

Introduction

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The notion of modernity is a concept which doubtless helped to form contemporary societies, and in this regard, China is no exception. If we want to historically evaluate the Chinese attempts at establishing a “typical Chinese” philosophical basis for modernization, we need to consider the context of the questions linked to Hobsbawm’s and Ranger’s (1995) concept of “invented traditions”. In other words, we must consider to what extent are the “past” intellectual “traditions” based on historic assumptions, and to what extent are they merely a product of the (ideological and political) demands of the current period. An important consequence of the current trans-nationalization of capital is that, perhaps for the first time in modern history, the global mode of production appears as an authentically universal abstraction that is no longer limited to its specific historical origins in Europe. Hence, the narrative of modernization is no longer an exclusively European one, and for the first time non-European societies are also making their own claims on the history of modernization (see Dirlik 1994).

In this context, it also seems important to go beyond narrow views that consider the prospect of a clash between Chinese and Western civilizations (e.g. Huntington 1993) without a basic historical grasp of the developments of the diverse, complex and multi-layered Chinese traditions in modern and contemporary China,¹ since the transition from the past to the present must necessarily be aware of these complexities (see, for example, Jiang 2011).

Diverse approaches to the questions related to the specifically Chinese mode of modernization have several times been at the centre of our interest, with a number of special issues of *Asian Studies* devoted to them. Among the papers published under the topic, several authors focused on the new modes of thought that were gradually brought to China from the Western world (e.g., Hočevar 2019; Vrhovski 2021), on the specifically Confucian forms of modernization (Huang 2020; Jia 2020), and on syntheses between Sinicized Marxism and the Chinese intellectual tradition (Dessein 2019; Paul 2021). However, most of these contributions were either centred on purely theoretical themes, or particularly focused upon questions of ideological transformations. To grasp a more comprehensive and coherent image of specific characteristics of Chinese modernity and

1 For a well-grounded critique of such approaches see, for instance, Yu Ying-shih (2005, 215).

its relation to the manifold historical developments of pre-modern China, we also need to examine the main elements that enable the amalgamation of traditional Chinese standards, principles and values into the framework of the dominant global developments in the realm of social and ideational history, sociology, and cultural studies.

The present issue aims to fill up this gap in the current literature. It deals with the period which embraces eight decades that were crucial to the development and establishment of present-day China. The period under research spans from the threshold of the previous century up until the 1980s, i.e. until the margins of the new millennium. This special issue explores how and why in the shaping of the first republic, China started the process of “national” consolidation. It explores several aspects of Maoist ideology which were brought to the fore in the subsequent socialist revolution, and investigates the implementation of widely based modernist experiments in social engineering and socialist, even communist, utopias. It shows that the abundant ideas developed in these experiments remained influential in China until the mid-1970s. The issue also depicts the intellectual background of the important shift in China’s new image of modernity, in which the so-called Post-Mao transformations helped to establish a “state-socialist” directed approach to capitalism. It will hopefully help us to understand this significant shift and its consequences, which still pervade the social and political reality of contemporary China.

The issue is divided into three scopes of contents. The first questions some of the central theoretical and conceptual backgrounds of China’s modernization. Joseph Ciaudo analyses whether the Western notion of “New Culture” can truly denote the scope of meanings and connotations implied in the Chinese term “*Xin wen-hua*”. Ady Van den Stock deals in the second article of this scope with the influence of Du Yaquan, a “cultural-conservative” scholar who lived on the boundary between the 19th and 20th centuries. Van den Stock’s case-study analysis points to the hitherto overlooked complexity of different reactions to WWI in among Chinese academics on the edge of modernity.

The second scope deals with questions related to logic and methodology. In the first paper, Jan Vrhovski explores the Chinese debates and ideas related to the Marxist notion of dialectical logic, which started to circulate in the Chinese intellectual world in the late 1920s. This paper outlines the major landmarks within these debates in the 1930s, and sheds light on some new aspects of the connection between formal and dialectical logic in the scope of the sinization of Marxism in this period. The second contribution, written by Cui Qingtian, also deals with logic, but concentrates on the history of investigating, reviving and re-interpreting classical Chinese semantic logic. The last article in this scope is my own. It

analyses Zhang Dainian's work and shows its great importance in the search for a modernized methodology of Chinese philosophy.

Throughout the world, modernization was always connected not only with a sense of economic and political urgency, but also with ideals, hopes and passions. These are the main concerns of the third and last scope of contents, which contains two contributions, written by Federico Brusadelli and Téa Sernelj. The former also belongs to a certain type of case study, although it does not explore any particular person, work or idea. Instead, it investigates how the modernized form of a particular Western political order influenced certain Chinese intellectual strata. The author thus shows why and in which way the Swiss political system became a source of inspiration for several new institutions, organizations and intellectuals in modern China. The latter author also deals with an important source of inspiration, namely with the notion of beauty. It shows the connection of two large-scale aesthetic debates which took place in different periods of the second half of the 20th century, and have—each in their own way—profoundly influenced the contemporary views on the role and function of Chinese aesthetics and its connection to politics and economy.

Perhaps an important common thread of the present issue of *Asian Studies* is the fact that it confronts us with many unfulfilled ideals and promises that arose in the earlier eras of Chinese modernization, laying bare their opposites which manifest themselves in uncertainties and risks. It is important to see these risks, because many of them are still being mirrored in today's China. We must not forget that every uncertainty can also be seen as possibility; in this sense, new hopes can arise from old risks—as long as we are aware of them—and perhaps hopes and ideals are the most precious things we need to embrace when thinking about the present-day China and its future.

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