CHAPTER 1

THE RISE OF ANTI-CONFUCIANISM IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY: FROM ICONOCLASM TO CRITICAL INHERITANCE
Chapter 1

In any account which seeks to recapitulate instances of going against tradition in Chinese history, before the advent of the Communists, the problem is where to begin. This is not suggestive of any depreciation of the dominant ethos of old China - of both the literate elite and masses - which has been a strong sense of tradition. In Confucianism, the aggregation of that tradition, we can see the intellectual continuities which have in the main given China its long and unbroken history. Historiography particularly, has been so intertwined with the Confucian culture that it has an equally long record and in terms of sheer bulk would easily surpass any collection in the world. Nonetheless, against this larger backdrop, China's past is also replete with people and movements, which opposed, argued against and even attempted to refute the authenticity of the most revered Confucian classics. Indeed, so incessantly has this questioning recurred that many historians have remarked that if one were to scrutinize the succession of scepticism from the eight century BC onwards, not much of the credenda would emerge unscathed. It was this composite tradition that first inspired intellectuals and historians in the twentieth century, to not merely question the relevance of continuing the 'old', but to advocate a complete uprooting in the field of historiography.

For centuries the Chinese questioned, refuted and rejected - but it was all done within the country, in isolation and ignorance of the developments in the world outside. Contact with the West dramatically changed the nature of their investigations. A lot of research has been conducted into how China began the task of examining its past and initiated reforms to fortify themselves to meet the Western challenge. It is not our purpose to go into those well known facts - they constitute the backdrop as it were, against which thinking minds came to realize that China would have to change or suffer ignominy. But change, reform or even revolution would only be justified if the traditional views of China's past were thoroughly discredited and abandoned and if appropriate comparisons with the development of other countries were made. The irrelevant had to be cast off and the necessary incorporated. Thus task of questioning began.

But while acknowledging the debt of the West, it would be well to keep in mind that its role in initiating the process of questioning in China should not be rated overly. For while it is true that the Marxists owe their origins and development to ideas from the West, the entry of those ideas had been facilitated by the New Culture Movement which had begun after the chaos of the Republican experiment and lasted till the early twenties. The New Culture Movement (NCM) itself was not merely the outcome of the contact of a section of the Chinese intelligentsia with Western culture and civilization. A few studies have traced the origins of the NCM, to the period of philosophical renaissance which had begun in China more than three hundred years ago. The point that is sought to be made is that a truly historical assessment of the revolutionary changes in China needs a historical perspective, the leitmotif of which is historical continuity. Analysts with obvious predilections for interpretations which portray China as static and unchanging till the West opened her up, combined with the fact mentioned in the preceding pages regarding widespread misconceptions about China, either choose to ignore this fact or at any rate minimize those historical continuities. But if the reappraisals of Confucius in the twentieth century have to be understood, this continuity has to be the starting point. The long history of opposition to and rejection of Confucianism has already been mentioned. Our objective is not to negate the role of Western influence but merely to trim the proportions it has acquired in most Western analyses. In the following pages, the Chinese indebtedness to the West shall crop up time and again, but the heterogeneous strands of the Chinese heritage must not be lost sight of.

The Marxists would certainly come along in due course - as they did - and stand traditional historiography on its head. But the process was begun at the turn of the century by Kang Youwei, Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, Gu Jiegang, Lu Xun and a host of others. What they offered can by no stretch of imagination be called Marxist, but their ideas, investigations and writings did much to shake the foundations of traditional historiography. Their work very definitely impressed the young minds who read them and who turned to Marxism in the twenties and thirties, discovering in it a more organized and attractive theory of history. Chinese history could now be studied scientifically; traditional historiography lay in ruins, but the first blows were those of Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao and Gu Jiegang. They carried out a tremendous amount of historical research, very little of Chinese history escaping their examination. But their achievements are discussed primarily in the context of the contribution they made towards destroying the fundamentals of traditional historiography and in so far as they constituted a half way house between the traditional and

Communist historians. There can be no denying the pioneering and constructive role of these men in the methods they adopted and in the results they achieved.

There is a second and more important objective in surveying the legacy of such intellectuals. The questions they investigated reveal the distinctive attributes of traditional Chinese historiography, which when compared with those of Communist historiography, gives an idea of the extent of the revolution which has been accomplished in the field of historical studies. And in the process we look on the engrossing spectacle of the crumbling edifice of a historiography that had persisted for upwards of two millennia. The eventual contrast between the old and the new that shall emerge will make manifest the crucial implications of this largely overlooked field, for China today.

The post-revolutionary evaluations of Confucius as well, have their roots in the social and intellectual upheaval which began in the twentieth century. The ideological framework within which those assessments were placed also date back to the ideas and guidelines laid down by the historians and Communist Party theoreticians of the twenties. Drastic changes have come about in the appraisals of Confucius, which have fluctuated wildly from one extreme to the other, every two to four years since 1949. Nonetheless, a certain continuity and almost logical progression can be observed in Communist historiography on Confucius if one bears in mind the interaction between politics and ideology during the periods when the changes appear most confusing and misleading.

The study of Chinese communist historiography on Confucius since 1949 however requires an understanding of the manner in which opposition to Confucius arose, took form and gradually became a movement in which the entire Chinese tradition, subsuming history, philosophy, literature, art, religious customs and social and political practices came under attack, spanning the years 1916-1921. It was during this movement that the slogan “Destroy the Old Curiosity Shop of Confucius” was first heard and which was echoed again and again in time to come when mass campaigns against Confucius took place. Criticism of or opposition to, Confucius and his philosophy, was not a new phenomenon in Chinese history, but a

---

3. Also known as the May Fourth Movement, so named because it was on May 4th 1919 that a massive student demonstration took place, protesting against China’s abasement by Japan in the Treaty of Versailles. This was the spark which led to the ‘prairie fire’ of social and intellectual ferment. For a comprehensive account of the Movement see Chow Tse-tsung, *May Fourth Movement* (Stanford University Press, 1960).
4. Attributed to Hu Shi. Ibid., p.300.
concerted campaign to throw him out of it lock, stock and barrel, certainly was. The May Fourth Movement (MFM) undoubtedly occupies a unique place on this account. The radical nationalism and iconoclasm which inspired the attacks on Confucius are thus related aspects of modern Chinese historiography.

Strangely enough, Confucius' grip on the Chinese psyche was loosened by the very people who championed his cause, viz, the moving spirit of the Hundred Days Reform of 1898, Kang Youwei. For he brought about the most sensational upset in China at the turn of the century by declaring that all the texts of the Confucian Classics were forgeries. These very texts had been the source of Confucianism for fifteen centuries. By this means, Kang sought to prove, that in the process of perpetrating the forgery, the true Confucius had been distorted and perverted, which therefore had to be cleansed of its impurities and restored to its rightful place. He then proceeded to outline what he believed was the genuine philosophy of Confucius. But in so doing, he underestimated the widespread consternation resulting from his act of attempting to overthrow as strongly established a school of believers as the old text Confucianists. If the object of the highest reverence was nothing but a fraud, then, there was something drastically wrong in the system itself which had laid it open to manipulation.

