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Chapter 6  Conclusion

In the early 1990s, Chen Lai described a situation in which he believed the May Fourth intellectuals and the intellectuals of the 1980s were both drawn into:

Confucian thought and tradition entail the crisis mentality, which created an unprecedented sense of urgency to free the nation from humiliation through political means. This cultural-psychological tradition in return has made intellectuals prone to a total negation of cultural tradition, thus making it impossible for cultural inheritance and construction, or to provide a stable cultural environment for a benign political order.708

Then Chen Lai asked: “Is this really a dilemma for intellectuals?” This question refers essentially to a dilemma of positioning the Self between the past and the Other. Chen’s question then can be rephrased as such: does Chinese culture really have to be torn between tradition and the West? To him, in the 2010s, this dilemma had already been solved.

But this research has shown that, nearly a century after the May Fourth Movement, the tension between the past and the Other has far from been resolved. The dilemma as described by Chen is constantly at play in national self-perceptions, and it is still able to evoke intense and sometimes contradictory emotions.

By examining the discourse of national character, I have outlined three different approaches, including the one of Chen Lai’s, to the problem of positioning the Self between what look like two irreconcilables. The first approach is reflected in the critiques of national character. This discourse, formulated by Liang Qichao and Lu Xun, has been borrowed by contemporary cultural critics to ask the question of “What is wrong with us” and to advocate cultural reforms oriented towards the modern West. The rationale, the influence of Western perceptions, and the emotional dynamics behind such a question have been examinined in Chapters Two and Three.

The mode of thinking in the first approach is rejected by many others in their search for a cultural identity. In Chapters Three and Four, I have looked into the cultural

708 Chen Lai, Tradition and Modernity, p. 81.
viewpoints of philosopher Chen Lai and historian Qin Hui. Chen criticizes the critiques of national character as a form of cultural radicalism, and Qin regards them as an embodiment of cultural determinism. As alternatives, Chen’s approach is to assert a cultural subjectivity, and Qin proposes to make Confucianism converge with liberalism, both incorporating Confucianism as an indispensable part of their visions for the nation’s future.

The contest of these three intellectual perceptions of Chinese culture has demonstrated that the formation of the Self is a constant negotiation process among different cultural forces. While some attempt to shape the boundaries set between China and the West, as well as of tradition and modernity, others strive to overcome such a framework.

In this research, the past and the Other have been analyzed as the two dimensions of a cultural identity: the historical and the international. Therefore, I will also summarize my findings from these two perspectives—how the Self is perceived through the Other, and how the present is constructed by appropriating the past.

**6.1. Perceiving Self through the Other**

The discourse of national character has been examined as a recurring theme in Chinese cultural debates and Chinese-Western communications. Critics of the national character, in their search for the ultimate cause of socio-political problems and a thorough solution to them, highlight the flaws and defects in Chinese culture. They regard cultural tradition, especially Confucianism, as the root of a perceived servile nature of the people, therefore the reason for national defeat and backwardness.

While they see the national character as an enduring and almost innate feature of the nation, they have nevertheless chosen to criticize it in a fierce manner, in the hope of transforming the nation to what they regard as a better one. What has led them to believe that the best way to improve the nation would be to question its cultural root?

This research has argued that the encounters with the modern West have played an important role in stimulating this extreme form of self-criticism. In the late Qing and early Republican periods, the imperial *Tianxia* worldview was challenged by the presence of modern, foreign powers and gave rise to national consciousness of the Self as compared to the Other. Similarly, after the Cultural Revolution, the image of China as the center of world revolution soon faded, leaving intellectuals in the 1980s
bewildered by the influx of Western influence as the new modern world permeated Chinese life.

A modernized West contrasted with an unsatisfactory socio-political reality at home and suggested that China was lagging behind. Self-reflective intellectuals began to question the cultural tradition and national psychological make-up that were deemed to be responsible for such a situation. Many characteristics of Chinese culture were regarded as national defects, as compared to the special features that were seen as having created the stronger and/or better cultures and civilizations in the West.

As such, cultural construction and invention of the Western Other has been the key in defining the Self. Certainly, there is no such thing as a stable, unified “West”, “Western culture”, or “Western civilization”, but the West as a whole set of modern institutions and values has been undoubtedly “the Other” in the Chinese evaluation of the past and present, as well as its imagination for the nation’s future. Thus, this research has concluded that Chinese self-perceptions have never been able to escape the powerful presence of “the West”.

