
UNIT 9 THE NEW CULTURAL MOVEMENT AFTER 1911*

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9.0 OBJECTIVES

After reading this Unit, you will be able to learn about the:

- hold of Confucian philosophy on China;
- reasons behind the advent of “new culture” after 1911;
- components of the New Cultural Movement; and
- role of intellectuals in China’s Cultural Revolution.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Confucianism as an ideology had been practised in China for more than 2000 years. However, a variety of factors led to the generation of such new ideas which challenged not only the hold of Confucian ideology over the Chinese but its very basis. Imperialist exploitation of China, the urge to modernize and bring about political reforms were some such factors. The initial attempts for reform had been tried out very much within confines of Confucianism with the exception of the Taipings who had openly challenged and flouted it. All these aspects we have touched upon in earlier Units. In this Unit we discuss the emergence of a new culture in China immediately after the Revolution of 1911. The roots of this new culture had been established from the closing years of the 19th century. The role played by intellectuals, students, the university system, etc. in this new awakening has also been taken into account.

9.2 THE NEW SETTING

The end of a dynasty and the subsequent tyranny and disruptions were no new experiences for the Chinese people. Their ancestors had faced periods of massive anarchy at various intervals. They had not only come out of such situations but, at times, had also flourished. For the Chinese, the dynastic cycle was an accepted feature of history. The downfall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 was, however, different. It brought to an end the Emperor system. According to the Chinese, the Emperor as son of Heaven was the Supreme ruler and remained so till he lost the 'Mandate of Heaven'! When that happens, a new ruler and dynasty takes over. With the decline of monarchy, other institutional structures of China which had made the society an enduring and self-governing entity — the family, the gentry, the clan, the guild, the village — were irreparably weakening. The struggle to emancipate women, the growth of cities with their factories, the development of business enterprises, and a new system of education were, on the one hand, destroying traditional Chinese society and, on the other, remaking it into a modern one. While the political revolution lay stagnant, as militarists snatched power and curbed every attempt to create representative constitution, the Cultural Revolution was on the increase. This cultural transformation of China was inevitable as the forces of change and progress had been unleashed. They had to make an impact somewhere - if not in the realm of politics and economy, then on the realm of society and culture. The cultural transformation which began since the closing years of the 19th century took a dramatic and exciting shape in the 1911-1919 period. The most crucial aspect of this Cultural Revolution was the challenge it posed to Confucianism — the reigning ideology of China for more than two thousand years. Once the ideological basis on which a society rests is eroded, all of its super structural institutions tend to fall apart.

Confucian philosophy had remained secure and intact even though the monarchical-dynastic emperor system, which had been there long before Confucianism, had ended. The Confucian norm and harmony in society is achieved by maintaining a hierarchy and only through superior-subordinate relationships. This was antithetical to any ideas of progress. The Reformers of the Manchu court during the nineteenth as well as in the early years of the twentieth century tried to change China within the Confucian framework. Changes, therefore, were of not much consequence to Chinese society — they were largely superficial. Hence, revolutionary change was simply not possible without challenging Confucian orthodoxy.

9.3 CONFUCIANISM AND TRADITIONAL CHINESE SOCIETY

The Confucian philosophy had maintained its hold on practically every sphere of life in China even during what we term as the modern period. In Confucianism, the preference of age over youth, past over present, authority over subject and society over individual is the norm. In other words, society is based on a hierarchy of relationships. It is on the basis of this hierarchy that society maintains harmony and order. Once the hierarchy is disturbed, society can degenerate and order and stability will be replaced by chaos, thus threatening the very existence of society. Confucianism, therefore, upheld status quo and was against any change. It was, by definition, conservative and orthodox. Although it was never as such called a religion, yet some of its tenets were more rigid than

that of any religion. And because it was not a religion, so it could coexist with Buddhism, Christianity and the folk religion of China.

In the area of politics and government, Confucianism upheld 'rule by the virtuous'. If the ruler himself did not follow ethical principles, how could he set things right in his kingdom? The political system was part of the cosmic system and provided for enlightened rule by a moral, ethical ruler - the emperor, son of Heaven. The subject was bound in obedience to the ruler, who was morally bound to rule over him and his other subjects.

In the Confucian pattern of thinking women were completely subordinated to men and youth to the older generation. Age and gender discrimination was so rampant in every strata of society that it was hardly noticeable. Woman had no role in society and at home she was merely a wife or mother. Her role of child-bearing and child-rearing was seen as society's natural claim on her. Excluded from formal education, owning property or having access to productive resources, Chinese women, for centuries, suffered repression and oppression. Even in South China, where women performed agricultural tasks, their position in society or within the family was only marginally better than women of the conservative north. What added more to the oppression of Chinese women were social evils like foot binding, bride-price and child marriage?