It matters not whether Kang Youwei's interpretation of Confucius, rather, his exposition of what he termed "the true Confucius," was or was not in accordance with what the Sage actually said. Equally moot is the point that the intentions of Confucianism's Martin Luther were to safeguard Confucianism by removing its impurities and unpropitious features. What matters is, that in the process, the whole plan went awry. Much research had been carried out, regarding how Kang's interpretation was actually alien to the spirit of Confucianism and how championing it, could not but be construed, as conceding that Confucianism was facing problems. As things stand, Kang and his reforms constitute a watershed, in that the position of

5. Fired with a passion for classical scholarship and a sense of complete dedication to the Confucian ideals of personal virtue and service to society, Kang Youwei was the precursor of the Reform Movement in China. He advocated a change to constitutional rule from Monarchy and yet retained an unswerving loyalty to the Manchu Dynasty, which ultimately isolated him completely when a strong Republican tide engulfed the nation, accompanied by a rejection of the Confucian philosophy. For further information see Pusey, Kang Yu-Wei and Pao-Chiao: Confucian Reform and Reformation (Harvard University, 1966).


Confucius underwent a steady deterioration thereafter, never to regain its once absolute pre-eminence.

So much for Kang Youwei's role. We needn't go into his defense of Confucianism. The point to be noted is, that the exercise in critical hermeneutics that Kang seems to have undertaken, was aimed at reforming and modernizing the ancient philosophy through reinterpretation. Kang was keen that it should be adopted according to the requirements of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, his political affiliations alienated the majority of the intellectuals who were rabidly anti-Manchu and hence his historical conclusions failed to draw much of a following. But Kang's contribution is not done justice, if merely stated in such nebulous terms as 'eventually contributing to the undermining of Confucianism in China'. It was largely his reformist zeal, which led in 1905 to the abolition of the traditional examination system. The advocacy of constitutionalism, gave impetus to the movement against absolute monarchy, and in 1911, the Manchu Dynasty was overthrown and the Republic established. These major changes definitely contributed to the rise of radicalism in the twentieth century, which further intensified anti-Confucian sentiments.

But it was left to an influential disciple of Kang Youwei, who by going much further than his teacher, anticipated many of the trends of the twenties and thirties - Liang Qichao, who started the process of going against traditional historiography in the twentieth century. The failure of the Reform Movement was the mortifying motivation in changing Liang's belief from bienfa (reform) to geming (revolution). The latter concept has acquired a more dynamic overtone in Communist China, But Liang used it to mean something more than reform but less than revolution - a sort of beinge. Yet, it was radical enough in connotation when Liang called for a "revolution of the spirit." It embraced a literary revolution, academic revolution, religious revolution, writing system revolution- and indeed all else. The blueprint for this revolution came from Charles Darwin. In fact the most concrete revolution in which Darwin's theories were utilized, was in the study and writing of history.

 Nonetheless, it would do well to point out that although Liang and his contemporaries did not think much of the historical legacy they inherited from the historians of the Qing Dynasty, they did make use of it. Underestimated though the work of the Qing historians has been, their situation was not so different in essentials from that of the twentieth century historians. The fall of the Ming Dynasty and the rise of the Manchus was as agitating as the fall of the Manchus and the rise of the Republic. The collapse of the Dynasties in both cases was the motive force in galvanizing intellectual activity towards critical studies - the difference being the faith in and loyalty to the ancient tenets of historiography which inspired the work of the Qing historians and which was markedly absent among the legacy of the Qing historians. For more details on the legacy of the Qing historians, see, Jack Gray, Historical Writing in Twentieth Century China in Pulleyblank and Beasley eds., n.1 pp. 192 - 97

9. Nonetheless, it would do well to point out that although Liang and his contemporaries did not think much of the historical legacy they inherited from the historians of the Qing Dynasty, they did make use of it. Underestimated though the work of the Qing historians has been, their situation was not so different in essentials from that of the twentieth century historians. The fall of the Ming Dynasty and the rise of the Manchus was as agitating as the fall of the Manchus and the rise of the Republic. The collapse of the Dynasties in both cases was the motive force in galvanizing intellectual activity towards critical studies - the difference being the faith in and loyalty to the ancient tenets of historiography which inspired the work of the Qing historians and which was markedly absent among the legacy of the Qing historians. For more details on the legacy of the Qing historians, see, Jack Gray, Historical Writing in Twentieth Century China in Pulleyblank and Beasley eds., n.1 pp. 192 - 97


THESIS
951.042
Ac44  Hi

TH3431
Liang's obsessive objective was the development of China as a nation, and the spirit of nationalism among the Chinese people, so that it would not be tradition, but the nation, on which the people's allegiance would converge. In this context, the role of the historian was decisive. In an article 'The New History' Liang stated, "The subject investigated by the historian is the broadest and most important subject. It is the clear mirror of the folk, the wellspring of patriotism." ¹¹

But the historians would have to change; so would history and historiography. For if the Classics had been proved to be spurious, other historical records of yore could also be forgeries. The past, as depicted in them was therefore, not entirely reliable. Obviously, it was not possible now to blindly accept the verisimilitude of the historical records. Nor could one emulate the innumerable generations of Chinese historians in comparing the present with analogous events from the past to justify or denounce the course of action in the present.

More importantly, such an attitude had in no way assisted in the fostering and promotion of the spirit of nationalism. In the twentieth century, one had to look to the future and it was through Darwin that Liang realized that "meaningful human history" had to be the history of human evolution, of "progressive evolution." ¹² This was the first of the elements of traditional historiography that Liang attacked: this almost sacred duty of the Chinese historians to revere the past unquestioningly. When one looked to the past, it should be to establish human progress. Belief in progress generated much optimism among the literate Chinese and can be discerned in Mao's views on history as well.

Secondly, the question was not just one of human history; it had to be people's history. Darwin had shown that it was not the study of the individual, but that of the 'group', in which progress could be seen. By stating this simple fact, the major portion of traditional historiography, highlighting the lives of Kings, Emperors and Sages were proclaimed as not even being worth the bamboo strips and paper scrolls they were inscribed upon. For the masses, the people had been totally ignored. Only their inclusion could foster the collective spirit of nationalism. That consciousness, that coalescence, that strength of unity could be cultivated only by

¹². Pusey, n. 6, p. 199.
recounting the progress of the Chinese people as a whole. The study of history was therefore to use "past progress to lead to future progress."  

The Chinese historical tradition of making moral judgements on events and men was also fiercely attacked by Liang. His views in this connection led to the development in later years, of a passion for objectivity in investigation and to study history more scientifically than depend upon fallible and inherited value judgements. Liang however wrote about a different aspect of this tendency to apportion praise or blame in Chinese history. It fostered, he wrote, a false sense of complacency, that had it not been for the wrongdoers, China would have been strong. It discouraged the urge to reform the defects which led to the weakness.  

Yet another area where Darwin created a furore, was religion. During the Hundred Days Reform of 1889, Liang had supported Kang Youwei's proposal to make Confucianism a state religion. Later as a consequence of Darwinian analysis, he came to the conclusion that such a move would only hamper free and unencumbered thought. In ringing tones he declared, "I love Confucius, but I love truth more." (This could be virtually termed the statement that launched a thousand criticisms of Confucius, as shall be seen later). He advocated that instead of belief in a supernatural force, the Chinese should have the very practical faith in the ability of men - this faith would make China a nation - strong, free and alive. Such a faith, free of religious and dogmatic taint, would go a long way in making thought free. In other words, freedom of thought bespoke of the freedom to go against Confucian thought itself and yet call oneself a Confucian. With all the passion of his conviction Liang told the youth of China, "I love the ancients but I love freedom more." The ultimate reason for the advancement of civilization was the freedom of thought. The impact of such impassioned sincerity on the literate Chinese - the old but especially the young - was indescribable. Liang's powerful pen, which had the ability to shock, to startle, to move and to inspire, had opened an entirely new world before the impressionable youth and the manner in which they responded, as witnessed during the May Fourth Movement, gives the impression that they were only waiting for someone to point the way.

