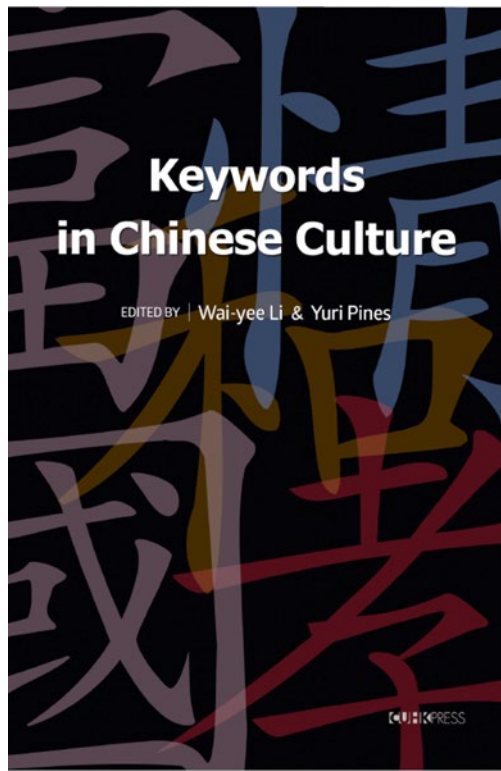


What is the Chinese
understanding of wenhua
(‘culture’)?



- ❑ ‘culture’ not included among key words
- ❑ ‘New Culture Movement’ (*xin wenhua yundong* 新文化運動)
- ❑ Cultural Revolution (*wenhua da geming* 文化大革命, 1966-1976)
- ❑ Culture Fever (*wenhua re* 文化熱)

‘Culture’ – history of the term

- Word with a complex history
- ‘culture’ ← Latin ‘cultivare’ – ‘tending’, ‘husbanding’, ‘cultivating’ (15th cent.); ‘cultivating’, ‘educating’, ‘improving the mind’ (between 16th – 18th cent.)
- Notion of improvement → abstract term for process of human cognition or product of that process
- “The complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.” (E.B. Tylor, 1832–1917; *Primitive Culture*, 1871)
- Process of constant improvement (‘civilised’)

‘Culture’ – history of the term

- 18th century: ‘idea of cultures’ in the plural emerged
 - Romantic period: interest in folk and traditional cultures
 - ‘culture’ as root of national identity
 - Romantic search for unsullied traditional values
- Many different cultures that cannot easily be arranged in a hierarchy of civilisation.

Culture

- ❑ Relational term – difference between ‘English’ and ‘Welsh’, ‘German’ and ‘French’ and so forth
- ❑ What counts as a significant difference? Who determines what is a difference? → Importance of **classification**
- ❑ Cultures are shifting constructs (symbolic construction), not stable entities
- ❑ To ‘live’ a culture as opposed to ‘have’ or ‘own’ a culture

Which groups are included in this classification? Which groups are excluded?

Which groups are included in this classification? Which groups are excluded?

➤ Choose **one** section from A to E, then tick **one** box to best describe your ethnic group or background

☐ English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British

☐ Irish

☐ Gypsy or Irish Traveller

☐ Any other White background, write in _____

[illegible]

☐ White and Black Caribbean

☐ White and Black African

☐ White and Asian

☐ Any other Mixed/multiple ethnic background, write in

[illegible]

☐ Indian

☐ Pakistani

☐ Bangladeshi

☐ Chinese

☐ Any other Asian background, write in

[illegible]

☐ African

☐ Caribbean

☐ Any other Black/African/Caribbean background,
write in _____

[illegible]

☐ Arab

☐ Any other ethnic group, write in _____

[illegible]

'Essentialism'

THE SOUL OF CHINA



Richard Wilhelm

Published 1928

'Essentialism'