As mentioned earlier, the youth were too in the category of oppressed strata. The tradition of filial piety demanded complete subordination of the younger generation to the older. According to Confucian teachings, the son's gratitude to the father continues even after, the latter's death in the form of rituals and ceremonies done periodically. This to an extent had kept China's young men submissive, timid and weak. It hampered personal development and advancement. Even the family system had certain internalized forms of oppression which prevented an individual's free development.

A vast portion of the Chinese population was illiterate. For millions, education and learning remained the privilege of a tiny elite. The most important purpose that education served was in the creation of scholar-officials necessary for the imperial court to keep the Chinese nation under its constant control. The content of education was also very limited. It was confined to classics written in the earlier periods. Committing the classics to memory was all that was expected of an educated person. The more one could cram, the more his intellectual capabilities were recognized. The civil service examination through which officials were recruited also considered memory as an indication of knowledge. The most unfortunate aspect of the traditional Chinese system of education was that the written language was in literary or classical Chinese, which was very different from the spoken language (Bai Hua). Mastering this language took several years of full-time study. This was a great hindrance to the spread of literacy and for the labouring people it was next to impossible to devote that much time to education. Only the wealthy could afford it. Confucian philosophy based on hierarchy and inequality implicitly supported this form of educational system.

However, the survival of Confucianism, as the reigning philosophy of China, had been possible because it had been successfully imposed on the weaker sections of society, whereas the powerful sections often violated it. The philosophy, in other words, was used expeditiously by the ruling classes. Yet this order of things did not prevent social convulsions. It could no more keep China away from strife and violence.

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Mention in about five lines the position of women under Confucianism.

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9.4 THE 1911 REVOLUTION AND THE ‘NEW CULTURE’

Towards the end of the Manchu rule, as part of one of its reforms, the court had abolished the civil service exams (in 1905). No new effective system of recruitment had been evolved to fill the vacuum. Administratively, China got weakened even more. As imperialist powers encroached further, the government in Peking was involved in political bickering, manipulation and power struggle. China remained economically, socially and politically backward. However, it is a fact of history that no nation or people remain passive, subdued and oppressed for too long a period. Forces of change are bound to emerge and they did in China in the form of youth and intellectuals, students and teachers who created a new awareness which eventually changed the Chinese nation for good. It was an intellectual revolution in the first place: Ideas of nationalism, democracy, liberalism, science, socialism and communism gradually started dominating the intellectual environment.

The Chinese Revolution of 1911 has often been considered ‘superficial’ for it produced no social transformation, leave aside, a social revolution. Yet the fact remains that it brought about the following changes:

- the end of the universal kingship and the collapse of the entire cosmology which legitimized it,
- the fragmentation and militarization of power and authority throughout the society often down to the local level,
- the loss of moral authority on many levels of that society,
- the conclusive insecurity of local holders of power and wealth — both old and new, and,
- the failure of the new republic to establish its own bases of legitimacy.

Many of these trends had been underway much before 1911. The end of the examination system for the civil service had itself had an enormous effect on the social role of the ‘literate’. The cosmology of kingship had already been undermined by the evolutionary doctrines of Kang Youwei, Yen Fu, Liang Qichao and others. An objective study of Chinese society, undoubtedly, will reveal a variety of conditions and even some positive developments. Yet in the perception of most of the Chinese intellectuals the total scene was of deterioration, fragmentation, corruption and brutality.

9.4.1 Philosophers and Ideas

Reformer-philosophers like Yen Fu and Kang Youwei now felt confirmed in their conviction that evolution cannot be forced on a society, and that a republican

revolution at this stage of China's evolution was an enormous mistake. Liang Qichao accepted the revolution and the irreversibility of the demise of monarchy as the decree of history. He was at first, on thoroughly consistent grounds, in favour of Yuan Shikai's efforts to a 'republican' dictatorship which would be able to carry through the tasks of modernization. Kang, again on thoroughly consistent evolutionary grounds, continued to believe that at this point only the symbols of monarchy could restore the centre that had collapsed. A common tendency among all the three thinkers during this period was of a greater inclination to accept the premises of cultural nationalism. Kang had of course long advocated the need for his own version of a Confucian religion. Yen and Liang, in an environment of growing disintegration, were now increasingly convinced that China required minimal elements of a stabilizing common faith. It was in such circumstances that Yen Fu signed the petition of the Society for Confucianism' that Confucianism be recognized as a state religion. China, he argued, was still in a period of transition from a 'patriarchal' to a 'military' stage of society and it still required a patriarchal faith.

