Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming.

tianxia 天下: Literally “all under Heaven.” Refers to both the Chinese empire and by extension the entire human realm, under the classical Chinese conception of the world. Combines the characters 天 Heaven or sky and 下 below.

xinxue 新学: New Learning. Late nineteenth century term referring to Western science and philosophy.
xiucai 秀才: The degree conferred on one who passed the lowest level of the
Confucian examination system. Combines the characters 秀 outstanding or
demonstrated and 才 ability.

yanshi 厌世: Pessimism. In classical usage, denotes a certain world-weariness or
passivity. The precise meaning of this term was the subject of a debate between
Zhang Shizhao and Li Dazhao. Combines the characters 厌 to detest or be tired of and
世 the world or the times.

zhi 智: Reason or logic. Used by Chen Duxiu in contrast with 情 or emotion.

zhi sang ma huai 指桑骂槐: Chinese idiom meaning “to make oblique accusations.”
Literally “pointing at the mulberry to rail at the locust.” Refers to the tendency of
Chinese scholars to bring up past events in order to criticize the present situation.

Zhongfu 仲甫 Chen Duxiu’s adult name, or zi. Composed of the characters 仲
intermediary, and 甫 a common suffix to adult names.

zhonghua minzu 中华民族: Chinese nationality. Refers to all ethnicities living within
the borders of present-day China, as well as Han Chinese living abroad. Combines the
compounds 中华 Chinese in a cultural sense, and 民族 nation or ethnicity.

zidong 自动: Term used by Chen Duxiu to refer to decisive individual action. Is used
in modern Chinese to mean “automatic.” Combines the characters 自 self and 动 to
move or act.

zijue 自觉: Self-awareness. Used by Zhang Shizhao to refer to an individual’s ability
to think rationally and individually. Combines the characters 自 self and 觉 to awaken
or be conscious.

zijuxin 自觉心: Chen Duxiu’s adaptation of Zhang Shizhao’s term, refers to an
individual’s ability to understand a nation’s purpose and situation. Combines the
compound 自觉 self-awareness and 心 heart.

zuguo 祖国 Ancestral nation. Term first appearing in Chen Duxiu’s writings in the
1920s, and used commonly at present as a way for Chinese to refer to their country.
Contains the characters 祖 ancestors and 国 kingdom.
Endnotes

Introduction: Awareness of a Nation’s Purpose

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4. Articles on Chinese websites are notoriously mobile and hard to pin down, and the original disappeared from the popular web portal 163.com within a month of its publication. A version can be found as “Chen Duxiu ‘jiaoshou piaochang an’ de lishi zhenxiang” [The true historical facts of the Chen Duxiu whoring case], http://www.sznews.com/culture/content/2010-01/06/content_4308273.htm (accessed 22 March 2010).
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**Conclusion: Solitary Beauty**

1. This entire section draws heavily from “Duxiu Muyuan,” *Anqing Lüyou wang*, http://www.aqtour.com/rwls/rwls_list.asp?rwcls_name=%C3%FB%C8%CB%B9%C A%C0%EF&rw_id=26 (accessed February 22, 2010).
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Images

(2) Statue of Chen Duxiu from the back. Reproduced from China Life Magazine (Shenghuo Yuekan), no. 41 (2009).


(85) La Jeunesse (Qingnian). Reproduced from the Ningbo Archives, Ningbo, P.R.C.

(92) La Jeunesse (Xin Qingnian). Reproduced from Wikimedia Commons, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E6%96%B0%E9%9D%92%E5%B9%B4%E5%B0%81%E9%9D%A2.jpg

(101) Celebration of the Armistice, Beijing, November 1918. Reproduced from Jonathan Spence, The Search for Modern China.

(106) Section from Meizhou Pinglun. Reproduced from the Harvard-Yenching Library.

(122) Sun Yat-sen. Reproduced from Wikimedia Commons, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:%E5%AD%99%E4%B8%AD%E5%B1%B1%E8%82%96%E5%B8%83.jpg.


Appendix:
A Translation of Chen Duxiu’s “In the End, Should We Really Be Patriotic?”