What is Wrong with the Chinese National Character?

By tracing the discourse of national character, from Arthur Smith to Liang Qichao, and from their time to contemporary cultural critiques, I have argued that Chinese self-perceptions have been shaped by Western perceptions in two ways. They have been influenced by imported Western conceptions and theories, and in particular, by Western worldviews and their consequent perceptions of China within a certain world order.

I have firstly demonstrated that Smith’s account of the Chinese people and their culture was a missionary description of a backward, barbaric, and almost inscrutable nation in urgent need of Christian enlightenment. His racial, religious and cultural superiority was accompanied by a mixed feeling of contempt, fear, and paternalism for an inferior nation. The perceptions in Smith’s book inspired the two most prominent advocates of national character reforms, Lu Xun and Liang Qichao. As I have argued, Liang’s “new people” thesis incorporated many of the characteristics listed by Smith in its effort to renovate the cultural features of the nation.

Moreover, placing it in a bigger context, Smith’s perception of the Chinese nation was not an isolated example; rather, it reflected the transition of Western perceptions of
China from a vague image to a personified character, witnessing the consolidation of Orientalist cultural constructions at the turn of 20th century. And the “missionary mind” as observed in Smith remains an important factor in today’s Euro-American understandings of and dealings with China.

At the same time, Liang Qichao’s calls to reform the nation did not go unnoticed. His “new people” thesis, together with his other thoughts on Chinese culture, inspired generations of intellectuals across the wide spectrum of various political and cultural convictions. The influence of such cultural interactions was later manifested in the May Fourth Movement of 1919 and the culture fever of the 1980s. The Chinese-Western dichotomy, with the assumption of a Western superiority, appeared in the texts of, for example, Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Gan Yang, and the documentary series River Elegy. It remains an important part of the contemporary discourse of Chinese national character, notably in Wolf Totem and Wang Xiaofeng’s critiques. It is then justified to say that contemporary cultural critiques still echo Liang’s propagation of cultural reforms, regarding themselves as continuing Liang’s historical cause to revitalize the nation.

Furthermore, though many of these comparisons between China and the West and the consequent negative images of the Self have been created with political considerations —be it the pursuit of sovereignty or socio-political reforms, they have undoubtedly left their footprints on the Chinese national psyche. Chinese imaginations of modernity have been expressed with Western discourses; and the perceived status of a late-comer to modernity has, to various extents, resulted in an inferiority-superiority complex among different schools of intellectuals in their pursuit of modernization.

Based on the above findings, I have concluded that Western perceptions of China, including Orientalist perceptions, have been internalized and naturalized into Chinese self-perceptions, albeit to various degrees and for various purposes. The question of understanding the Self has become the question of understanding the Other. In the eyes of the critics of national character, wittingly or not, the diversity and complexity of different nations in the West have been ignored, and a homogeneous cultural image that meets the requirement of an imagined strong modern nation has been created for the national Self to compare itself with: whereas the West has been perceived as adventurous, progressive, aggressive, and powerful, Chinese culture has been reduced to Confucianism, and Confucianism to servility and autocracy.
There are two points that need further clarification. Firstly, my conclusion does not suggest that the interaction of different intellectual perceptions has been a process in which Chinese intellectuals passively accept the concept of a stronger West and an inferior position of Chinese culture. As I have noted, for example, in the case of Liang Qichao’s “new people” thesis and Jiang Rong’s *Wolf Totem*, the Chinese incorporation of Western perceptions has been an eclectic process in which intellectuals actively selected, employed and re-invented some notions while at the same time rejected and disregarded others, for the eventual goal of finding the right place for the nation and the Self in the world.

Secondly, the Chinese discourse of national character is only one part of an ongoing interactive process. It has to be noted that the West as the Other has been used both in negative and positive light by different schools of Chinese thought; and the same intellectuals that once saw an inferior China through a Western lens could at other times use it as a mirror to reflect the positive self-image and to confirm Chinese superiority—Liang Qichao’s call to save Western civilization with Chinese wisdom, partly inspired by Western self-reflections after WWI, was a case in point.

*Returning to the Self*

The second half of this research has examined two different efforts to refute the discourse of national character, thereby presenting two other approaches to resolve the tension between the Self and the Other.

Chen Lai has taken issue with the tendency of self-orientalization—to interpret Chinese culture with an overriding Western, modernist discourse. To him, this tendency, as part of the profound hegemonic impact of Western knowledge and perceptions, has led to xenophilia and the inferiority complex in Chinese cultural identity.

