No Forbidden Zone in 21st Century
Celebrating 20 years of the Hong Kong journal

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ABSTRACT: The Hong Kong journal Ershiyi shiji (21st Century) occupies a special place in the radical reconfiguration of the Chinese intellectual landscape that followed the traumas, both national and international, of 1989. On the occasion of its twentieth anniversary, we retrace the founding of the journal and the aspects that have made it unique in the world of the “thinking” press, and question the normalisation in China of the intellectual internationalisation of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

KEY WORDS: intellectual life, history of ideas, liberalism, postmodernism, nationalism, press, Hong Kong.

The aim of this article is two-fold. Firstly it hopes, through tracing the history of a major scholarly journal, to review the survival of a liberal movement – associated with the Enlightenment in the 1980s – which, despite many difficulties, has left a lasting impression on Chinese society. Next, by retracing the intellectual issues of the late 20th century, we will attempt to outline the basic characteristics of a contemporary intellectual arena in which a renewed national story and a completely new relationship with a globalised world are being played out, overlap, and jostle one another. We will therefore begin by retracing the origins of the journal, which presupposes a detour via the careers of Jin Guantao (金觀濤, born in 1947) and his wife Liu Qingfeng (劉青峰, born in 1949), its joint founders. A long conversation with Chen Fangzheng (陳方正, born in 1939), key figure in the archaeology of the journal, threw light on the delicate period that led from the repression of 4 June 1989 to the founding of the journal and publication of its first issue in October 1990. We will see how the thinking that led to the creation of Ershiyi shiji in a sense foreshadows both the establishment of a part of Chinese cultural life in an intellectual periphery in the making, and the continuity of a liberal school of thought that met difficulties on the mainland. Indeed, whilst in the PRC the situation at the beginning of the 1990s remained relatively tense, a movement of intellectual emancipation had already been set in motion centring on the twin poles of Hong Kong and the Anglo-American academic diaspora.

The bimonthly Hong Kong journal Ershiyi shiji (二十一世紀 – 21st Century) celebrated its twentieth anniversary in October 2010. This would therefore seem a suitable occasion on which to retrace the history and the particularities that have enabled it to become and remain one of the cornerstones of the Chinese community’s “thinking” press. Founded by a couple of historians, refugees in Hong Kong, and published by the Institute of Chinese Studies (中國文化研究所 – Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (香港中文大學 – Xianggang zhongwen daxue, CUHK), and on the periphery of the People’s Republic (PRC), the journal might have been simply a vain attempt to revive a dying Chinese liberal movement. However, Ershiyi shiji rapidly became a journal of reference in which Chinese intellectuals could reflect on, and debate, some of the intellectual conundrums that spread across China and the world throughout the 1990s, in the forefront of which were the globalisation of the economy and of capitalism. Although the journal prints only 3,500 copies per issue, it nonetheless offers a special forum in which the intellectuals of Greater China can express contradictory opinions. In so doing, it echoes the "thinking press" in Continental China, whose best-known review, Reading (讀書 – Dushu) has a print-run of more than 100,000. (1) It is not unusual for authors to write for both publications and for the polemics to echo one another, within the limits that exist in the People’s Republic. (2) Although Ershiyi shiji is difficult to find on the mainland outside university research centres, the most important articles are now invariably found on the Internet, which in China does not initiate debate so much as it offers an enormous resonance chamber for the exchange of ideas. (3)

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Next, although it would be impossible to deal in detail with all the elements that over the last 20 years have made China what it is today, we will follow the thematic classification of the main intellectual developments that structured thinking in China in the 1990s, as put forward by Beijing philosopher and historian Xu Youyu (徐友漁 born in 1947), an important figure in Chinese liberalism and a regular contributor to the journal. [6] This classification, though necessarily incomplete and schematic, seems nonetheless to give both an interesting overview of the journal’s eclecticism and at the same time, a fairly clear idea of the structure and relationships between the great debates that have taken place in China since the end of the Cold War.

Lastly, we will try to see where these polemics have led by observing the contemporary intellectual scene, for does not the beginning of the twenty-first century correspond to a form of normalisation that focuses on several essential ideas emanating from the many post-1989 crises?