THE SOUL OF CHINA



Richard Wilhelm

Published 1928

A FOREIGN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE BOOK

THE SOUL OF CHINA

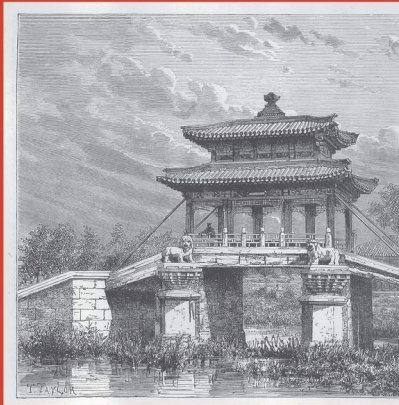
A challenging interpretation of Chinese history

By AMAURY DE RIENCOURT

Published 1958

'Essentialism'

THE SOUL OF CHINA



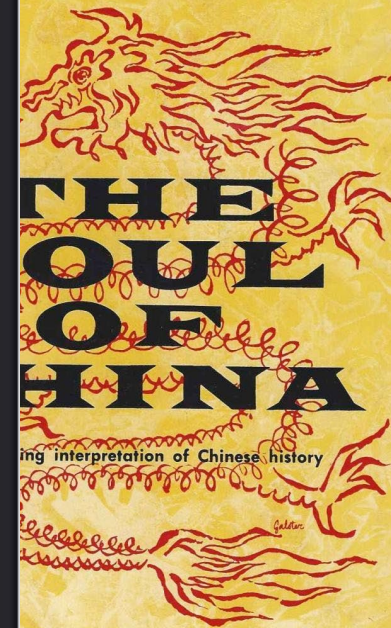
Richard W

the Chinese Mind

Essentials
of Chinese
Philosophy
and
Culture

Edited by CHARLES B. MOORE

POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE BOOK



THE SOUL OF CHINA

A new interpretation of Chinese history

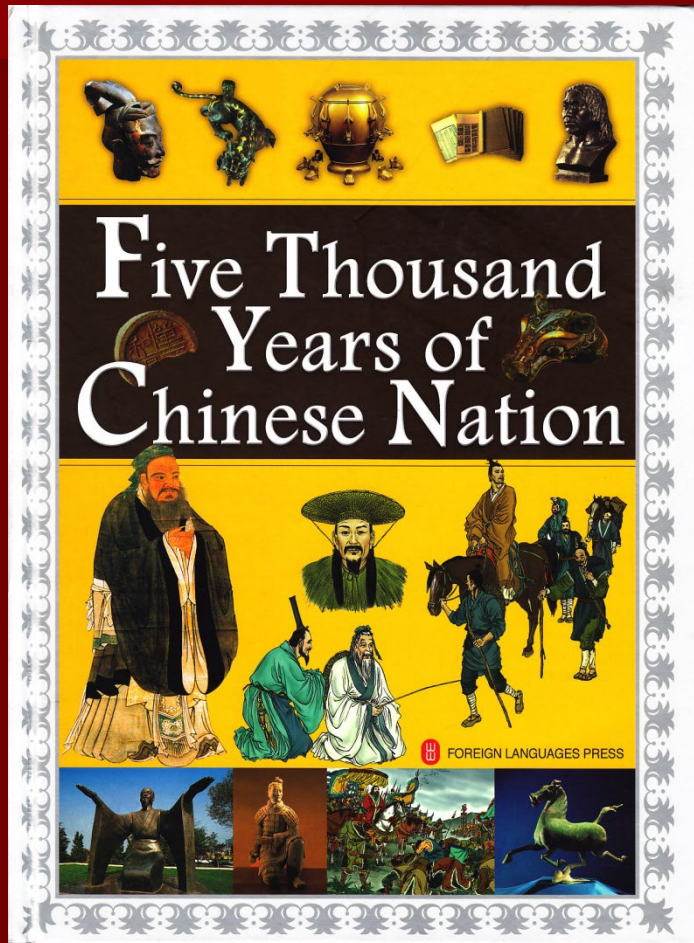
MARY DE RIENCOURT

Published 1928

Published 1967

Published 1958

Cultural Continuity



- Essentialist ideas are often linked to ideas of cultural continuity

1980s: Anti-essentialism movement

- ❑ Difficulty to define what is 'English', 'Chinese' etc.
- ❑ Stereotypes of the British