The responses of the active revolutionaries were diverse. They too demonstrated that their ideological commitments had not really been profound. Soon they got involved in the politics of the unsavoury warlord era. Sun Yatsen tried to actively seek a base for political power. Those whose nationalism was primarily based on anti-Manchuism, or the adherents of the belief in 'national essence', soon found that the Han race did not automatically achieve full restoration once the corrupt Manchus had been thrown out. Even those who were preoccupied with the preservation of national cultural identity could no longer hope that it might be preserved through political means. Its concept of culture tended a focus on literature and traditional scholarship, leading it to become a vehement source of opposition to both the linguistic and literary revolutions of the May fourth period.

9.4.2 The Students

Since the early years of the twentieth century the number of students who had lived and studied abroad increased. Many had acquired education in the West and in Japan. Many young intellectuals were impressed by the Meiji Restoration in Japan. Western science and technology had been accepted by many as the panacea for China's illness. All in all, there appeared on the Chinese scene a group of people who were young, educated, politically conscious, socially aware and progressive in their approach. The Twenty-one Demands hurt the pride and dignity of these people who reacted through vociferous expression of nationalist sentiments.

Yuan Shikai's attempts to restore monarchy had also worried them. Though small in numbers but powerful in articulation, this strata led the May Fourth Movement making anti-imperialism as its basic plank on which rested the pillars of science, democracy and socialism.

Students maintained contact with many Chinese students' associations abroad. Patriotic zeal was the greatest unifying factor. Most students who returned home became active in the anti-imperialist movement. Among other social groups, the small working class (as China's industry was very limited) was a natural ally of the student patriots. The bourgeoisie (also small in number) too felt the negative impact of imperialism, particularly after the war broke out, and supported the anti-imperialist struggle. In more concrete terms, the forces of change were given

a boost with the reforms at Peking University and other forms of literary and intellectual activities.

Let us also briefly mention about the Peking University (Beida). Established in 1895, the University started with a negative reputation. The faculty comprised of senior civil servants, and students were from wealthy families, whose primary aim was to get into the civil service. Meaningful academic pursuit was of secondary importance. Faculty members' hierarchy was not dependent on their scholarship or teaching abilities but on their position in the Manchu court. The university was known more for its notoriety than its academics.

The reform of Beida was essentially the work of one man, CaiYuenpei. He had been educated in France and Germany and also at a very early age he passed the civil service examination. He was a man having the experience of two cultures. He quit the civil service and joined the Revolutionaries in the government of SunYatsen in 1912 but resigned this post when Yuan Shi Kai became President. A few years later the Peking government offered him the post of Chancellor of Peking University which he accepted. Cai was essentially an educationist and his accomplishments as head of this institution earned him the distinction of being called the Father of the Chinese Renaissance. He appointed the best available scholars for faculty positions, defended academic freedom from government pressure and made the university a forum for free and open debate where students and professors were equal participants. Amongst the men he appointed to the various faculties were ChenDuxiu, Hu Shi and LiDazhao. Two of them later became founder members of the Chinese Communist Party. With Cai's reforms, Peking University not only flourished academically but also became the centre for debates and discussions between traditional literate and modern intellectuals. A group of new thinkers emerged. It won the students support and together, challenging the conservatism of China, they called for modernization. As Lucien Bianco stated:

“The May Fourth Movement was a youth movement, in which professors in their thirties and their student followers sought with young men's passion to impose young men's values on their society.”

In addition to Peking University, the New Culture movement was further developed and spread through the journal New Youth.

9.4.3 The New Youth

Another feature of the intellectual and literary revolution was the publication of Hsin Ching-nein or New Youth. The most spectacular and most often noted aspect of this intellectual transformation, the “literary Revolution”, was at first just the work of writers and publicists. In January 1917, Hu Shi proposed that all writings henceforth would be in the spoken language and not in classical Chinese. This was indeed a revolution in education as it made learning and knowledge accessible to more people. The living language was the only medium through which the common people could communicate. Hu Shi's proposal, which found favour among many intellectuals, had a social goal. With literature becoming more accessible to people, Hu Shi also urged that it should be more directly concerned with people's lives. This literary revolution he felt, need not remain limited to linguistic reform that create new literature, new cares and new styles. It meant rejection of outworn literary traditions and promotion of popular

literature, one that was simple, clear and meaningful. Despite some opposition Hu Shi's ideas carried the day as they were in perfect consonance with the intellectual environment of that time. By 1920 most writers had adopted the vernacular language.