Another historian who played no mean role in taking the shine out of traditional historiography and in the formation of China's 'new' history, was Gu Jiegang. His writings on Chinese history and Confucius, like

15. Pusey, n. 6, p. 221.  
16. Ibid., p. 222.
those of Liang, are of pioneering consequence in understanding the developments and changes in historical consciousness. It was largely through Gu's struggles against the straitjacket of Confucianism and its historical canon, that Chinese history assumed new proportions and dimensions. Gu has managed to carve out a niche for himself among the Chinese historians and despite the fact that he has played a quiescent role in the making of the post-1949 historiography, his early reputation and scholarship was sufficiently influential to keep the Communist historians from rejecting him wholesale. Although he prefaced it with a self-criticism, his famous work, *Alchemists and Confucianists* was reprinted in 1955 with marginal changes. And his investigations into folk history could be said to be the precursor of the Communist concept of popular history.

If the critical evaluations of Confucius are seen as a concomitant of the desire for reform and modernization, there is ample justification for attending to Gu at length. The coupling of the aspiration for reform, with reevaluation of the 'old', was a blessing in disguise. It enabled a dispassionate enquiry into the historical legacy, which would now not merely be refurbished, but be rejected and overthrown if it impeded progress and prevented China from occupying its rightful place among the nations of the world. This concern for China's inability to emerge as a modern nation because of the absence of the will to look critically at her past, characterizes all of Gu's writings. This 'will' could only come about if historical investigations were conducted and the anachronisms in history were discarded. But, for Gu, the traditional methods of historical investigations, were themselves the biggest anachronism. Hence, the first step logically, was the discrediting of traditional historiography and the creation of a new one. Pitted against a superior West and desirous of arming China to face the new challenges, the radical Gu Jiegang stands chronologically as well as thematically, as the predecessor of the Marxists.

Gu Jiegang is one of the few in the category of non-Marxist scholars who was not influenced by the West. His scholarship and research controverts the theory that the impact of the West alone was responsible for the far reaching changes in almost every aspect of Chinese thought. Gu developed, or at any rate propounded a new direction for Chinese historiography, largely unaided by Western historiographical concepts (excluding the influence of the America - returned Hu Shi on him). In the Chinese tradition itself, he was suitably

---


18. In fact, by decisively discrediting the veracity of the legendary King Yu, he lopped off nearly a century and a half from the beginning of recorded Chinese history - a period of remote antiquity. Ibid., p. 60.
impressed by the heterogeneous streams of thought to realize that opposition to traditional historiography could itself be subsumed within the Chinese tradition. He could oppose it and yet be a part of it - and hereby stands as a striking instance of intellectual continuity, with a difference. He took a dialectical view of tradition.

He did not dismiss the Chinese past entirely, but sought to remove its anachronisms so that the distinct Chinese identity would stand out - not be stifled by the Western identity. The extreme iconoclasm of the May Fourth radicals, which sought to replace Chinese values with Western values, Gu felt was not a practical or workable solution. 19 He relied on a scientific study of the past, to bring out the truths in China’s historical legacy which had been corrupted. First, by a self-seeking ruling class who desired to perpetuate themselves at any cost and secondly, by the intellectuals, who unlike Dr. Faustus, had sold themselves to the devil (the ruling class) not for knowledge but for material profit. This weaning of scholarship from politics, Gu believed, would prevent the destruction of what was inherently Chinese. But it is not for his belief that there was much of substance in China’s past, that he preoccupies us. Rather, it is despite this belief in the abiding values of China’s past. For he was very clear about what the role of that past was.

“We want men of antiquity only be men of antiquity and not be leaders of today. We want to have ancient history only be ancient history and not be the ethical teachings of today. We want ancient books only to be ancient books and not be today’s resplendent repositories of law.” 20

Gu Jiegang’s decision to break with tradition began as a reaction to the works of earlier historians - more specifically, Kang Youwei and his *A Study of Confucius As Reformer* - which showed him clearly “the vagueness and confusion that characterize (d) our knowledge of ancient Chinese history” and “was the motive force that inspired me to overturn all our (so called) ancient history.” 21 The burden of Gu’s historical writings concerned a twofold investigation, viz, the relationship of scholarship to politics and secondly, of intellectuals to society. These two themes constituted the anvil, on which he honed his attacks on traditional historiography. He energetically advocated for a clear demarcation of the spheres of politics and scholarship, for unless

---

19. And indeed, in the thirties, we do see some attempts at turning the wheel full circle with the appearance of some rather clumsy efforts at a return to some sort of conservatism, revival of the old and the boycotting of Western culture. But it was short lived and not very influential. For more information on this aspect, see, Charlotte Furth ed. *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge, 1976).

20. Cited in Schneider, n. 17, p. 60.

21. Ibid., p. 49.
scholarship was free and knowledge was pure, the intellectuals would be reduced to being mere mouthpieces of those in power, in return for status and material profit.\footnote{Ibid., p. 5} This would defeat the very purpose of history and this had been the major defect of traditional historiography. China was a great country and if she had fallen from her eminence, it was because of such intellectuals, "the parasites of the aristocracy," who played false to their commitment to truth, so that they could reap the benefits of keeping their powerful patrons satisfied. Advancement and development of China in the twentieth century, hinged on the emergence of a "scientific, intellectual community," \footnote{Ibid., p. 188.} who would not be a victim of political entanglements. Thus Gu blotted the escutcheon, of countless venerable ancestors who had been in the main revered and emulated through the ages. The epithet "parasites," considerably lowered the estimation of the traditional literati and the historians; they became human, possessed of a propensity to err with a vengeance.

The haloed image of the 'Sage' was also decisively trounced. For too long had he bestridden the narrow world of historical scholarship, while the petty masses walked under his huge legs giving the impression that they were incompetent and had no notion of creativity. For too long, only a handful of literati among the vast populace had been connected with knowledge and culture. Such a state of affairs had been largely conditioned by the traditional historical preoccupation with Kings, Emperors and great men. But once the scope of history was broadened to include popular concerns, the masses would no longer play a peripheral role. They would no longer stand on the fringes of a glorious tradition, but become a part of it. This would not merely augment their appreciation of their nationality, but the literati too, would no longer be able to use their knowledge, to assert their superiority and give themselves a preeminent status. The implications were staggering. History would reflect the life all the people irrespective, no field of inquiry being too mean for the historian to delve into. Even Liang Qichao had expressed his contempt for the "class-bound nature of traditional histories" in China.\footnote{Ibid., p. 70}

The obloquy heaped on the sublimity of the Sage, also helped to demolish yet another tenet of traditional historiography - belief in the existence of a Golden Age in China's antiquity, the era of the Sage Kings. During this era, as the saying and legend goes, unity of thought and action prevailed. Gu methodically tried to establish, that their was no such period in Chinese history. Since almost all the literature recording the Golden
Age was proved to be spurious, the 'Way' which they advocated, was not to be held sacrosanct. The objective was to confine the utility of the Classics to the period in which they were formulated. "Each era has its own historical scholarship, said Gu. Traditional historiography was therefore to be viewed, as the historical data of a particular period and not a truth pertinent for all times. It constituted evidence of how men of an age thought and in view of the inconsistencies therein, were not to be necessarily accepted as an accurate description.