Patriotism! Patriotism! This sort of clamor in recent years has nearly stuffed the society of our country full. It is corrupt, useless officials and rough soldiers, who in speech often hang the banner of patriotism. Even the Traitor Party does not dare openly say that one need not love the country. Since the Shandong Question arose, the patriotic clamor has suddenly risen to hundreds of thousands of voices. It seems that the two characters “love one’s country” are indeed beyond question, and not easily discussed.

Emotion and reason are both important parts of the human spirit, moreover the two are often in conflict. Patriotism is more often than not the product of emotion, although reason occupies a small part. Sometimes patriotism does not in fact conform to reason at all – German and Japanese soldiers are thus. Human behavior is the natural result of emotional impulse. I believe that if one uses reason as the foundation of emotion, then emotion can at last be firm and not waver from start to finish. In society, when people’s emotions are aroused, they often act blindly, lose their reason, and commit unthinkable crimes – during the European War, French and English city-dwellers in killing pacifists were thus. This is because they do not use reason as the foundation of emotion, and thus the blind actions of the masses are sometimes for good, sometimes for ill. Thus in the midst of everyone’s zealous, slavish, unquestioning, “patriotic” clamor, I would like to have a reasoned discussion: in the end, should we really be patriotic?

If one does not have a rational discussion about the slavish, much-acclaimed patriotism in society, then whether officials forbid patriotism or encourage it, it will not last as a credible motive for our actions.

If one asks whether or not we should be patriotic, one must first ask what a nation is. Originally a nation was nothing more than an organ for people to unite and resist foreign oppression, and to harmonize domestic disputes. Good people can use patriotism to resist foreign oppression and settle domestic disputes. Evil people can use patriotism to oppress the people and foreigners alike.

We Chinese people (zhonghua minzu) since ancient times have been secluded, with sole hegemony over the East. Before we established commercial relations with Europe and America, there was only the idea of “all under Heaven”, and no concept of “the nation”. Therefore patriotic thought is faint in the people’s root feeling. If one wants to make patriotic thought eternal and not simply part of a passing era, and in this sense resemble the various nations of Europe, whose people have existed side by side since ancient times, I fear that it will not be easy.

The peoples of Europe have existed side by side since ancient times, and their view of the nation is profound, so patriotic thought has become an eternal characteristic of their citizens. Recently there has been a group of people of lofty thought, who seem to believe in individualism or in cosmopolitanism. They seem to have divined that the nation is man-made and not natural (“has no value”), and have seen and heard much darkness and sin both in domestic and foreign affairs, all of which are done in the name of the nation. Since they oppose the nation, they naturally do not advocate patriotism. In their eyes, patriotism seems to be another word for harming others. Thus they consider patriotic killing to be fanaticism and madness.
We Chinese people have no education, no knowledge, and no unity. We do not love our country, but not in the same sense as those lofty thinkers. When officials block patriotic movements, it need not be said that their intentions are different from those thinkers. Although I currently cannot wish that our uneducated, ignorant, disunited countrymen should have lofty thoughts, I still would prefer that our countrymen not continue to have these traits for long. If our countrymen from now on are educated, knowledgeable, and united, then we finally will be qualified to join the lofty thinkers of all nations and unify the world (datong shijie).

Our China is a poor and oppressed country, which domestically has admittedly committed many crimes. Patriotism is an ideal tool to extort from and oppress the people, but for now China does not have the ability to use patriotism to oppress foreign peoples. It is foolish to even wish to guard against the government using statism and the people’s patriotism to go and oppress the people of other nations.

Lofty thinkers oppose patriotism, and ambitious people use it to oppress others. China currently is not only incapable of oppressing others, but also has been oppressed by others to the point of barely having room to survive. Being patriotic in order to resist oppression and seek to survive is not the same as oppressing others; no lofty thinker would necessarily disagree with this. Individuals’ self respect is well-developed in any case, and as long as one does not harm others’ existence, it is not a crime.

According to the discussion above, there are people who ask: Should we, in the end, love our country? We answer even more loudly: what we love is a country where the people use patriotism to resist oppression, not a country that uses patriotism to oppress.

What we love is a country that seeks happiness for the people, not a country for which the people sacrifice themselves.
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