Jin and Liu, the young guard of cultural activists

At the origin of the Ershiyi shiji adventure we find a couple of intellectuals: Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng. [7] Born with the People’s Republic, they were prevented from attending university during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and are part of the loose group of intellectuals who consider that rather than having broken away from pre-1949 China, the “New China” is simply the last stage in a long historic process in which the harmful and alienating influence of a traditional holistic ideology persists. They see in the rigid dogma of Marxism a renewed version of a Confucianist philosophy of systems). [8]

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7. Liu Qingfeng tells of her meeting with Jin Guantao in a novel, which takes the form of an exchange of letters between friends and shows the confusion of a generation faced with the state of their country and their hopes for change. Jin Fan (Li’s pen-name), “Gongkai de qinghu” (“Open love letters”), original 1972 manuscript version, published in Women (We) a non-official paper in Hangzhou. Published later in Shiyue (October) in 1980, then again in Shiyue wenshu congbi (October’s literary collection), Beijing, Beijing chubanshe, 1981. The novel is available on the Internet (http://www.shuku.net:8082/rovell/dangdai/publicshiyue/publicshiyuanghu.html) [29/11/2009]. The novel created a wave of intense emotion well before scar literature (shanghen wenshu); see Tan Mei, “Nianqing yi dai de renshengjia – Gongkai de qinghu” yinju de zhengli” (A young humanist generation: the polemic surrounding “Open Love Letters”), Zhengming, no. 34, Hong Kong, August 1980. Liu Qingfeng refers to this episode in an interview given to Shanghai Culture, the journal of the Institute of Literature of the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, no. 74, vol. 3, 2009, pp. 96-101.


9. Jin Guantao and Liu Qingfeng, “Zhongguo fengjian shehui de jiegou – Yige chaowending xitong” (Structure of feudal Chinese society: A hyperstable system), Gujiang shifan daxue, vol. 1, no. 2, 1979. The article became an essay five years later, Xiangsheng yu Wei (Xiangsheng yu Wei) – Jin Zhongguo fengjian shhui de chaowending jiegou (Crisis and Prosperity: The hyperstability of the structures of feudal Chinese society), Changsha, Hunan renmin chubanshe, 1984. The essay has been regularly republished since in Taiwan and Hong Kong. It is worth noting that after 20 years of being banned, this first essay and other writings by Jin and Liu were once again published in the PRC by Falü chubanshe [Law Publisher] in Beijing.

10. Cybernetics, set theory and systems analysis have since, in China as elsewhere, fallen into disuse. They are known in China under the term “three old theories,” laosanlun.

11. Although the hypotheses of Jin Guantao have been widely criticised from an academic point of view, one might question whether their interest was merely academic. See Ye Xiaoqiong, “Patriotism versus Intellectual Curiosity; Jin Guantao’s Approach to Chinese History,” in Gloria Davies, Voicing Concerns: Contemporary Chinese Critical Inquiry, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 2001, pp. 185-98.
and Prosperity) was published in 1984, the split between reformists and conservatives was from then on clearly defined. Published at the crossroads of a publishing market in its infancy and the expectations of a curious public, the book, keen to respond to the reforming impulse set in motion by the highest authorities, was a success.\(^{(12)}\)