During the twenties, under Hu Shi's pragmatic guidance, Gu Jiegang, Ho Bingsun, Zheng Qiao and a few others propagated 'National Studies' (guo xue). The aim of guo xue was to discover "cultural alternatives" which were characteristically Chinese to replace what was rejected. For everything was not without value in China's past; the criterion of selection being relevance. This process involved considerable destruction wrote Gu, but,

"... without it our nation will not find a viable path. Our acts of destruction are not cruel activities; we are only restoring these things to their historical position... In sum, we are sending them to the museum... when it comes to the morality, the learning and institutions of the men of antiquity, what can be preserved for today ought to depend on the needs of today, and whether they can be of any value. This is just as there is no reason why things in a museum cannot be of use to men today. But this is another matter which we will leave for others. Our work is limited to classifying and arranging within the museum."26 (emphasis added)

A final word about Gu's studies on 'popular culture', for it is in this field that we see the rudiments of the Marxist notion of 'popular' history. The two primary purposes of Gu's explorations here were, a) that a systematic presentation of the culture of the masses in opposition to the inutile aristocratic cultural tradition would hasten the latter's debacle, and, b) that in time, hopefully, it would be able to constitute the alternative to what was being rejected instead of having only Western culture as the sole option.

It was Gu Jiegang and the group of reformers around him, rather moderately inclined in their political views, and not the Communists, who were the precursors of the notion that folk culture and poetry could be

25. Ibid., p. 61
26. Ibid., p. 314
material to the new 'national heritage' they were seeking to formulate. In addition a fundamental and deep-going social, economic and religious reform could be initiated with the instrument of folk culture. In fact, all manner of student organizations with a strongly populist ideology, mushroomed in China after the MFM, which mainly devoted their energies to discrediting the idea that physical or manual labor was degrading and that the intellectual, because of his literary achievements, was superior to the masses. Besides, a number of 'work study' and 'work and learning' societies came into being in and around Beijing, with the aim of taking the new culture and literacy to the masses and countryside. 

Even Li Dazhao, one of the founders of the Communist Party of China, attempted to emulate the late nineteenth century Russian populist organizations in a 'Youth to Village' movement, which however was short lived and not very successful. What is sought to be emphasized is that this distance between the literate and non-literate people, and the necessity of involving the latter in the making of 'new' China, has been a constant concern since the turn of the century. Obviously, most of the ire was directed at the man who was inseparably associated with the formation of 'old' China - Confucius.

Gu Jiegang certainly was an indefatigable critic of Confucius and Confucianism. The fact that Confucius and his philosophy had flourished for so long in China brings up the possibility of its amazing capacity for rejuvenation. But in all his writings, Gu was not able to consider Confucianism "historically appropriate under any circumstances or conditions." On the contrary, he pictured the 'Sage' as a "scion" of the old feudal, aristocratic order, bitterly opposing the dismantling of the aristocratic class structure. Elements of Mohism, such as the levelling of the various classes had indeed, according to Gu, began even in Confucius' time but became corrupted in attempts to incorporate it into the mainstream of Confucianism, the sole aim of which was to stop the tide of progress. 

In the Communist critiques of pre-Marxist historiography, Gu's methods and results have been labelled "unscientific" because he concerned himself with ideas and values per se, instead of the social structures, which in the ultimate analysis generated them. And despite the fact that he played an important role in the destruction of historical myths, Gu eventually failed to establish "concrete historical verities in their place." 

The discussion of this transition of historiography from the old to the new is best concluded with a brief sketch of the devaluation of Confucius and his tradition. Serious historical research took a back seat as

27. Ibid., pp. 219-20
28. Ibid., p. 236
29. Ibid., p. 305
Confucius - the representative of the forces pulling China backward - came to the fore. Kang Youwei, as we have seen, had unwittingly begun the slide. With the benefit of hindsight it becomes obvious that not even his reinterpretation of Confucius to fit contemporary requirements, could stay the decline. The reformers who came after Kang, were certainly more radical and between them they renounced virtually the entire tradition which revolved around Confucius. Yet, they were unable to wholly denounce Confucius himself. Levenson's analysis of what we shall term the 'Liangian dilemma', faced by almost all thinking men of Liang's generation, spoke of the contradiction between the emotional attachment to their past and the historical necessity to rid China of its enfeebling and enervating verbiage, (i.e. all that was 'old'), and which could never be entirely resolved one way or the other. Nothing around Confucius - his followers, aspects of his philosophy, the later interpretations which corrupted the essence - was spared. But when it came to the ultimate step of denouncing Confucius himself, some justification was sought to establish, that there were some positive aspects in Confucius as well.

Yet it must be admitted, that Liang Qichao was the logical step between reform and revolution and he did accomplish the needful. He had assigned Confucius to his historically relevant position. Confucius was lauded as the wisest man of his day - but only of his day. The morality of the ancients was not relevant to the needs of twentieth century China. "If Confucius and Mencius were to arise again, they would have to revise their views."

Confucius believed in progress and was committed to the concept of freedom according to Liang, for which he was duly panegyrized. But,

"....each and every one of the ethical principles of the *Four Books* and the *Six Classics* is not suitable for our use today.... We must not be slaves of the ancients... Do you fear my words? Just think of the destiny of the world. It advances ever upwards and human knowledge gets ever clearer and more profound. Therefore the greatest of philosophers can only speak to the ills of one age; he can benefit only his own time. *No one is great enough to set rules for the people of millions of years to come.*"  

(emphasis added)

And yet again, Liang believed, that overthrowing Confucius completely could have disastrous consequences, to the extent that Chinese morality could well collapse. Nor could he define the extent of the past

30. Pusey, n. 6, p. 223.
31. Ibid.
which could be adapted to the present or what exactly it was that needed to be adapted. As the cannonade against Confucius heated up, Liang flung a question at the iconoclasts: "How is it Confucius' fault that those who have called themselves Confucians have opposed his spirit?"  

But it was a weary question, the distinction too subtle for the youth particularly, who were dealing in black and white. Liang's plea went unheeded. He had come back to where Kang Youwei had started.

Yen Fu, a contemporary of Liang Qichao, however specified very clearly what Confucius' sin was. In 1904, *A History of Politics* by Edward Jenks was translated in China. The theory of social evolution which Jenks put forth and which Yen Fu wholeheartedly endorsed, was that all countries originated in totemism, passed through patriarchy into the nation state. Suddenly, the reason for China's backwardness became crystal clear. In the preface to the book, Yen Fu wrote, "Confucius was the sage of a patriarchal society. It is his moral pronouncements that have influenced our people longest and penetrated their hearts and minds the most clearly....we are still only a patriarchal people....For over four thousand years we have been stuck in this cycle of order and disorder without progressing a single step."  