Advantages and Disadvantages of Essentialism

Discuss the following two questions:

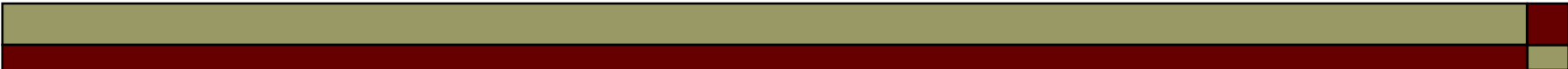
1. What are advantages and disadvantages of essentialist notions of cultural identity?
2. Is there a way out of the trap of current conceptions of cultural identity, namely their reliance on classification and mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion?

‘Culture’ and ‘Civilisation’

- *wenhua* 文化 (culture) “transformation [by means of] *wen*”
- *wenming* 文明 (civilisation) “bright *wen*”
- Idea of ‘culture’ implies process of transformation through *wen*
- *wen* may refer to titles, ritual objects, rites and music, norms and statutes, deportment, art of politeness, cosmic symbols, eloquent speech, writing, rhymed writing, literature and so forth.
- *wen* → things and practices that reveal and produce a pattern, orderliness

‘Culture’ and ‘Civilisation’

- *wen* primarily manifested in language and especially writing
- *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 (1st century CE)
“Written characters are the foundation of the classics, the origin of royal government, the means by which former generations passed on to posterity, the channel through which later generations can learn from the past. Therefore it is said: ‘As the root has been established, the Way is generated.’”
- *wenren*, scholar-gentry → *wen* is linked to power and its holders, those who uphold the social and political structure; ‘culture’ often implies elevated and conservative values

- 
-
- “...the purpose of *wenhua* is to teach morally correct ways to the world and accomplish the goal of ruling and pacifying the people.”
(Fang Weigui, *Modern Notions of Civilization and Culture*, p. 15)



Part II

CRITIQUE OF CULTURE

May 4th Movement (1919)

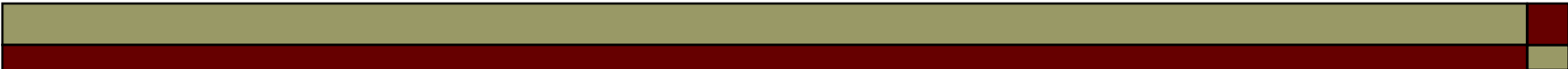


- Anti-imperialist demonstrations on 4th May 19
- New Youth (*Qing qingnian*) flagship magazine (founded 1916) by Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) and Hu Shi (1891-1962)
- “Science and Democracy”: “We must be thoroughly aware of the incompatibility between Confucianism and the new belief, the new society, and the new state.” (Chen Duxiu) → New Culture Movement

May 9th at Qinghua University

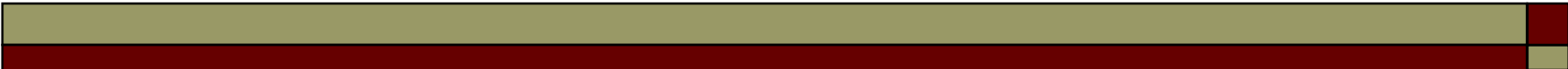


1919年5月9日，清华大学举行国耻纪念大会，会后，学生在操场焚烧日货。



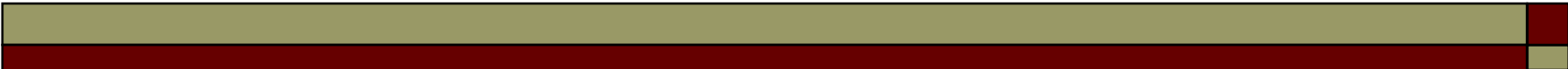
Reform of Literary Style

“Down with the ornate, obsequious literature of the aristocrats – up with the plain expressive literature of the people Down with the stale, ostentatious literature of the classics; up with the fresh, sincere literature of realism! Down with the pedantic, obscure literature of the recluse; up with the clear, popular literature of society!”
(Chen Duxiu)