**Institutional support and collaborators**

To ensure the publication of this essay under conditions that suited them, Jin and Liu, with the active complicity of the historian Bao Zuxin (包遵信 1937-2007), were behind an attempt at fostering an autonomous civil society that was unique in the history of the People’s Republic: the founding of the book series “Towards the Future” (走向未来叢書 – Zou xiang weilai congshu). It was a fertile breeding-ground. Those born after 1949 had grown up in a highly dogmatic, culturally arid world, a world that some even considered relatively boring.\(^{(13)}\) The number of publications fell from 27,000 in 1957 to 600 in 1967. In 1957 there were 600 periodicals; only 20 remained in 1967.\(^{(14)}\) In the gradual opening-up of the country after 1978, the failure of the Chinese Communist scheme became clear in the light of Western opulence, although the latter had already been affected by economic crisis. Young people were eager for new ideas to solve the country’s problems. At the same time, the economy was slowly emerging from the rigidity of the Plan. As part of the same movement, the embryonic publishing market benefited from the support of middle-ranking bureaucrats who had confidence in the young guard of cultural activists. These cadres were apparatchiks, directors of academic institutions, directors of research institutes, and editors of official papers. They were often close to the reform movement of Zhao Ziyang (趙紫陽 1919-2005) and were open-minded enough to feel that Chinese society needed to develop. Yu Guangyuan (于光遠 born in 1915) was amongst them. A student in physics who joined the Party in 1935, hero of the anti-Japanese resistance, and a translator of Engels, in 1949 he became head of the scientific section of the Department of Propaganda, and Party secretary of the Philosophy and Social Sciences Division of the Academy of Sciences. When the Division expanded in November 1977, becoming the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (中國社會科學院 – Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan), he was appointed Vice-President. That same year, together with several colleagues, he decided to relaunch the *Journal of Dialectics of Nature* (自然辯證法通訊 – Ziran bianzhengfa tongxun), a newsletter originally specialising in the philosophy of sciences, the publication of which had been interrupted during the Cultural Revolution. The journal’s editor-in-chief, Li Baoheng (李保恆 born in 1922), then decided to hire Jin Guantao – a young physics and chemistry teacher at the time – to work on this national paper. Very quickly, the *Journal* exceeded its initial ambition. By taking an interest in all scientific innovation, it began to attract many young talents in an atmosphere of freedom that prefigured the 1980s. These young 30-year-old intellectuals used the *Journal of Dialectics of Nature* as a first staging-post in the publication of their new optimistic, scientific, and rational ideals.\(^{(15)}\) However, the marked heterodoxy of their work soon incited them to found their own paper.

**“Towards the future”**

With the complicity of a group of reformist cadres in sympathy with the optimistic energy of the young couple, and after several abortive attempts to create a journal, Jin, Liu, and Bao finally managed to create an administrative framework at the limits of socialist legality that enabled them to found a series of books and retain complete control of its content and editorial line.\(^{(16)}\) To publish a series of books without the control of the Party, in a country that had barely emerged from one of the twentieth century’s strictest totalitarian regimes, was an unique success that was to serve as a model for the “book series craze” (叢書熱 – congshu热) that was to feed the many debates on Chinese culture in the second half of the 1980s. In 1984, when the first series of books in the “Towards the Future” collection was published, the debates between the reformers led by Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦 1915-1989) and then Zhao Ziyang, and the conservative old guard led by the “immortal” Chen Yun (陳雲 1905-1995), took on a different aspect. The division had been clearly established and was to leave its mark on the end of the decade. The response to the translated works and essays of the young 30-year-old intellectuals aroused people’s curiosity and stuck in their minds.\(^{(17)}\) The Sichuan People’s Press reprinted the works continuously.\(^{(18)}\)

The *Future group* is generally associated with two other groups of intellectuals: firstly, “Culture: China and the World” (文化：中國與世界 – Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie), founded by Gan Yang (甘陽 born in 1952), and secondly, the “Academy of Chinese Culture” (中國文化學院 – Zhongguo wenhua shuyuan), an institute that offers seminars and lessons directed in particular towards the renewal and the spreading of national studies (國學 – guoxue)\(^{(19)}\) and associated with the guardian figure of Liang Shuming (梁漱溟 1893-1988). Without going into detail, it must be said that the futurologists stood out as much by virtue of the wide range of subjects they tackled as by their avowed ambition to make their publications accessible to as many people as possible.\(^{(20)}\) This high-quality “populisation” approach, the aim of which is to educate as many people as possible, has been a constant thread in Jin Guantao’s career.