Confucius was thus wholly responsible for China's degeneracy.

Radicalism, tinged with iconoclasm became the chief feature of Chinese thinking in the years following the establishment of the Republic in 1911 and if anything, exacerbated with the publication of the journal *New Youth* (Xin Qingnian) in 1915 by Chen Duxiu, a co-founder of the Communist Party of China as also its first chairman. Started with the aim of marshalling forces against the Warlord Rule, Chen realized very early that the first step lay in basic and far reaching changes in Chinese society, initiation of essential reforms in traditional thought and attitudes and the smashing of stagnant dogmas. The weapons which would achieve this destruction were Science and Democracy (or Mr. S and Mr. D. as they were popularly called.) In its January 1919 issue, Chen Duxiu outlined the programme of action.

"In order to advocate Mr. D, we are obliged to oppose Confucianism, the codes of rituals, chastity of women, traditional ethics and old fashioned politics; in order to advocate Mr. S, we have to oppose traditional arts and traditional religion; in order to advocate both Mr. D and Mr. S, we are compelled to oppose the cult of "national quintessence" and ancient literature."  

32. Ibid., p. 229  
33. Ibid., p. 224  
34. Chow Tse-tsung, n.3, p.59.
The general atmosphere in China at this time, encouraged a critical spirit and the most popular approaches were pragmatism, skepticism and agnosticism. Even though a number of studies have appeared on the MFM, it is still difficult to truly appreciate the ferment China was in during the period 1915-21, when the spirit of the 'new' imbued each and every activity. As many as seven hundred journals were started during this period and barring the few conservative ones, almost all the titles had something to do with 'reform' or 'new', or 'education' or 'masses'.

The National University at Beijing became an important center of anti-Confucianism during the MFM. Faculty members inspired and joined hands with the students in propagating the new ideas and in early 1919, the journal New Tide or Renaissance (Xin Chao) was started. It soon attracted a large following from students of various colleges in the many cities throughout China. As the movement gathered ever increasing number of supporters, they came clearly to stand in opposition to the government, which was identified with conservatism and attempts to return to the old ways which had reduced China to her miserable condition in the first place. Two noteworthy scholars who utilized these newly created forums, viz, New Youth and New Tide, to voice their anti-Confucianism were Wu Yu and Yi Basha.

In an article titled 'A Discussion of Confucius' in Xin Qingnian, Yi Basha (1886-1921) outlined a systematic denunciation of Confucius with the objective of exposing "the secret of Confucian worship." He began by conceding that Confucius was a brilliant scholar. But, Confucianism was only one among nine schools of thought in ancient China. Under the reign of Qin Shi Huangdi, the first Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, the Confucianists were persecuted and suppressed, but they added their forces to the later rebellion which overthrew the Qin Dynasty. The Emperors of the next dynasty, the Han, thought it best to propitiate the followers of Confucius and started the practice of worshipping their Master. As a result, Confucianism became responsible for stifling the other schools of thought and became enshrined as the official credo. The basic tenets of Confucians were distorted by the rulers to further their own interests which was not a difficult task, as Confucianism championed the authority of the Emperor, without any limits, over the individual person. This constricted the principle of 'rule by law', upheld autocratic rule with the only check on the Emperor being his own conscience. No doubts were permitted to be raised regarding the basic principles of

---

36. Chow Tse-Tsung, n. 3, p. 301
the Confucian philosophy. Above all, Confucius attached great importance to the holding of office and degraded other means of livelihood. The Confucians had to willy nilly trust to the favours of the Emperors for their maintenance and thereby laid themselves open to manipulation. The more Confucius was adored and the more lavish the ceremonies became, traditional arts and sciences became more and more decadent. The idolization of Confucius was, according to Yi Basha, a farce; the Confucian scholars failed to realized that a marionette had been made out of Confucius by the Han Emperors to secure their own position. With the help of Confucius' teaching they could justify their power; they could fit Confucius' teachings into all their political aims and suppress spiritual freedom and unorthodox teachings like those of the Mohists, the Legalists and the Taoists. This was the *raison d'etre* of the lack of progress and the virtual spiritual enslavement of the scholars and Confucian literati, the absolutist veneration of Confucius' teachings and the sidelining of other schools of philosophy.37

The seeds of these evils, claimed Yi Basha, were sown by Confucius himself, however much subsequent distortions may be utilized to absolve Confucius of blame. Only this realization would create the pre-requisites for spiritual freedom and a modern attitude. But Yi Basha's critique aimed at tracing the manner in which Confucius became an instrument in the hands of the rulers. He did not analyse why Confucianism was unsuitable in the twentieth century as a philosophical and ethical canon - though he certainly advocated its overthrow.

Wu Yu, another ardent anti-Confucianist, had studied Law and Political Science in Tokyo. He had begun to write quite early but it was only from 1917 that he started to have his essays published in *Xin Qingnian*. Wu Yu condemned Confucian philosophy - in theory as also in its bearing on Chinese customs, institutions, laws, morals, and history. More than that, he effected cogent comparisons of the ancient practices with the theories of the Taoists and with those of Montesquieu, Jenks, John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Endo Ryukichi and Kubo Tenzui as well as with the principles of constitutional, civil and criminal laws of Europe and America."38 The impact of these articles was subsequently praised by Hu Shi: Wu Yu became "the old hero from Szechwan province who beat Confucius and sons single handed."39 With a sharp dig at blind
reverence, Wu went straight to the heart of the young- that even the souls of Confucius and Mencius and the thirteen Classics could not save the birthplace of the two Sages, Shandong, from Japanese occupation and neither could their present day followers provide an effective military opposition to Japan.

Wu Yu attacked specific aspects of the Confucian philosophy such as the traditional family system with its stress on paternalism, which led to much oppression and tyranny; the concept of ‘filial piety’ which instructed all Chinese to follow a path of unqualified loyalty to one’s father and Sovereign and which was an ill disguised attempt to exclude all possibility of dissidence or rebellion among the masses. (And indeed, filial piety has been particularly singled out by all the Emperors from the Han Dynasty onwards as the principle commanding unconditional reverence). The attack on filial piety was promptly and more than adequately echoed, by the rebellious young people during the MFM who saw in it an opportunity to break free of the strict family codes and control on every aspect of their lives. Wu Yu’s intention was to lay bare the hypocrisy and cruelty of the ancient customs, traditions and mores, religiously and blindly adhered to by the Chinese people.

Lu Xun, variously described as China’s Maxim Gorky or China’s Voltaire, joined the battle as well. Through the medium of his satiric and humorous stories, he exposed the custom of the Chinese for what it was, intolerant, hypocritical, servile to the superiors and arrogant to those inferior, opportunist and superstitious. Confucianism he attacked mercilessly and incessantly, for what it had came to represent and for its total alienation from the masses.