It was New Youth which first published Hu Shi's viewpoint. This was formally endorsed by its editor Chen Duxiu who had founded the magazine in 1915, in Shanghai. Chen had got many leading anti-establishment intellectuals join its editorial committee. The journal played a very crucial role in clearing the social vision of many educated Chinese. It was being published at a time when freedom of the press was often severely curtailed by harsh laws. This factor as well as paucity of funds sometimes led to the journal's suspension of publication. Nevertheless, the New Youth had a devoted following among students who took its every editorial pronouncement as an article of faith. In every sense the journal was a revolutionary one. One example of its prescriptive tone is evident from Chen's six principles to be observed by the youth. He said: "Be independent, not submissive, progressive, not conservative; outspoken not reserved; cosmopolitan, not parochial, practical not formalist; and scientific not imaginative;"

As reflected in its name this influential magazine was all set to create a new youth. It called on all Chinese youth to be everything their parents were not – to be progressive, scientific and independent. It addressed itself to the young men and women educated in the new schools and in the new thought. Many of them had studied in Japan, in Europe or in the United States. They had been exposed to the free exchange of ideas, Eastern and Western, old and new. They knew that 1911 had rid China only symbolically of the old officialdom or authority, and China was still an easy mark for imperialist powers. They believed that they had come upon a working, acceptable substitute for the enfeebled and enfeebling orthodoxy. They felt that, as stated simply by Chen, the salvation of China lay in a new culture based on Science and Democracy: "Republican government in politics and science in the domain of ideas, these seem to be the treasure of modern civilization." It was through the pages of New Youth that Chen began his attack on Confucianism and in the early years of the journal it advocated liberty, equality and fraternity – the ideals of the French Revolution. (Chen later switched to Marxist-Leninist ideology and became the first secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921).

The impact New Youth had on the educated younger generation of China is demonstrated through the very fact that students and young intellectuals waited for every issue anxiously and read it word by word as if it was a gospel. Debates and discussions on a variety of issues took place through the columns of this journal. Lively exchange of ideas characterized this journal which became a mouthpiece for China's young, patriotic and socially aware generation.

9.4.4 Attack on Tradition: Intellectual Efforts

Characterizing the New Culture movement as a whole, what we see on the other side is a much more radical and more totalistic attack on the entire cultural heritage. Chen's exhortations to the Chinese youth like "be independent not servile progressive not conservative, aggressive not passive" were not attacks directed simply against the entire tradition with all its "three teachings of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism" (not to speak of the superstitious culture of the masses).

Although the language of social Darwinist evolutionism was being invoked but in some sense the 'old society' and 'old culture' began to be treated as if they had paralyzed the soul of the nation. The revolution had proved that one could, after all, remove the entire traditional political structure without effecting the rot which permeated the whole society. Indeed, not only did the dead weight of the past had the power to persist but it also had the power to reconstitute itself, as was evident from Yuan Shikai's attempts to restore monarchy. The task which lay ahead was thus nothing less than to transform the entire conscious life of a nation. The 'new cultural' leaders felt that this task was an absolutely necessary precondition of any political action or institutional reform. The resolve expressed by the young Hu Shi in 1917 upon his return from the United States 'not to talk about politics for twenty years' seemed to express the common viewpoint of the entire New Culture group. As the title of their main organ indicated, they regarded their first and primary audience to be the educated youth who had not yet been entirely corrupted by 'the old and the rotten'.

Here too there seems to be only a difference of degree between the New Youth outlook and that of the pioneer thinkers. In confronting their dilemma, the pioneers had come to stress the role of conscious ideas in changing the society. Yet their educational approach was supported by the sense that changes were actually taking place or about to take place in the institutional infrastructure of society during the course of the Manchu Reform movement. The diagnosis of the New Culture group before 1919 led them to feel that nothing but a change of consciousness could move the society.

One aspect of the New Culture movement before 1919, which was to have continuing implications for the future, was the sharp line it drew between politicians and intellectuals. The dissociation had been pre-figured in the abolition of the examination system in 1905. It is also clear that in the past, in spite of the scholar-official clique, there had always been literate who were primarily intellectuals and others who were primarily politicians. Also, in the period after 1919, many intellectuals were to immerse themselves once more in political life. Yet the self-perception of the intellectuals (particularly the academic and literary intellectuals) as a separate structure was to persist even after 1949 and was even to carry with itself a certain ongoing notion of the right to autonomy in intellectual life.