**Exile in Hong Kong**

In 1987, at the height of their fame, the couple was invited to Hong Kong for the first time by Chen Fangzheng, Director of the Institute of Chinese
In December 1989, the agitation created by the role of Hong Kong in the evacuation of dissidents finally calmed down, but for Jin, Liu, and Chen, in this return to routine, one question remained: what was to be done to prevent the decade’s humanist upswell and the undisputed intellectual impulse that accompanied it from disappearing? Together with Ambrose King (金耀基 – Jin Yaoji, born in 1935), a Taiwanese sociologist, the decision was taken to create a journal. To consolidate the academic foundation of the project, the four decided to appeal to the Chinese intellectual diaspora, in a supranational movement that prefigured the opening up of the Chinese world to its academic margins and in particular, Anglo-Saxon academia.\(^{21}\)

Thanks to the celebrity of the players they recruited, funds were quickly amassed. The technical difficulties linked to creating a journal were also quickly resolved. So on 27 October 1990, a journal appeared that opened with the catch phrase: “For the cultural construction of China” ([為了中國的文化建設 – Weile Zhongguo de wenhua jianshe])\(^{22}\), a slogan that served as a title for Chen Fangzheng’s editorial.

21. Interview with Chen Fangzheng, 19 November 2010, Hong Kong.


The 1990s according to Xu Youyu

To try to visualise the way in which the intellectual landscape was reconfigured and to gain a clearer understanding of the close parallels between the journal and the Chinese world at the beginning of the twenty-first century, let us go back in time a little with the Beijing philosopher and historian Xu Youyu to what he considered to be the five major elements of the intellectual restructuring that followed the double trauma in 1989 of the repression in Tiananmen Square and the end of the Cold War following the collapse of the Communist bloc. (17) Xu Youyu, in the few pages he devotes to the twentieth anniversary of the journal, draws up a five-point table that seems to us significant, coming as it does from a well-known player on the intellectual stage, appreciated for his rigour and the constancy of his commitment. (20)

(1) Firstly, immediately following the 1980s and the repression of the student movement, intellectuals examined with hindsight their own vacillations between radicalism and conservatism, between their passion for “the spirit of May Fourth” (五四運動精神 – wusiyundong jingshen) and their fear of “troubles” (動亂 – dongan). In the pages of Ershiyi shiji, starting with its second issue (December 1990), a change of direction occurred condemning the radicalism of the 1980s as heir to the same attitude that pushed the first modern radicals to embrace Marxism-Leninism rather than the liberal pragmatism defended by Hu Shi (胡適 1891-1962) at the same time. For the Sino-American historian Yu Yingshi, the twentieth century was the “most sombre” period in the history of the Chinese nation. The condemnation of Communism was categorical. In the same issue, Du Weiming (杜維明, born in 1940) raised the question of the responsibility of those intellectuals who by allowing traditional culture and society to disappear have placed themselves on the sidelines of the body politic. (21) For the authors of Ershiyi shiji, after the thirst for freedom expressed in a sometimes rather chaotic manner over the preceding decade, it was time to revert to an attitude of greater pragmatic realism in conditions in China, whilst at the same time reinforcing their fear of “troubles” (動亂 – dongan). In the PRC towards the end of the 1980s. (30) In the same issue, Jin Guantao (金簡) raised the question of nationalism re-entering the journal, draws up a five-point table that seems to us significant, coming as it does from a well-known player on the intellectual stage, appreciated for his rigour and the constancy of his commitment. (20)

(2) It very soon became clear to the authors of the journal that nationalism and its political instrumentalisation had become the only ideological horizon the government could rely on. From 1992 onwards, therefore, the journal took an interest in the building up, development, and use of modern nationalism. The ICS organised an international conference on the theme of “Nationalism and Modernisation in China,” publishing most of the speeches in two special issues of Ershiyi shiji (no. 15 and 16, February and April 1993). (33) The question of nationalism remained, moreover, a central issue for the journal that was the first to publish, as early as 1993, the translation of a famous article by Samuel Huntington. Over and above a hypothetical “clash of civilisations,” the article foreshadowed the present day and the appearance of a paradoxical tension between a progressive opening up to the world and the ethnocultural assertion of identity characteristic of contemporary societies. (24) It was a time when China’s relations with the rest of the world were very tentatively becoming normalised as a result of a difficult, often polemical examination of the relationship between the Chinese and the Western “Other.” Within the criticisms of the intellectual arsenal of Western modernity – essentially the product of eighteenth and nineteenth century Europe – a qualitative change in critical thinking was at work. “Liberalism,” “constitutionalism,” and “democracy,” as well as “Marxism,” “socialism,” and “tradition”; all the categories of the twentieth century were reviewed and reinterpreted in the light of a modernity that was now seen as truly Chinese. In this decisive movement, they were the object of a major semantic shift that allowed them to move from Chinese characteristics (中國特色 – Zhongguo tese) of foreign ideas to an autonomous, independent, and indigenous Chinese model (中國模式 – Zhongguo模式). (31)