"... it was those in authority who boosted Confucius in China, making him the Sage of those in power or those anxious to take power, a sage having nothing to do with the common people. And as for the Confucian temples, those in power soon lost their enthusiasm for these. Since there are ulterior motives behind their cult of Confucius, once their aim is attained this paraphernalia becomes superfluous, and even more superfluous if they fail. Thirty or forty years ago when all who wanted power, that is, hoped to become officials used to study the Four books and the Five classics... others dubbed these books... 'bricks to knock on doors'... This fellow Confucius has, in fact, been used since his death as a 'brick to knock on doors'... The ordinary people of China, especially those known as

41. Chow Tse-tsung, n. 3, p. 311.
the ignorant mob, though they call Confucius sage, have never really looked upon him as such. Admittedly, Confucius devised outstanding methods of governing the state, but these were thought up to rule the people for the sake of those in authority; there was nothing of any value to the people. This is what is meant by the saying "Rites do not extend to the common people"... we cannot say he had nothing to do with the people but I fear the politest thing we can say is that he had absolutely no feeling for them. To have no feeling for a sage who had absolutely no feeling for them is only natural... even the ignorant mob is not so ignorant as not to understand that." 42

Mao's tribute testifies to Lu Xun's contribution:

"Lu Hsun was the greatest and the most courageous standard bearer of (this) new cultural force. The chief commander of China's cultural revolution, he was not only a great man of letters but a great thinker and revolutionary. Lu Hsun was a man of unyielding integrity, free from all sycophancy or obsequiousness;... Representing the great majority of the nation, Lu Hsun breached and stormed the enemy citadel; on the cultural front he was the bravest and most correct, the firmest, the most loyal and the most ardent national hero, a hero without parallel in our history. The road he took was the very road of China's new national culture." 43

It requires but the views of Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao to conclude this section. In his journal New Youth Chen wrote almost continuously, addressing the youth of China, in whom alone he saw some hope for China's redemption. In a number of articles variously titled, "Constitution and Confucianism", "Confucius' Teachings and Modern Life", "Concerning the Confucian Problem Once More" and "Reintroduction of Monarchy and Confucius' Veneration" - all of which appeared in New Youth.44 Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) fought for a modern democratic consciousness in the people and a liberation from the Confucian morals because he felt that this problem of the relationship towards Confucianism, the "fossil of the past" had to be necessarily solved before anything else. Chen did not dwell on the personality of Confucius, nor did he differentiate between Confucius' teachings and Confucianism - both were equally evil and beyond the pale.

44. On the establishment of New Youth, see Chow Tse-tsung, n. 3, pp. 42-48.
The above mentioned articles have to be understood in the context of the actual political stimuli: the decision of Yuan Shih-kai to make Confucianism the state religion and enshrine it in the Constitution of the 1911 Republic. If it is believed, Chen argued, that the people cannot live without a religion, which was the reason for making Confucianism the state religion, then he asked, why should there not be freedom of religion? Such a move not only limited individual freedom and hence was intrinsically unconstitutional, it would also undermine scientific progress. Chen was of the opinion that modern life is characterized by the economy, and economic production necessitates individual independence. This however was not present in the Confucian values, because the younger sons were dependent on their elder brother and their father while women were wholly subservient to male dominance. Personal independence was totally negated by the concept of filial piety. Confucian philosophy was a feudal philosophy, created for a small elite and thoroughly anachronistic in a Republic. Chen went to the extent of propagating the abolition of all religions for the good of Science and Democracy and concluded that “One should not only not make Confucianism a state religion, but all Confucian temples in the country should be destroyed and make an end to all state sacrifices.”

Li Dazhao argued in like manner. In 1917 he published two articles: “Confucius and the Constitution” and “The Ethical Observation of Nature and Confucius”. In these articles he described Confucius as a "thousands of years old dried up skeleton" and went on to say,

“if this thousands of years old skeleton is brought into this Constitution in which the living spirit of the modern people is crystallized, then this Constitution would become the Constitution of a rotting corpse and not one of living people.. a Constitution which preserves the authority of an idol and not a constitution which guarantees the well being of the people.”

Li Dazhao believed that the teaching of Confucius “marked the despotic absolutism of the Emperor” in Chinese history. Conditions in the twentieth century forbade the retention of Confucius’ teachings in the new Constitution because in such a step lay the germs of a new despotic rulership and a consequent loss of freedom.

In the later years of the MFM, the group of ‘ antiquity doubters’ came into existence, led by Hu Shi, Gu
Jiegang, Qian Xuantong and a few others. In their research these scholars adopted the genetic method and the pragmatic approach, whereby they went into the origin of the various legends and how they evolved in current folklore and folk-songs was investigated. By this process, Gu Jiegang discovered what he claimed was the guiding rule in the creation of legends: “The later the legends were added, the more deliberate and complete the fabrication and the earlier the period to which they were attributed.” By tracing the myths which had developed around Confucius, Gu asserted that each era had its own image of Confucius. In the *Qun-qiu* period (722-481 BC) Confucius was regarded as a gentleman, in the Warring States period (403-221 BC) he was revered as a Sage and in the Western Han time (202 BC-AD9) Confucius was hailed as a Saviour. The Eastern Han period (AD 25-220) reconverted him to a Sage and now he was once again to be gentleman.

In seeking to elicit the veracity of the ancient historical records, Gu discovered that the Six Classics were not written or revised by Confucius as claimed by the ancient historians, but were a compilation of his teachings by his disciples. This led to a considerable modification of the generally accepted versions of Confucius’ authorship of the Classics. More than that, it led to a veritable ‘battle of books’ which lasted from 1923 to the forties. The ‘antiquity doubters’ managed to effect a demolition of a wholly fallacious picture of China’s high antiquity. With the refutation of Confucius’ claim to the authorship or the revision of the sacred works, his standing in history too became obvious, as also the fact that the norms of evaluating both Confucius and the Classics would have to be changed.

But the ‘antiquity doubters’ did not build a new version of the antiquity they had cast to perdition and in that their greatest drawback or even failure lies. But to give them due, their investigations into history, their attempts at changing the concepts and tenets of historiography and their criticisms of Confucius were certainly more academic and based on persevering and painstaking research; their approach certainly scientific in that it was based on concrete evidence and their conclusions, definitely played a crucial role in the process of change. Not that their work was free of defects, but they worked within certain limitations. Nonetheless, they were severely criticized by later Communist historians. Possibly, as has been suggested by Chow Tse-tsung,

47. This group was characterized by the alacrity with which they challenged authoritative and established views and expressed their doubts about the period of antiquity in Chinese history. Qian Xuantong in fact gave himself the name ‘I-gu’ (doubting antiquity) The group came into being in the latter years of the MFM. Ibid., p.316.
49. Ibid.
50. Ibid., p. 317.
they were unable to adapt what they considered to be of value in China’s past because China lacked the necessary political, social and economic pre-requisites to make such an appropriation successful. And it would be pointless to deny that their scepticism infected many others who were inspired to do the same, but given the scholarly tradition of revering the ancients, very few of them possessed the necessary logical thinking or training which would lead to a balanced criticism. Much oversimplification was indulged in but the excuse for that must be that those who did it were mostly all of them, young; the general atmosphere was surcharged with emotion and the sole motive was to strengthen China. It was left to the Marxists to proceed with a considerably more scientific methodology, equipped with a theoretical framework and aware of the objectives to be achieved, to finish the task begun at the turn of the century.

Sharing equally with the other intellectuals a similar concern for China’s fate and influenced equally by the prevalent revolutionary ideas, but nonetheless restrained by the pull of tradition, Guo Moruo wrote a rather diverting little story about a meeting between Marx and Confucius - “Marx Visits the Ancestral Temple of Confucius.” This story is discussed at some length for it is an enlightening glimpse into the thinking of an interesting and complex personality. Guo was a poet, writer, historian, literary critic and translator and was considerably influential in historical and literary circles in the PRC. His scholarship and the personal rapport he enjoyed with Mao, bestowed on his writings an authority and preeminence which few challenged.