Another vital and crucial aspect of the New Culture movement was the emergence of the 'New literature'. Here also we see the emergence of literature as a major autonomous area of human experience. Although poetry and belles-letters had long been an organic part of the high culture of the literate, ideally they had never been separated from the entire programme of self-cultivation. There have been examples of people who had been very 'literary' in orientation, but the notion of literature (in the sense of belles-letters) as a high autonomous vocation had never prevailed. Above all, the writing of fiction as a department of literature had not been respected as a high cultural activity. There, as in so many other areas, Liang Qichao had been a pioneer in his advocacy of the employment of fiction as a powerful emotional medium for promoting his socio-political ideas. Lu Xun and his younger brother had been young pioneers during their days in Japan before 1911 in their aspiration to use literature as a means of curing the deep spiritual ailments of the Chinese people. It was, however, the New Culture movement which effectively launched the new vernacular 'high Culture' literature. Yet if the new culture elevated the genre of fiction to a high

cultural, status, it did so for the most part by associating it to the view that fiction must first 'serve life'. To this extent the new literature in China was in the main oriented from the outset to the view that literature must serve social ethical goals. This general orientation does not, of course, preclude on absorption of some of the greater writers in purely literary concerns, but the general goals were to retain their hold.

Even the romantic 'creation' group of Guo Moruo, Yu Dafu and others which had ostensibly adopted the slogan 'art for arts sake' was deeply moved by concerns which were not strictly artistic. Romanticism as a release from the repressive structures of traditional life had emerged before 1911 and even then had been as much related to the search for individual meaning in life as to the romance of revolution. In the years after 1911 when the promise of political salvation dramatically receded the concern of the younger intellectuals with the meaning of their own personal lives, in a world where faith in traditional values both public and private had sharply declined, was to become an important dimension of the new culture. In a sense, 'individualism' in both its liberal and romantic senses now seems to have a direct impact on personal life to a degree which was certainly not true for the pioneer generation, who still lived quite comfortably within the confines of conventional Confucian family values. For a time at least, the concern with individualism as such seemed not to be entirely instrumental to socio-political goals. The translation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* (a Norwegian play supporting women's liberation within the family and society) in the Ibsen issue of *New Youth* sponsored by Hu Shi is symbolic of this concern. Similarly the rapt absorption of the romantic 'creation society' authors in their own unfulfilled emotional yearnings were anything but a concern for 'art for arts sake'. In the words of Leo Lee, "Far from French symbolist notion that art not only restructures life but also constructs a new edifice into which the artist can escape life (their) arguments point in the other direction", towards an overriding concern with "life".

Another development clearly associated with the New Culture movement is what might be called the 'higher criticism' of the traditional heritage represented, among others, by the Shih. Conflicts regarding the validity and authenticity of various traditions and scriptures had been a feature of Chinese thought for ages. The great philological scholars of the empirical research school of the Qing dynasty had also fostered the critical treatment of the great texts. Although it is much to be doubted that their work had skeptical-iconoclastic connotations ascribed to it by their twentieth century admirers. Kang Youwei, who was by no means a critical scholar, had attempted at the beginning of the century to use a systematic attack on the orthodoxy of certain Old Text scriptures in order to support his own New Text version of Confucianism.

The movement to "reorganize the national heritage", as it was described by Hu Shi, had a deep ideological motive. The methods of "science" could, in the words of Lawrence Schneider, be used "to undermine the credibility of orthodox histories and the historical foundations of scriptures." One of the most effective ways of removing the dead hand of tradition was to dissolve the factual claims of the myths which supported that tradition. In the end this critical liberation of historical studies from the burden of certain conventional ways of viewing the past was to be taken up by many other scholars of "national studies" – even by 'neo-traditionalist' scholars who did not necessarily have the iconoclastic preoccupations of Hu Shi.

Even in the case of the iconoclastic “new cultural” scholars, their intentions were not entirely destructive. Although they committed themselves to a future whose model was to be found in the contemporary West, as Chinese nationalists they were by no means entirely free of the desire to find, what Hu Shi called, “congenial stocks” in the Chinese past from which a modern culture might grow. The view of science advocated by Hu Shi’s American teacher John Dewey, with its notion of graded, incremental evolution, encouraged the idea that the present must somehow grow out of the past. Hu and others were able to find, to their own satisfaction, strands of Chinese thought which pointed towards modernity. There was the presumed “scientific” method of Qing scholarship, the beginning of logic in China’s ancient thought, and in the case of Hu Shi, the vital vernacular literature of the past which was in such striking contrast to the decadent, formalistic classical literature of the elite. This populist theme which contrasted the discredited and oppressive “high culture” of the elite with the vital energy of the folk was eventually to lead some new thinkers to their extensive studies of folklore. Hu Shi, who was equally concerned with both the new literature and the new scholarship, was later able to combine both interests in his scholarly investigations of the vernacular fiction of the past. All these endeavours, whether literary, scholarly or simply publicist, were thoroughly infused with the common premises of the New Culture movement.