It is in this context that Chen Lai asserts his “cultural subjectivity”. It is simultaneously a rectification of the tendency of self-negation and an attempt to reject a modernist view of culture. Chen is of the opinion that the Chinese cultural tradition should be viewed in its own historical context, independent from the normative framework of Western culture that has been drawn from its own historical experiences.

His notion of “cultural subjectivity” suggests a return to the Self—the local, the
indigenous, and the national tradition. As Chen himself points out, this return should be understood as part of the global trend of root-seeking. Within the West, this trend has given rise to various forms of critiques of modernity; and in other parts of the world, it has resulted in a growing assertiveness of local cultures and national tradition. The rise of cultural self-consciousness, be it nationalistic or post-colonial, is a “bent twig” that has been recently released from the hegemony of Western modernist perceptions of culture.

Qin Hui’s approach to overcome the cultural dichotomy of Self-Other takes a different point of departure. In his eyes, perceiving the Self through the lens of the Other, or vice versa, is not as problematic as failing to identify the true Self. He criticizes the discourse of national character for confusing the aesthetic, transcendent part of a nation’s historical legacy with the socio-political phenomenon of culture. While the former is the inherent feature of a nation—the true Self that cannot, and should not, be compared or simply uprooted, the latter is the temporary result of certain social constraints that can, and should, be changed with or without the inspiration from the Other.

Because Qin finds nothing wrong with the true Self as he identifies in the former category, he then tries to shift the focus to the latter, where he believes that the real problem lies. And in his opinion, the national character under criticism belongs to the latter category strictly. Here, he does not reject to view liberal principles as universal values, on the contrary, he believes that they are essentially things of human nature, rather than a special Western invention.

Both of their approaches try to guard a certain part of cultural tradition from the notion that there is something fundamentally wrong with the Chinese national character or the overall psychological make-up of the Chinese people. One way or another, both attempt to justify cultural particularity and to promote a pluralist view of culture; and in doing so, to liberate Chinese culture from the “shadow” of a Western normative framework. Therefore, they not only challenge the perception of Chinese culture as inferior to, and the follower of, modern Western culture; but also challenge the notion of the West as the sole representative of modernity.
2. The Problem of the Past

Next to the relations between the Self and the Other, the historical dimension in self-perceptions has been studied through the discourse of national character at the turn of both the 20th and 21st centuries. To better understand the views of the past in these two periods, the paramount significance of the past, or of history, has to be taken into account. Before the times of Smith and Liang, a tendency to romanticize the precedent in reflections of the present has been present in Chinese thinking. The Self used to be formed in its relations with past role models, for example, ancient sages; and the sense of self-fulfillment was at the same time achieved by glorifying the ancestors. In this sense, the Chinese past used to be the frame of reference for the evaluation of the present and for envisioning the future.

The encounter with the modern West and Western perceptions of China turned the focus of the Other from “the old” to “the new”, and the subject of learning shifted from ancient wisdom to foreign enlightenment. Both reformers and revolutionaries have been occupied with making new proposals to steer the nation towards what they believe as the right direction, and the discourse of national character has reflected the consequent condemnation of the past and aspiration for the new.

Negating the Old, Imagining the New

The propagation of national character reforms was clearly prompted by the idea that thought reforms, or reforms of the people, would create a new culture, which would then lay the foundation of socio-political transitions. In the case of Liang, at least according to his “new people” thesis, his cultural ambition to create a new people was not to be separated from his political ambition to build a new and strong nation-state, with a reformist political agenda grounded on a revolutionary cultural ideal to change the national psychological make-up.

Yet I have argued that Liang’s “new people” thesis was never a complete negation of the past. He had an eclectic approach, not only to Western thoughts, but also to the Chinese cultural tradition, because to “revive the existing cultural essence” was just as important to him as “to import the absent”. However, the reformist intention and the eclectic syncretism in Liang’s “new people” thesis were to a large extent lost in many
later interpretations of this thesis. While Liang Qichao in 1899 passionately predicted a young China to be the most powerful race in the world of the 20th century, the nation subsequently saw a century of revolutionary upheavals, rather than reformist projects, when it struggled its way towards fulfilling Liang’s dream. Liberal and Marxist cultural reformers after him made iconoclastic claims to denounce the nation’s past and cultural tradition.