The entire meeting is an allegorical presentation of the introduction of Marxism to China: the manner in which Marxism was viewed or welcomed, the resistance from conservative or tradition-bound quarters, particularly the followers of Confucius, the attempt by some to seek parallels between Marxism and Confucianism and the utilization of seemingly convergent ideas in the two philosophies to justify acceptance of the former accompanied with arguments which aimed at establishing the superiority of the ancient Chinese wisdom, to the extent of proving that Confucianism was a far more revolutionary system than Marxism would ever be. At another level, this meeting graphically illustrates the dilemma faced by Guo himself - it is an eloquent comment on the bind in which most intellectuals found themselves. In a word it reflects the thinking of a section of the intelligentsia in the twenties and thirties who did not wish to achieve strength and

modernization at the cost of China's cultural heritage but whose choices were dwindling rapidly. The conversation between Marx and Confucius gives a fair idea of how the fundamentals of Marxism were understood by and large and also attempts to dispel certain erroneous notions then prevalent.

The meeting occurs in a temple. Confucius is seated with his disciples when a sedan chair is borne right inside the temple. This is a breach of etiquette which makes the disciples “uncontrollably angry”. Confucius however urges them to politely welcome the visitor. From the sedan chair alights

“... a European, his face red as a lobster and wearing a beard that covered the entire lower half of his face...it turned out that the bearded man with the red face was called Karl Marx, Recently, this name had become so well known that even Confucius had heard it mentioned...”

After the initial formalities, Marx stated the reason for his visit. “I especially made this trip to be instructed by you.” “The choice of the word “instructed” is revealing in that it sought to place Marx and Confucius, in a manner of speaking, in a disciple-teacher relationship. Marx said that although his doctrine had reached the Middle Kingdom, he had been informed that his teaching did not accord with your system of thought, and that there would be no chance of its being applied here since the Middle Kingdom is dominated by your system. So I made this journey to contact you directly and to inquire from you... whether it is true that it does not accord with mine, and how it differs, should that be the case...”

Here emerges Guo’s preoccupation with seeking points of convergence and departure between Confucianism and Marxism. When Marx explained that his basic premise was that “the world and human life are positive”, Confucius remarked “Indeed... as regards our fundamental orientations, we agree completely.” The next question was regards Marx’s ideal world. Presumably the greatest misconceptions about Marxism in China centered around this aspect, so Marx’s reply was extremely forthcoming.

“Because I developed a materialist doctrine, most people take me for a kind of animal or at least someone who only understands eating and drinking, but has no ideals. The truth is that I am afraid
that I may be the idealist with highest ideals history ever produced."

Then Marx proceeded to outline his ideal society which so animated Confucius that he could not help clapping his hands and he said,

"This ideal society of yours and my world of great Equality accord completely, without our having expressly agreed on it beforehand."

So Confucius also began to recite his world of great Equality and here Guo hinted at what probably was the problem with the followers of Confucius. For the Sage had so enthralled himself with his own words that "the monotonous flow of language" had transported him into a dreamy state. Possibly the lack of action and the tendency to be completely absorbed by excessive verbiage, Guo felt, had led to stagnation in society despite the fact that the ancient goals were as lofty as the new revolutionary philosophy from the West.

Marx next discoursed on the ways and means to remove poverty and the degradation of the people, the manner in which the downtrodden and the wretched of the earth would rise and unite, first in their own country and then on the international plane, bringing about a situation where each could develop his talents to the full and live in peace and harmony. Once again Confucius grew very enthusiastic and quoted passages to prove "that feeding the people and taming the wealthy merchants had already been the necessary pre-requisite for peace in ancient China..."

Into the bonhomie generated by the realization of this concordance in their respective thinking, Confucius broke in with a depressing sigh- and Guo's pent up emotions surfaced as well. This "sigh was so profound and so sustained that the resignation which had been accumulating in his heart for two thousand years and more could pour forth all at once." Such tremendous ideals and lying fallow! He asked Marx to recommend a course of action. Marx was indignant. "What ... do you mean to say that the Chinese are incapable of realizing your ideal." This was Guo's way of driving the point home. What was the use of advocating and propagating Marxism when the same ideals had not been realized by the Chinese in two thousand years. Possibly, mused Confucius, something could be done,

"...if one preaches enough, perhaps...But we have to understand that your disciples must not
agitate against mine, and vice versa." (emphasis added)

Obviously, Guo had faith in the inherent compatibility of Confucianism and Marxism. Meanwhile Marx agreed with Confucius and said that he could now “go back home to my wife.”

The concluding part of the story is sheer mischievousness on Guo’s part. In the first place he scored against the neo-Confucians (who propagated the ethereal attributes of Confucius) by saying that had Confucius been as ethereal as all that, he would have objected to Marx mentioning his wife when such lofty things as ideals were being discussed. In the second place, as a parting shot, Confucius outlined his view on the correct relationship among men which concluded with,

“Treat with love the woman in your own family, so that the women in the families of others shall be similarly treated. And thus I love your wife.”

This alarmed Marx and made him extremely indignant.

“Your system of thought is even more dangerous than mine. I don’t have the courage to provoke you further,”

he said, and fled the scene “as if he had lost a battle.” The story concludes with Confucius’ disciple expressing bafflement at Confucius’ strange words, for “...today Master, you were not the Master of yore...” Confucius laughed amusedly and said, “I was only joking and having fun when I said those things.”

Guo’s Confucius emerges as an extremely human figure with a sense of humor - not the stiff and exalted Sage of China’s devout Confucianists. Of course, he is “today” not the Master of “yore” and the fault is with the Chinese themselves. If only they could realize the utter futility of mechanically reciting quotations from the texts and pursue a strong course of action, China could yet emerge powerful.

Of course, Guo neatly sidestepped such issues as class struggle and revolution and conflict while waxing forth on the equivalences. He either chose to ignore or simply avoided analyzing the philosophical bases of Confucianism and Marxism - that of Harmony and Struggle respectively - and focussed on the objectives. His emotional and somewhat romantic inclinations come through very clearly and his conclusions are devoid of
a logical and rational detachment. For obvious reasons, this piece was not a part of the *Collected Works of Guo Moruo* edited after 1949.

It was after 1927 that Marxist ideas began gaining ground in China. The utilization of historical materialism in the criticism of traditional Chinese culture and ethics did not make headway till the mid-twenties although as early as 1915, Chen Duxiu had shown some interest in the economic interpretation of history and society. The intellectuals who were caught up in the new ideology were also primarily motivated by the task of changing China. But the difference between the proponents of change in the NCM and those in the late twenties and thirties was a sense of history. The discussions on historical materialism brought about an awareness of historical and material factors as the preconditions as well as the limiting conditions of change. The debates among the Marxist historians in the thirties are fascinating but not in the scope of this study. Our concern is with the fact that historical materialism soon became established as a viable method for analyzing Chinese history among a significant section of Chinese historians in the thirties and forties.