Despite the shared premises of the movement, when we juxtapose the names of some of its protagonists Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu and Lu Xun, we become acutely conscious of the profound differences among them. As a young student before 1911, Hu Shi had already been profoundly interested in and influenced by social Darwinist ideas of Yen Fu and Liang Qichao. His happy experiences as a student in the United States and his contacts with the philosophy of John Dewey then seem to have led him by a kind of smooth evolution to his own version of Chen Duxiu’s famous formula ‘Mr Science’ and ‘Mr Democracy’, a formula which once it had been set forth was to remain essentially unchanged. Yen Fu’s conception of science as a kind of simple inductionism was to provide a bridge to Dewey’s experimentalist concept, and Hu Shi’s only life experience in early twentieth-century America was to provide him with a happy image of democracy in operation even though he also enthusiastically accepted Dewey’s more advanced, critical view of true democracy.

In John Dewey’s philosophy, science and democracy were inseparable values. The experimental method of science in its reliance on tentative hypothesis applied to the study of ‘Problematic situations’; represented a rejection of all spiritual authority and all pre-established dogma – whether religious, political or metaphysical. Thus, it was the very basis for the assertion of freedom. If men would co-operate together to apply the methods of science, which had been so successfully applied to nature, to the study of human and cultural problems – an area still subjugated to the empire of dogma – the ends of liberty and equality would be brought close to realization. The spread of scientific intelligence, thus conceived, through the whole society by education, would lead men to analyze and deal effectively with their collective problems and even to reconcile their interests. In spite of Dewey’s sharp criticism of mere formal ‘political democracy’ and constitutionalism there seems little doubt that his whole outlook presupposed common acceptance of constitutional democracy as “the rules of the game.” While Shih seems to have accepted Dewey’s view of science and methodology, the subtle epistemological issues raised by Dewey as a philosopher seem to have escaped him entirely and he found it quite possible to combine Dewey’s

pragmatism with a simple dogmatic, mechanistic and naturalistic metaphysics. In this area he remained very much in the tradition of Yen Fu and Liang, even though his naturalism is away from Taoist-Buddhist overtones. Again, Dewey's emphasis on scientific enquiry and education in dealing with socio-political problems and his deprecation of "mere politics", seems to have reinforced a pre-existent tendency in Hu Shi to regard the disorderly and irrational political conflicts of China as irrelevant to China's true progress.

Dewey's emphasis on scientific intelligence and education was entirely in keeping with the whole new cultural emphasis on the transformation of conscious life. It was thus entirely appropriate that when Hu Shi returned to China in 1917 he should have become closely associated with the movement. His deep interest in language reform was entirely in keeping with the broad educational goals of the movement. His interest in the New Literature reflected a deep and passionate fondness for literature and a conviction that the effective power of literature provided a most powerful vehicle for communicating new ideas. When one surveys his life in retrospect, one cannot but feel that Shi's pronounced literary and scholarly concerns reflected personal inclinations as well as the sincere belief that "reorganizing the national heritage" was a crucial cultural task. This does not mean that he did not devote a good deal of attention to social and political questions in his writings over the years, but, unable as he was for the most part to affect the actual course of political affairs, he found that it was much more feasible to apply "scientific intelligence" to the critique of the cultural heritage.

When we turn to Chen Duxiu we find that while he actually created the formula "Mr Science and Mr Democracy", his view of both these categories was different in subtle ways from that of Hu Shi. His temperament, unlike that of Hu, was passionate and impatient. The fact that the Western influence which had been predominant in his case had been French rather than Anglo-American was not insignificant. His view of science was that of a crude Darwinian metaphysics. Science was a corrosive which could be used to undermine traditional values. The fact that the forces of evolution seemed to have completely bogged down in China led him to moments of deep depression, yet like Hu Shi, he was basically able to combine 'scientific' determinism with a strong faith in the powers of an intellectual elite. Unlike Hu Shi the positive doctrine of science as a piece-meal experimental methodology did not penetrate the centre of Chi's consciousness that he was later able to transfer the use of the word science from Darwinism to Marxism without losing any sense of its certainty.

Similarly Hu Shi's conception of scientific method seems to have rendered him impervious to the appeal of the nation of total revolutionary transformation, while Chen, who greatly admired the French Revolution as a fountainhead of modern democracy, was probably inherently more vulnerable to the appeal of revolutionary transformation in spite of his thoroughly anti-political 'cultural' approach during the period before 1919. Yet during the period of close collaboration between the two (1917-19) there was nevertheless a great resemblance in their views on the individual and on the ingredients of democracy.