The discourse of national character later drifted away from Liang’s syncretic approach and took a turn towards a radical bifurcation of “thought reform” and even “thought revolution”. Hu Shi proposed a “thorough Westernization”, and Chen Duxiu called for “the last awakening”—to awaken people from Confucian ethics. Mao Zedong later became a master of thought and cultural reform. It seemed that the only way to build a new culture would be to destroy the old. Once “cultural reform” became “cultural revolution”, few noted the romanticized image of Confucian culture as depicted in Liang’s fictional *The Future of New China*.

My analysis of cultural critiques in the reform era has suggested a similar revolutionary tendency, with Confucian culture being viewed by critics of the national character as the most fundamental obstacle to China’s road towards modernization. *River Elegy* described the yellow civilization as drawing its last breath, and Gan Yang in 1985 claimed that a “thorough, total and comprehensive” reform of the “overall national cultural psychological structure” was necessary to create a new and modern culture. In *Wolf Totem*, Jiang Rong had the ambition to turn the Chinese nation from “civilized sheep” into “civilized wolves” in order to survive the fierce competition around the world. To reform the national character has become the ultimate form of battling the old and the traditional.

As such, this research has shown that, in present day China, cultural critiques keep returning to an almost revolutionary approach in their perceptions of tradition. Such a discourse has identified Confucianism as, among others, the foundation of the people’s servility that has hindered the nation’s revival to greatness. Critics of the national character have imposed a social-Darwinist view on cultural tradition, holding Confucianism responsible for the lack of Socio-political progress as well as the unsatisfactory international status of Chinese culture.
Pride and Loathing in History

The criticism and even negation of the past have been saturated with a sense of urgency and a rather intense emotional dynamic. This research has identified the discourse of national character, accompanying the rise of a national self-consciousness, as largely created by the crisis mentality of intellectuals and their anxiety to reform the nation for the better—to become stronger and more modern. Consequently, it has demonstrated the entanglement of pride and loathing towards the nation’s historical legacy and cultural tradition, at the same time a mixed complex of superiority and inferiority towards the West.

As I have discussed, the fierce criticism of the national past has also revealed the cultural imagination of a glorious national future, which resembles, ironically, the past glory that was lost in recent history. Liang envisioned a peace conference in Nanjing where a Mr. Confucius was lecturing guests from all over the world, River Elegy ended with an image of the Chinese dragon emerging around the coastal regions, and even the nation of loathsome sheep described in Wolf Totem would eventually be revitalized with the wolf spirit. To borrow Vivienne Shue’s words, these alternating and paradoxical emotions are better understood as “continuing sub-themes within a larger saga—the saga of upholding the glory of the Sinic civilization”.

Furthermore, the intensity of such emotional dynamics also suggests that the intellectual search for a cultural identity is essentially a search for an individual identity. As the national Self and the personal self of the intellectual are closely linked together, the glory and dignity of Chinese culture becomes a matter of personal honor and dignity. Therefore, once the pride of national culture has been wounded, it becomes a moral obligation for intellectuals to resurrect it, and to find a rightful place for both the personal self and the national Self in history and in the world.

A Conservative Shift: History, Tradition and National Spirit

Whereas one school of thought tends to attribute the country’s problems to the national character, Confucianism, and cultural tradition in general, many others regard it

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problematic to appropriate the past in a such way that a Western universalist-style culture is propagated. The two rejections of the discourse of national character have led to the conclusion that the battle between “the old” and “the new” is an ongoing one. The intellectual debate of radicalism and conservatism is the most recent manifestation of such a battle: the 1990s saw a “thorough” intellectual shift from anti-traditionalism towards a “conservative style of thought”. With different schools of thought incorporating cultural tradition—Confucianism in particular—in their cultural blueprint, it seems that “the old” has returned to rectify the negative attitude towards it.

This rectification is a re-interpretation of history, of tradition, and of what the nation essentially is. When Qin Hui criticizes the cultural determinism in the discourse of national character, he maintains that history is an uncertain process. In his view, the outcome of history is not pre-determined by a nation’s cultural tradition, either positively or negatively. Thus, Confucianism does not explain China’s backwardness in modern history, nor is it responsible for political autocracy as the national character critics claimed.

In Chen Lai’s efforts to rectify cultural radicalism, he asserts tradition as an indispensable part of modern culture. He does not reject change or reform, but merely stresses that changes and reforms should be based on the understanding of a continuous past and with respect for historical continuity. Thus, undue allegations against cultural tradition, in his eyes, will give rise to a sense of inferiority and even xenophilia, which would in turn sabotage the nation’s political and cultural well-being.