Before we conclude our historical survey, it is important to examine the origins and development of Mao’s attitude to Confucius and his philosophy, since the basic premise of this thesis is that anti-Confucianism in the PRC has been largely motivated by Mao Zedong. His attitude towards traditional Chinese culture, history and Confucius inspired all categories of historians who inevitably and invariably cited his words to justify the stand or position they took. In the voluminous works by as prolific a writer and speaker as Mao, it is very easy to come up with paradoxes and at times seemingly contradictory statements. His authority and eminence had made his analysis and instructions the guide for correctness in speech and rightness in action. Hence people belonging to widely divergent faiths did not find it difficult to use his words to vindicate themselves. All it needed was an extremely painstaking perusal of his works and a dogged insistence on the words rather than the spirit in which they were written. It would therefore be pertinent at this juncture to elaborate on Mao’s attitude towards Confucius and the traditional Chinese culture.

To borrow a line from Shakespeare, “... And the elements were so mixed in him...” The historical situation in which Mao grew up, the traditional factors and the intellectual influences, all combined to make him an

---
52. For a comprehensive account of these debates see Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China 1919-1937* (University of California Press, 1978).
extremely complex personality. Mao's break with traditional values began very early when he grossly transgressed as honored a custom as 'filial piety' - respect for elders - and thereafter ran away from home. He had received a thorough education in the Confucian classics but he very categorically stated that he

"... hated Confucius from the age of eight ... There was a Confucian temple in the village and I wanted nothing more than to burn it to the ground. At first I thought it was because I hated teacher and because my father quoted Confucius against me: only much later did I reason out my hatred." 53

When his thoughts, like those of other Chinese at the time, turned to the problem of bringing China out of its humiliating position and transforming the country into a powerful, independent, modern nation-state, the biggest barrier was seen in the traditional culture in which China was steeped, its orthodoxy and conservatism which had kept her backward. He himself had not been immune to some rather obnoxious traditional attitudes such as the disdain of the intellectuals for manual labour. While serving as a soldier in the anti-Qing army, "I... had to buy water. The [ordinary] soldiers had to carry [it] from outside the city, but I being a student could not condescend to carrying, and bought it from the water pedlars." 54 During the MFM, he launched the Xiang-jiang pinglun (Xiang River Review) as his contribution towards propagating anti-imperialist and anti-feudal thought. In its initial issue in July 1919, he spoke out forcefully:

"Academically we must devote ourselves to thorough study in order to be free from the bondage of traditional views and superstitions, and seek the truth. In human terms, we hold that the masses should be united to carry on persistently the 'movement of admonition' to the powerful and to realize the 'revolution of awakening'. Politically, the people living along the Xiang River lack the ideal, total solution of problems, but are rather interested in private strife." 55

While organizing the peasantry in Hunan, Mao realized their potential in enhancing the revolution. He therefore encouraged them to rise against the ethics of the old Confucian society according to which the Chinese man was in bondage to government, clan and family. The Chinese woman, in addition to these was

55. As quoted in Tien-wei Wu, Lin Biao and the Gang of Four: Contra-Confucianism in Historical and Intellectual Perspective (Southern Illinois University, 1983) p. 78
in bondage to a fourth - her husband. Mao also exhorted the illiterate peasantry to destroy the traditional hold of language on culture and create the true culture of the peasants. Advocating the overthrow of the landlord gentry by itself constituted a serious challenge to Confucian precepts. In his "Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan", Mao propagated the use of violence to overthrow the 'old'.

"... a revolution is not a dinner party... it cannot be so refined, so leisurely and gentle, so temperate, kind, courteous, restrained and magnanimous. (These were the virtues of Confucius as described by a disciple) A revolution is an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another."

Mao's world view, dialectical and materialistic, was in direct opposition to the Chinese metaphysics. He rejected the Confucian view of a priori knowledge. For Mao, knowledge could only come from sense perceptions and impressions and that began with practice. "Knowledge begins with practice, and theoretical knowledge is acquired through practice and must then return to practice."

On the other hand, there is no dearth of references to Confucius in Mao's works. Analogies with historical situations and figures, classical allusions, ancient imagery, traditional poetry and tributes to enduring values are to be found a plenty suggestive of the fact that his departure from Confucianism was not quite as total as imagined. It baffled and confused critics and friends alike who were unable to grasp the very simple truth which lay at the bottom of it all - his essential Chinese-ness. It has been rather succinctly pointed out that,

"Mao's early life in "traditional" China left an indelible imprint on his entire personal culture. His aesthetic and literary sensibility (not populist) remained wholly Chinese. His personal 'style' of life remained Chinese. He continued to the end to find categories of thought derived from the traditional quite as compelling as Western categories even though he subsumed them under the higher truths of Marxism-Leninism."  

Mao had no intention of renouncing Chinese tradition totally. Neither did he approve of wholesale

58. Ibid., p. 304
'Westernization' and the mechanical absorption of foreign material. Till the mid-sixties, even in his most iconoclastic moods, when he advocated an overthrow of the old, it was always the dross - the feudal dross - that he wanted to do away with, never the essence. He denounced the Confucian concept of ren, since according to him, it was based on the erroneous fallacy that human nature is not concrete but an abstract thing. There is no such thing he maintained, as an all inclusive love of humanity since society is divided into classes. Human nature therefore has a class character; the concept of ren - love of humanity - similarly has class connotations.

"Confucius said: 'benevolence is the characteristic element of humanity.' 'The benevolent man loves others.' Whom did he love? All men? Nothing of the kind. Did he love the exploiters? It wasn't exactly that, either. He loved only a part of the exploiters."60

Mao did not consider Confucianism useful to the building of a modern society, let alone a socialist one. And yet, he had a high opinion of Confucius as an individual and believed that the Chinese could learn much from the educational ideas of Confucius.

"Confucius only professed the six arts - rites, music, archery, chariot-driving, poetry and history - but he produced four sages... It won't do for students just to read books all day, and not to go in for cultural pursuits, physical education, and swimming..."61

Mao also lauded the modest origins of Confucius and how he came to occupy high office:

"Confucius was from a poor peasant family; he herded sheep, and never attended middle school or university either. He was a musician, he did all sorts of things...he produced seventy-two sages, and had 3,000 disciples. In his youth, he came from the masses, and understood something of the suffering of the masses. Later he became an official in the state of Lu, though not a terribly high official."62

But there was a glaring drawback in the Confucian education:

---

61. Mao Zedong "Remarks at the Spring Festival": Summary Record 13 February 1964, in Schram, p. 204.
62. Ibid., p. 208.
"In the writings of Confucius, there is nothing about agriculture. Because of this, the limbs of his students were not accustomed to toil, and they could not distinguish between the five grains. We must do something about this." 63

Yet it was not an emotional attachment to Confucius and his legacy that we discern in Mao. His great merit lay in being able to rationally, logically and scientifically examine the underpinnings of Confucianism and unhesitatingly reject it for what it had come to be - the philosophy of a dominant, literary elite, totally separated from the larger masses of the poor, illiterate, underprivileged and oppressed.

Gradually however, Mao came to realize that appeals to retain the positive aspects of Confucius and reject the dross were not producing the desired results. He therefore advocated that,

"Before a brand-new social system can be built on the site of the old, the site must first be swept clean. Old ideas reflecting the old system invariably remain in people's minds for a long time. They do not easily give way." 64

And in his last years, he was to advocate and lead the movement to destroy Confucianism, root and branch.

63. Ibid., p 210