Lu Xun, who was to become modern China's most distinguished literary giant, was a man of quite different sensibilities. Throughout his life he seems to have a peculiar sensitivity to the "powers of darkness". In his youth, he was easily converted to the evolutionary creed and yet his doubts began to emerge even

before 1911. His own personal family experiences, his deep sense of the corruption and the “slave mentality” of the Chinese people, seem even before 1911 to have diminished his faith in the effectiveness of the forces of evolution in China. His contacts with the writings of Nietzsche did not turn him into a Nietzschean but provided him with the vivid image of the free, heroic, defiant spirit who sets himself against the “slave mentality” of the mass of mankind. For a time, he indulged in the youthful dream of the Nietzschean - Byronic poetic hero who would be able to rouse mankind out of its spiritual slumbers culture of Western Europe and America – In spite of Yen Fu’s influence, Lu Xun was to remain cool to the Western Technocratic strain of thought as well as to the detached “realism” of such Western literature and its over-complicated view of man’s moral life.

The post-1911 events were to lead Lu Xun to a blank wall of despair. His vision of the capacity of Nietzschean literary heroes to mould society seemed to have faded rapidly. His ‘totalistic’ image of China’s bad past and present was if anything more sombre than that of his ‘new cultural’ colleagues. The cruelty, corruption and hypocrisy of contemporary China did not represent a decline of traditional values, but in some sense were actually a manifestation of those destructive values. In his story, ‘Diary of a madman’ he makes it clear that it is not only the actuality of Chinese society which makes it ‘man-eating’. Its ideals are also ‘man-eating’ ideals. Even the young revolutionaries of the pre-1911 period had speedily succumbed to the poisonous influence of this incubus. Lu Xun’s decision to take up writing once more was a response to the aims of the New Culture movement but it seems to have been a highly skeptical response.

In spite of his “totalistic rejection” it is nevertheless important to point out that on the level of his literary imagination, Lu Xun continued to be fascinated by certain “counter-traditional” aspects of the Chinese past. The past to which he looked was, however, entirely different from the past into which Hu Shi saw. It was the past of neo-Taoist eccentrics of the southern dynasties, of popular fantasy and fable, and even the past of certain intimate personal values. Yet none of these attractions seem to have wrenched Lu Xun from his rejection of the heritage as a whole.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the role of students in the development of new culture.

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- 2) Discuss in about ten lines the importance of the slogan “Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy”.

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9.5 CONSEQUENCES OF THE MAY FOURTH INCIDENT

Most importantly, the New Culture movement which culminated in the May Fourth Movement or rather merged with it brought about a multiplicity of doctrines which were to find expression in a myriad of new periodicals. May Fourth simply marked an explosive stage in the expansion (already under way) of the audience for the themes of the New Culture — particularly its “totalistic” rejection of the cultural heritage.

One of the main consequences of these events here is their implications for the purely cultural diagnosis of China’s ill. The May Fourth Incident was a political act, a seemingly effective act of political protest against foreign imperialism. For a time it was also a kind of a mass movement (albeit of students and urban strata only). The new cultural leaders had in the past been mainly concerned with China’s domestic ills. Their thought had not, on the whole, led them to moralistic judgements of the behaviour of the imperialist powers or to attribute China’s ills primarily to foreign causes. Yet the nationalistic impatience and sense of urgency of the students forced some of their intellectual elders to turn their affection away for the moment from their long-time cultural effort in order to face the sad state of contemporary politics in China.

Even the apolitical Hu Shi was forced by the events of May Fourth to reassess his posture. The immediate effect was to raise his hopes that the cultural transformation which, to his delight, already seemed to have taken place among intellectuals, would flow not into politics but into a social movement. John Dewey, who was himself in China in 1919, encouraged this hope by his own observation that the student’s organizations have gone into popular education, social and philanthropic service and vigorous intellectual discussion. Hu Shi spoke of “masses to educate, women to emancipate, schools to reform.” The assumption seems to have been at the outset that all these goals might be pursued while by-passing the intractable facts of political military power as they existed in China of 1919. Yet by 1922, Hu Shi, himself founded the journal, whose English name was ‘Endeavour’, which was openly dedicated to political action. Meanwhile Hu Shi had also become painfully aware of the power of political forces to interfere with the intellectuals’ rights of freedom of speech and action. He had also become aware of the rise of new “issue” prepared to pre-empt the arena of political action. Hence one aspect of his political action was the liberal call for “civil rights” as against the arbitrary acts of the government.

The other sides of Hu Shi’s political proposals were his calls for a government of “good men” and a “government with a plan”. Already pointed to the grave problem of how to relate ‘science’ to ‘democracy’ in China given China’s situation, he could only hope that men of scientific enlightenment (who were ‘good’ by definition and also few in numbers) might bring their influence to bear on established censors of power. No less than the communists and nationalists Hu felt himself forced to believe in an enlightened elite. The hope of being able to work with the Warlord government (of Wu Pei fu) was of course to be short-lived, and Hu Shi was soon to return to his cultural view of China’s problems.