New Culture Movement

“To ask what the New Culture Movement is, we must ask first what the “New Culture” is. To ask what the “New Culture” is, we must ask first what “culture” is. Culture stands in contrast to military and political affairs (i.e., actual political operations, not political philosophy which should be categorized as a part of culture) and in contrast to industrial development. Likewise, the “New Culture” stands in contrast to the old. Culture encompasses science, religion, morality, fine arts, literature and music; [...]”
(Chen Duxiu: “What Is the New Culture Movement About?”, 1920)



Liang Shuming on culture

“Culture is nothing but ways of human life. [...] Culture is different from civilization. Civilization consists of all tangible merits achievable in our life – such as the vessels produced by China and Chinese political institutions, which are all parts of Chinese civilization. Material products are the outcomes of civilization; abstract ways of life are culture. However, culture and civilization can also be seen as two aspects of one and the same thing. For example, a political system is perhaps at once a product by a nation – a kind of civilization, and a nation’s way of life – a kind of culture.”

(Liang Shuming: *The Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies*, 1921)

“Oriental Culture” faction

- Liang Shuming, Liang Qichao, Du Yaquan, Zhang Junmai
- Material progress and spiritual well-being can never exist together → material life should be neither plentiful nor scarce
- Western civilisation as “unnatural state of affairs”
- Inspired by Oswald Spengler’s book *The Decline of the West* (1918-22)

Liang Shuming (1893-1988)

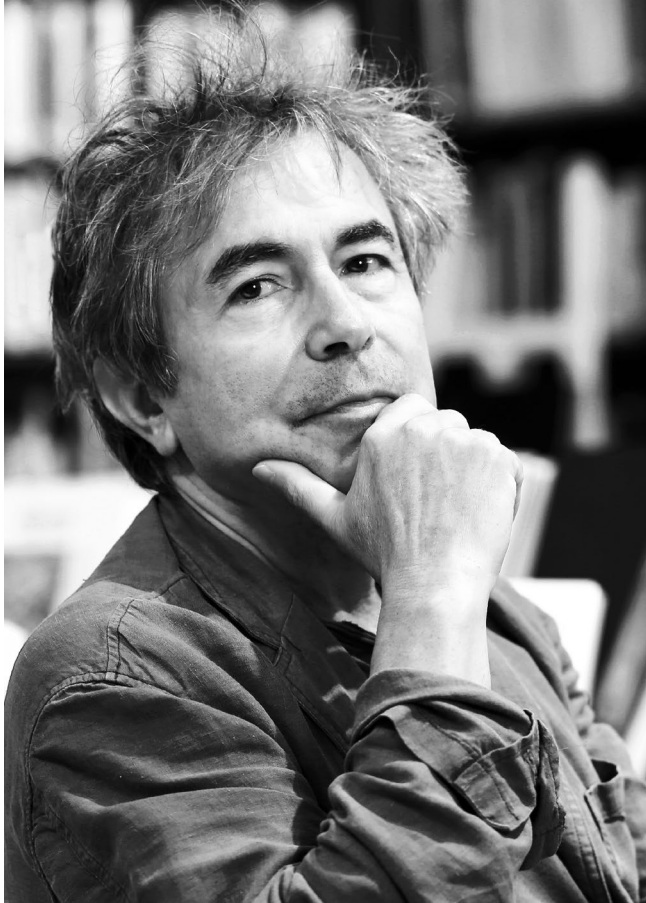
There are three ways in human life: (1) to go forward; (2) to modify and to achieve harmony, synthesis, and the mean in the self; and (3) to go backward. ... The fundamental spirit of Chinese culture is the harmony and moderation of ideas and desires, whereas that of Indian civilization is to go backward in ideas and desires [and that of the West is to go forward]. Generally speaking, Westerners have been too strong and too vigorous in their minds and intellect. Because of this they have suffered spiritually. This is an undeniable fact since the nineteenth century. Let us compare Western culture with Chinese culture. First, there is the conquest of nature on the material side of Western culture — this China has none of. Second, there is the scientific method on the intellectual side of Western culture — this also China has none of. And third, there is democracy on the social side of Western culture — this, too, China has none of. ... This shows negatively that the way of Chinese culture is not that of the West but is the second way [mentioned above — namely, achieving the mean]. ... As to Indian culture ... religion alone has flourished, subordinating to it philosophy, literature, science, and art. The three aspects of life [material, intellectual, and social] have become an abnormal spiritual development, and spiritual life itself has been an almost purely religious development. This is really most extraordinary. Indian culture has traveled its own way, different from that of the West. Needless to say, it is not the same as that of Chinese culture. (Liang Shuming, “Chinese Civilization vis-à-vis Eastern and Western Philosophies”)