(3) The development of the rhetoric of nationalist arguments itself became indissociable from another movement that was seeking, at first through literary criticism, to deconstruct the presuppositions and unspoken issues of the debates of the 1980s. The journal initiated the polemics and quarrels that were to mark the intellectual community in China after 1989. Positions on these questions of language clearly stemmed from clashes between the old guard of intellectual liberals, educated in ideals of freedom and progress and active during the 1980s, and a new generation of intellectuals and writers who not only had no links to the Chinese “Enlightenment” (歐美運動 – Qimeng yundong), but quite simply ignored or even openly (and vigorously) condemned it.

27. Xu Youyu, “Women xuyao zhege sixiang wenhua kongjian” (We need this cultural space for thought), Ershiyi shiji, no. 121, Hong Kong, pp. 42-43.
31. The article “Zhongguo wenhua de wutuobang jingshen” (The utopic spirit of Chinese culture) was republished in Jin Guantao and Liu Qinfei, Mao Zedong sixiang yu ruxue (Maoist thought and Confucianism), Taipei, Fengguan shichao, 2006, pp. 37-58.
32. In the same review (see preceding note), the same authors have written an article that is emblematic of this movement, and was first published in 1988 “Zhongguo de shenhuiyou cai chuangzao – lun Zhongguo xianzai zhidu de shenhuiyou” (On the formation and development of modern Chinese political culture), pp. 21-37.
34. Samuel Huntington’s article “Wenming de chongtu?” (The clash of civilisations?), published in Ershiyi shiji, no. 19, October 1993, is symptomatic of this tension between globalisation and nationalism. The article, published first in English in Foreign Affairs in 1993, had already attracted fierce polemics.
35. It would not be possible to go into all the details of these many subjects. One can, however, consult the journal’s highly efficient index on its Internet website: http://www.ics.cuhk.edu.hk/rccc/2/2c/index/ (27/05/2011). For a more general overview of this movement, see Tao Dongfeng, “Cong huanhu xianzaihua dao fashi xiandaixing” (From the call to modernisation to reflections on modernity), Ershiyi shiji, no. 55, June 1999, pp. 15-23. No. 121 of October 2010 devotes an entire feature to it entitled “Reflections on the Chinese model.”
Dismayed by the success of popular writers—of whom Wang Shuo (王朔 born in 1958) is an illustrous example—these liberal intellectuals raged against the new mass culture, source of materialist alienation that transmits the cultural "hooliganism" (流氓文化—liumang wenhua) of lacklustre literary heroes with no ideals, created by authors who openly declared their financial ambitions in an expressly cynical stance. These writers seem poles apart from the disinterested humanist spirit (人文精神—renwen jingshen) defended by advocates of a more fundamentally positive literature. On the other hand, the writer Wang Meng (王蒙 born in 1934), former minister of culture and figurehead of the intellectual opening-up of the 1980s, defended mass culture, in which he saw the very expression of the modernity so keenly sought in the 1980s. For leftist critics, however, an ambiguity that gave birth to two new trends: on the one hand, the critical stance permitted in China by knowledge of imported theories was a sive populist exploitation. It might be said that reading—sometimes rather hastily—Edward Said’s classic had a considerable effect on the universities of the former colonies.

Young Chinese intellectuals rushed into this breach. The liberating effect of this new subjectivity, introduced by a theoretical enrichment, against the Western demand for objectivity resulted in the elimination of one of the poles of the China/West binarism, or at least, put it into perspective. However, this challenge to Western cultural hegemony necessarily led to a problematic examination of Chinese cultural subjectivity that was all the more complex since it could easily be appropriated by narrow nationalist arguments.