In a way, in their rejection of equating cultural tradition to Confucianism to servility, both Chen and Qin are claiming their own version of tradition. They both deny the interpretation of ills in society as a manifestation of national defects. Instead, they categorize the problems identified by cultural critics as part of a social and historical phenomenon instead of something inherent in Chinese culture.

Furthermore, Qin has also re-interpreted cultural history, both ancient and modern. He argues that Chinese society in imperial times was one in which Legalism and Daoist cynicism, rather than Confucianism, prevailed. A similar revision was made to the Chinese-Western intellectual exchanges in the late Qing: by describing the movement of learning from the West as one initially to import liberal ideas to aid Confucian idealism, he justifies his rectification of liberal attacks on Confucianism.

710 Van Dongen, Goodbye Radicalism!, p. 241.
Whereas the critical discourse of national character perceives the elimination of cultural defects as the premise for modernization, to both Chen Lai and Qin Hui, the realization of modernization—though their understandings of modernization differ significantly—would provide a national condition for cultural change. In other words, contrary to what the national character critics claimed—“the ultimate solution is to reform the culture and the people”, they believe it is the social condition that has to be changed.

In doing so, they intend to rescue tradition from the critiques of the national character, and to advocate a certain part of tradition as a positive and transcendent national spirit. For Chen, the national spirit is embodied in Confucian ethics as a humanistic, relation-oriented philosophy, and to Qin, it is the altruistic idealism in the Confucian tradition that he strives to revitalize. Instead of revolting against cultural tradition, both intellectuals search for a cultural identity by re-negotiating and making peace with tradition.

3. Revival of Confucianism: Cultural Nationalism?

Confucianism has undoubtedly been the most fundamental issue in the discourse of national character, around which the rationales, perceptions, and sentiments have been centered. By analyzing contemporary cultural critiques, I have shown how Confucianism has been reduced to an over-simplified notion of a backward feudalistic ideology; and by exploring the rejections of this notion, I have discussed how Confucianism has been brought into a positive light as part of the national spirit.

This counter-discourse of national character reflects the most recent Confucian revival in mainland China, the significance of which has been widely noticed both at home and abroad. It has to be noted, as many have done, that this non-radical intellectual turn is contributed to not only by New-Confucian scholars, but also by Chinese liberals, including the so-called New-Left scholars, Marxists, post-modernists, and so on.

The meaning of a Confucian revival has been further complicated by state efforts to incorporate Confucianism into the official ideology of “Socialism with Chinese characteristics”: the Party-state's promotion of “its own affiliation with Confucian values”711 has made the return of Confucianism subject to interpretation of its

711 Davies, Worrying About China, pp. 133-134.
“suspicious involvement”.

From an international perspective, the return to tradition is also part of the global reflections of modernity that question the fundamental ideas, such as Enlightenment and scientific rationality, upon which the modern West has been based. The Confucian revival, then, as Dirlik describes, can be seen as “an articulation of native culture (and an indigenous subjectivity) against Euro-American cultural hegemony”.

As such, whereas Chinese critics of the national character have been very vigilant towards nationalistic sentiments, on the opposite side, the Confucian revival and “the identification with the national spirit” have been viewed as representing “a strong current of cultural nationalism”.

Indeed, Chen Lai uses Berlin’s metaphor of “the bent twig” to describe nationalism as a natural collective response towards Western cultural hegemony, just as Qin Hui defends “true nationalism” as a natural attachment towards the nation—a nation that he compares with “family”. Clearly, in their eyes, such a nationalism should be separated from political nationalism or popular nationalistic sentiments that are subject to state manipulation, therefore should be acknowledged as something not problematic. Yet is the term cultural nationalism adequate to make sense of the cultural perceptions of Chen Lai and Qin Hui?

I have previously argued that Levenson’s history-value thesis is limited, yet here it is helpful to understand the transforming and transformed intellectual perceptions of tradition. This study has suggested that their return to tradition and their identification with a distinctive and transcendent national spirit can be understood as a re-union of history and value, if, at the time of Liang, they were drawn apart by various forces.

Chen Lai stands firmly against any attempt to reduce Confucianism to a tool of autocratic rule. He interprets Confucianism as a religio-ethical philosophy with a humanistic orientation. Furthermore, he contends that such a human-relations focus is an antidote against the problematic alienation of the individual in modern times. Qin Hui, while lamenting the fate of Confucian philosophy as having suffered from the dual intrusion of Legalism and Daoist cynicism, remains dedicated to what he describes as the transcendent Confucian spirit of altruistic moral idealism.