Part III

CULTURAL IDENTITY

François Jullien (b. 1951)



- *There's No Such Thing as Cultural Identity, but We Will Defend a Culture's Resources* (2016)
- Critical investigation into the vocabulary we use to talk about cultural '*differences*'
- Tries to conceptualise relationship between cultures without recourse to classificatory schemes or mechanisms of exclusion.

Conceptual pairs

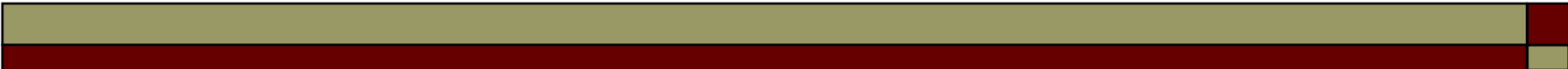
Difference	identity
“process or set of properties by which one entity is distinguished from another within a relational field or a given conceptual system” → Form of classification or typology → ‘China’ – ‘the West’	Refers to the specific traits held to be characteristic of a class of things; what defines a thing or a person → Identity is intended to be relatively stable → Focus on what a thing ‘is’ (ontological focus)

Jullien's suggests new terms

Divide/distance [écart]	Resource/fecundity
‘Divide’ is not identificatory; it does not refer to a typology like ‘difference’ Écart describes a creative space, an interspace [de l’entre] The interspace has no ‘in-itself’, it is where things happen	Culture is a resource (like love, compassion etc.) • Inexhaustible • Life giving • Creative • Transformative

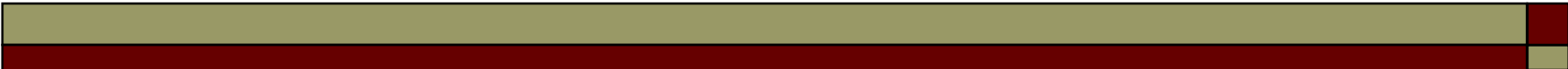
Interspace

- “Across the divide the two are continually discovering themselves; through the divide they both explore and reflect themselves. Each remains dependent on each other for self-knowledge and cannot fold back on its supposed identity.” (Jullien)
- The interspace is the space where culture is produced and lived.



‘Cultural identity’

- ❑ Culture is constantly changing because it is created by the tensions that the divide/distance produces
- ❑ “Transformation is at the root of culture, which is why we cannot establish cultural characteristics or speak of a culture’s identity” (Jullien)
- ❑ Culture **deploys** the distance between the plural and the unitary



Important texts for this lecture

- ❑ Wade, Peter. *Cultural Identity*. London: Inst. for Cultural Research, 1999.
- ❑ Jullien, François. *Il n'y a pas d'identité culturelle: Mais nous défendons les ressources d'une culture* [There's No Such Thing as Cultural Identity, but We Will Defend a Culture's Resources]. Paris: L'Herne, 2016. (not yet translated into English)





Thank you for your attention!