The links between this triple phenomenon—mass culture, "post" theories, and globalisation/nationalism tension—has proved fundamental for understanding how the Chinese intellectual landscape was redrawn after clearly the link between postisms, cultural studies, and state nationalism in third world countries. They warned against the instrumentalisation of the emotional moment linked to the idea of Nation and its potentially explosive populist exploitation.

So as we can see, imported textuality had, in the Chinese debate, broken free of its original literary and aesthetic links to enrich the field of history and politics. It was an opening-up of the Chinese world that rather paradoxically corresponded in the People’s Republic with a turn away from the new national narrative, made possible by the immense success of translations of the classics of postcolonial literature. It might be said that reading—sometimes rather hastily—Edward Said’s classic had a considerable effect on the universities of the former colonies.

Other authors of the same period seem nonetheless to understand very naturally the key between postisms, cultural studies, and state nationalism in third world countries. They warned against the instrumentalisation of the emotional moment linked to the idea of Nation and its potentially explosive populist exploitation.
Review essay

through the pages of Ershiyi shiji.

a theoretical textuality that was by and large imported and relayed
the “small prosperity” (xiao kang) and “harmonious society” (hexie shehui) projects. The criticisms of the Ershiyi shiji authors with regard to these new concepts were severe. In particular there are the uncompromising observations of He Qinglian (何清漣 born in 1956) on the moral responsibility and social cost of the reforms, whether it be a question of the Chinese stock markets, ownership rights, corruption, or the financial crisis. One also thinks of the solutions that political scientists and economists as different as Wang Shiqiang (王紹光 born in 1954), Hu Angang (胡鞍鋼 born in 1953), and Cui Zhiyuan (崔之元 born in 1963) tried to provide for these problems in a special feature in the journal devoted to the debate on the “government’s capacities” (国家能力 – guojia nengli),

55. Ershiyi shiji, no. 21, February 1994.
56. Ershiyi shiji, no. 29, June 1995.
57. Ershiyi shiji, no. 44, December 1997. Following the publication of her book Xiandalhu de xianyan (The trap of modernisation) (Jinh Zhongguo, 1998), He Qinglian was forced to leave China. She now lives in the United States.
59. Anniversary numbers, no. 36 and no. 37, August and September 1996, and no. 93, February 2006.
62. Nalaizhuyi is a principle (zhuyi) of appropriation (nalai) of foreign ideas with the sole aim of improving the Chinese situation. The term was invented by Lu Xun in 1934. There are several English translations: “raptism,” “appropriation,” and “take-ism,” among others. In French, the neologism “empruntisme” seems to fit quite well.
63. During a conference organised for the publication of no. 31 of the journal Extreme Orient/Extreme Occident, on 17 February 2010 at EHESS in Paris and available online at: http://www.rap.prd.fr/ressources/detailVideo.php?fichier=heess/ocmci/regard_sur_le_politique_en_chine.fr (19/05/2011).

The 2000s – Normalisation of the intellectual world?

The current prospect of a certain degree of stability in the Chinese intellectual scene is the direct result of the period of crisis in meanings we have just discussed. It is certainly now possible to speak of a form of normalisation of the intellectual exchanges resulting from this intense restructuring, in the 1990s, of a vast number of crisis situations (postmodernity, postsocialism, post “New Era,” etc.). Progressively, the positions and trends became clear, and a new consensus emerged in the 2000s based on three new paradigms, recently analysed in detail by anthropologist Joël Thoraval.

Firstly, the return of Confucianism in intellectual and political debates is now inevitable. The range of opinions on this question is extremely vast, however, ranging from the vision of Tang Yijie (湯一介 born in 1927), promoter of a low-key, modern, and potentially democratic doctrine, via that of Zhao Tingyang (趙汀陽 born in 1961), who would like to demonstrate

the particular value of Ershiyi shiji lies in the fact that if China needs a forum for debate, when the intellectual community has no other choice than to create this arena elsewhere, the journal of the Chinese University of Hong Kong is there. It has offered those who think about China a precious arena in which to faithfully record the tortuous path of the world of Chinese thinking over the last 20 years.