712 Wang, *High Culture Fever*, p. 70.
For both, neither their emotional attachment nor their intellectual commitment to tradition is problematic. While history returns, its value has been reinterpreted in a way that is fundamentally different from the value that once drew Chinese intellectuals away from tradition as described by Levenson.

However, this return to the past and the Self does not signify a return to culturalism as an alternative to foreign barbarism. Rather, understanding the Confucian revival in the light of the discourse of national character, this research argues that these Chinese intellectual assertions of the intrinsic value of cultural tradition should also be viewed as voices to reject a cultural metamorphosis. In this sense, they are not simply a manifestation of cultural nationalism, but a rectification of self-negation and self-orientalization.

4. Confrontation of Perceptions: beyond the Intellectual Debate

The reform era has witnessed the rise and fall of different undercurrents that have shaped contemporary Chinese self-perceptions, bringing the century-old question of identity to a new context. Whereas the West, as the most powerful Other, has never left Chinese consciousness, the return of cultural tradition and Confucianism, the major features in the intellectual search for a cultural identity, has coincided with state efforts and popular sentiments to forge a sense of Chineseness.

As such, the negotiation between the past and the West remains the most important issue in Chinese self-perceptions and the Chinese search for a cultural identity. At the one end of the cultural spectrum, cultural iconoclasm tends to negate the past and calls for a radical reform of traditional culture, even national character. As dialectical responses to the anti-traditional tendency, many other schools of thought try to hold on to their belief in historical continuity and the right to cultural particularity without necessarily refusing to learn from the West.

Such unresolved tensions and the consequent adjustments in self-perceptions have been studied in the context of Chinese and Western perceptions. Western perceptions of China have gone through many transitions, taking turns throughout the course of Chinese-Western encounters. Most recently, the development of the Chinese economy, seen by many in the West in a positive light, has not eliminated the doubts about the rise of an authoritarian state as a global power. Despite continuous Chinese efforts to
promote a more positive international image and to boost its soft power worldwide, fundamental differences in the understanding of political-cultural values such as the form of government, human rights, etc. have affected Western perceptions of China. At times, the conflation of autocracy, servility and Chinese culture still echoes the voice of Arthur Smith from a century ago.

These perceptions have exerted longstanding and far-reaching influences on Chinese intellectuals as well as the general public. Since the late Qing and early Republican periods, the West has always been the most powerful Other in Chinese self-consciousness, which is a fact that no issue of political or cultural significance is able to steer away from. The presence of the Western Other has inspired many to learn from it, and at the same time also compelled many to overcome it.

The gap between Chinese and Western perceptions of each other is a result of an uneven flow of knowledge and perceptions over the last centuries. At the same time, it has drawn the two parts of the world closer, and in return created an ever-growing flow of knowledge and perceptions. Many in today’s China have recognized the so-called universal values as seen represented in Western culture, and also accepted Western notions and even perspectives in making sense of the modern world. It is justified to say that a Western-oriented worldview has become an important part of Chinese perceptions—perceptions of the world, of the West, and of China itself.

However, the gap between Chinese and Western understandings of China—of its reality, its future direction, and the path it will take towards that future—still causes trade, diplomatic, strategic, and cultural confrontations and even conflicts. Along with increasing exchanges, this gap has played a crucial role in shaping the Chinese negotiation of a cultural identity.

What has been studied are three different answers to the question of cultural identity. My examination of the national character discourse was intended to do justice to the intriguing phenomenon of self-negation; at the same time, this research has aimed to shed light on the conservative turn in the cultural realm of mainland China that certainly deserves more study than it has already attracted.

Aside from the three types of self-perceptions, many other intellectual perspectives and approaches are not included in this research. The fact that they have not been discussed here does not suggest that they play a less significant role in contemporary Chinese cultural debate. This study invites further research to examine the cultural viewpoints
of, for example, the Marxists, the so-called New-Leftists, and the post-modernists that request equal academic and intellectual attention.

On a further note, the formation of intellectual perceptions is interwoven with many other factors that shape the landscape of contemporary Chinese culture. While intellectuals contribute in their unique ways, for being self-reflective and vocal, and with an imposed and self-imposed sense of social responsibility, their elitest perspective has undoubtedly been affected by the fast-changing and interacting forces of the media, the state and the market. Taking all these in mind, this research has served to remind us that the more we know, the more we know we do not know.