Sun Yatsen and his entourage were one of the groups better able to take advantage of the nationalist political fervour which pervaded the young during

May Fourth. (This fervour overrode all ideological differences.) During the whole bleak period from 1911 to 1919 he had not been diverted from his political goal of establishing a strong central government. However in effecting his method, he did not give into the 'new cultural' involvement with China's culture. On the contrary, even before 1911 he was convinced that national pride in the achievements of the past must be fostered and he had even developed definite ideas of what was to be prized. During the years of growing bitterness after 1911, he had devoted a good deal of attention to the problem of how to create a disciplined, unified vanguard party in China. In general his faith in constitutional democracy of the Western type gradually declined. It is, therefore, not surprising that Sun and some of his closest disciples expressed an immediate and keen interest after the October Revolution in Lenin's views on party organization as well as in the Soviet formula for dealing with military power. Some of his younger followers proved remarkably receptive to the Leninist theory of imperialism as an analysis of Western behaviour.

The Russian Revolution and its doctrine was one of the newer additions to the doctrinal and philosophical storehouse of the May Fourth period. Leninist theory became gradually popular in China. A new breed among the intellectuals emerged as communists. Spreading a new, scientific culture through mass mobilization became their aim. This mass mobilization was to be a source of political and military power too. It need not be added that the "new cultural" perspective of the period before 1919 was hardly oriented to mass political mobilization, however sincere its ultimate commitment to mass education might have been.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Discuss in about ten lines the attitude of Hu Shi towards political power.

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- 2) List in about five lines those Leninist ideas which found acceptance among Chinese intellectuals.

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9.6 LET US SUM UP

The period between the overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and the May Fourth Incident of 1919 was marked, on the one hand by political strife, economic instability and social tensions, but, on the other, a 'new culture' was also emerging in the midst of this uncertainty and chaos. Probably, this seemingly negative state of affairs brought about 'culture' on the agenda of those seeking a better future for China. Even though during the Reform movements, debates,

discussions and controversies regarding the value and relevance of the “Chineseness” of China were common place, in this period they concretized into some definite ideological forms. Both, a re-invigorated nationalism as well as the rise of communism were outcomes of this consolidation of viewpoints and disorganized streams of thought. “Science and Democracy” became the guiding principle for all new thinking of this period. Literature was effectively used as a vehicle to usher in the new culture. Rejection of the past was not simply a sporadic and impulsive exercise, it was the result of untiring scholarly efforts. Whereas mass education was an important ingredient of the “new culture”, its near-total reliance was on an enlightened elite. Women’s emancipation, youth power, political liberation and improving society were all crucial elements that combined to make China’s cultural revolution. This pluralistic cultural-academic movement based on the assumption of new ideas gave the erstwhile Confucian China its severest jolt.

More than half a century ago Confucianism was challenged by the Taipings. Towards the end of nineteenth century Reformers of the Hundred Days indirectly challenged Confucian tenets in the pretext of bringing out the real Confucians. Among the returned students, mainly from Japan and France, since the eve of World War-I one could see a fierce repudiation of Confucianism. This repudiation by a tiny elite gradually reached a large number of the Chinese people who had access to education.

It was accepted once for all that China’s path to modernization had to be cleared of the Confucian obstacle. “We want Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy” and “We reject Mr. Confucius and Company” was a popular slogan of China’s young intellectuals. For the first time, this all engulfing, all encompassing, two thousand year old philosophy was challenged and trampled on the streets of Peking.

9.7 KEY WORDS

Belles-letters : Literary studies and writings.

Iconoclastic : Attack on established customs.

Metaphysics : Branch of philosophy dealing with the nature of existence, truth and knowledge.

Narcissism : Excessive love or admiration for oneself.

Philology : Study of the development of a language.

Pragmatism : Thinking about treating things in a practical way.

Romanticism : Romantic tendency in literature.

9.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS EXERCISES

Check Your Progress 1

- 1) They were treated as subordinate to men. Their role in society was confined to being mothers or wives etc. Base your answer on Section 9.3.

Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Your answer should include the attitude and contribution of those students who studied abroad; the ideas that influenced them to modernise China; and how they gave vent to their ideals, etc. See Sub-section 9.4.
- 2) This slogan reflects the urge for modernization in China among the intellectuals. Mention who gave this slogan and its importance in challenging the traditional Confucian order by reading Sub-section 9.4.4.

Check Your Progress 3

- 1) Base your answer on Section 9.5.
- 2) These were Lenin's views on party organization; his theory of imperialism etc. See Section 9.5.