Finally, one might add that the very existence of this journal, and the metronomic regularity of its publication, invalidates somewhat the common perception of a rupture between the years 1980 and 1990. Indeed, one might consider that Ershiyi shiji is prolonging the most positive aspects of the spirit of the Chinese Enlightenment of the 1980s. Its core value of intellectual diversity, the pluridisciplinary rigour of its content, and its desire to remain accessible to the greatest number of readers would seem to be an extension of the professionalisation movement begun in the late 1980s by mainland cultural activists. The latter had quickly understood that the intellectual dispersion characteristic of the period they had just lived through was not only of little constructive value, but above all potentially dangerous for any edifice constructed since the end of the 1970s. Ershiyi shiji therefore proved that a somewhat erratic period of nalaizhuyi (拿来主義 — “raptism”) may be succeeded (from Hong Kong) in exemplary fashion by a journal that embodies rigour, curiosity, openness, and pluralism.

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that the concept of Tianxia (天下 – everything under heaven) is the future of international relations, to the extremism of Jiang Qing (張慶 born in 1953), in favour of an antimodern, antidemocratic, and anti-Western traditionalism together with a utopic Royal Path (王道 – Wangdao) forged in a sublimated past. (64)

Secondly, ever since the challenges to the very idea of modernity – by Wang Hui (汪暉 born in 1959), Gan Yang, and Liu Xiaofeng (劉小楓 born in 1956) among others – we have been witnessing a widening of the historical perspective with the appearance of a new sense of the relationship to history, doubtless made possible by a little amnesia. The long and difficult departure from binarism – liberal Enlightenment against “feudal empire” – offers new perspectives from which to approach Chinese history, from the longest to the most recent.

This change of historical perspective finally offers the possibility of a third standpoint, that of a new world perception that lays the foundation for a new relationship with the West. For example, on one end of the spectrum a Chinese, national cultural approach is emerging, of which Gan Yang may be considered a representative, (65) whilst in the centre appears a liberal universalism that, although embattled, continues to deepen its imprint on society. Jin Guantao, Xu Youyu, Qin Hui (秦暉 born in 1953), Zhu Xueqin (朱學勤 born in 1952), and Xu Jilin (許紀霖 born in 1957) are doubtless the most representative of this movement that survives despite a two fold confusion. Firstly, one associates these liberal intellectuals with the failure of the 1989 social movement and the “Westernist” fervour (西方主義 – xifangzhuyi) of the past decade. Secondly, they are frequently condemned in the name of the harmful social effects of economic (neo)liberalism. We can clearly understand the confusion – intentional and strategic – maintained by their opponents. (66)

Lastly, at the other end of the spectrum, we note the appearance of a radical, anticapitalist anti-globalization movement that advocates going beyond the nation-state, by rehabilitating, if need be, certain aspects of a hitherto irrecuperable Maoist past. Wang Hui is perhaps the best-known of the representatives of this critique who would like to move Chinese social protest closer to the movement against world economic neoliberalism born of the social excesses of capitalist globalisation, if need be by moving outside the traditional framework of analysis, generally of Western origin. (67) This constitutes the third essential element in the consolidation of positions directly stemming from the debates of the preceding decade for which the pages of the Hong Kong journal were the theatre.

The exceptional richness of Ershiyi shiji, (68) its acuity regarding the fundamental problems of Chinese transition, together with its permanent examination of the international situation enables us to foresee, without too much risk of being mistaken, a very bright future for the journal. It would therefore seem only natural for China Perspectives, founded at around the same time, to join in the celebration.

Translated by Elizabeth Guill


65. Gan Yang, “Prendre en compte la continuité historique pour penser le politique aujourd’hui” [Taking historical continuity into account when designing the politics of today], Extrême Orient/Extrême Occident, no. 31, October 2009.


68. The list of the 42 members of the editorial committee is available on the journal’s website: http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/ics/21c/index_g.htm (04/08/2011). Most of the names given in this article are on it.