Chapter 3

The Reception of Yan Fu in Twentieth-Century China

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I. Introduction: Yan Fu’s Historical Importance

Yan Fu (1854-1921) was born about the time Karl Marx said that China had finally been “opened up” to Western civilization, and that the collapse of the Qing Dynasty was imminent. Yet the monarchy managed to survive for more than half a century, struggling with rebellions, reforms and revolution until 1912. In those turbulent years of the late Qing and early Republican period, Yan Fu was an important figure, not because of any political or professional activity (his field was naval affairs), but because of his influence on the intellectual development of China. As Benjamin Schwartz, author of a renowned biography of Yan, put it, “Yen [Yan] Fu’s concerns . . . are significant concerns, and his efforts to cope with them are significant efforts. The problems he raises have profound and enduring implications for both China and the West.”
Yan was one of the pioneering scholars to seriously introduce Western social, economic and political ideas to China. He translated a number of classical works, namely Thomas Henry Huxley's *Evolution and Ethics* (Tianyan lun [The Theory of Natural Evolution], 1898), Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (Yuan fu [The Principles of Prosperity], 1901-1902), John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* (Qunji guanjie lun [The Boundary Between Self and Group], 1903), Herbert Spencer's *The Study of Sociology* (Qunxue yiyuan [The Study of Sociology], 1903), Edward Jenks's *A History of Politics* (Shehui tongquan, [A General Interpretation of Society], 1904), Montesquieu's *De l'Esprit des lois* (Fa yi [The Spirit of the Laws], 1904-1909), the first part of John Stuart Mill’s *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive* (Mule mingxue [Mill's Logic], 1905), and William Stanley Jevons' *Logic* (Mingxue qianshuo [An Introduction to Logic], 1909). Yan's endeavor was essentially unprecedented in that most previous translations of Western writings were of works on technology and religion. These were translated either by missionaries, who were helped by Chinese colleagues, or by Chinese students in Japan, who almost exclusively relied on Japanese translations of Western works. These Chinese translations were seldom pertinent to salient political issues and were not based on a serious understanding of Western civilization. Yan was different. Having lived in England, he used elegant classical Chinese to translate Western works on social, philosophical, and political topics, wrote extensively on current issues, and was astute and erudite in his efforts to assess Western civilization and its significance for the development of China. His oeuvre tremendously influenced Chinese literati who were eager to confront Confucian learning with Western theories. Contemporaries of Yan as well as the later May Fourth leaders all emphasized how much they had benefited from his writings.

Scholars from China, Japan and the Western countries have focused on two related issues, among others. The first deals with problems in Yan's translations. Whether blaming linguistic incompetence, political orientation, or the influence of his cultural heritage, critics have claimed that his translations suffered from many inaccuracies. They also pointed to stylistic defects allegedly impeding propagation of the liberal ideas he tried to bring to China. Translation questions, however, cannot be studied without consideration of the larger intellectual context in which Yan was operating. This brings us to the second issue, namely the traditional influences on Yan's works, as scholars explored the extent to which Yan's thought was shaped by Western ideas on the one hand, and by Chinese intellectual heritage on the other. The present article explores the complex historiographical
trends which gradually brought the two influences into focus.

II. Criticisms of Yan’s Translations

Many Chinese evaluations of Yan’s translations acknowledged his contribution in introducing Western learning. For instance, Liang Qichao said that Yan, as one of the earliest overseas Chinese students to learn a foreign language and understand Western civilization, had begun the task of introducing new ideas to China directly from the West. Cai Yuanpei said that, among those introducing Western philosophy during the last fifty years, “Yan Fu ranks as number one.” Hu Hanmin said, “Among the translations in the field of politics in recent years, Yan Fu’s works are the most valuable.” Kang Youwei regarded Yan as one of the two most talented translators in China.

Yan’s translations, however, not only won applause but also provoked heated debates. The criticisms of his translations have developed to form a complicated discussion including not only criticisms of his work but also criticisms of these criticisms. The bulk of the arguments revolve around Yan’s famous three principles of translation—“accuracy” (xin), “elegance” (ya) and “accessibility” (da). Almost all readers agree that Yan’s translations were elegant, but many question their accuracy and accessibility.

At first, critics agreed that Yan’s translations were elegant and accurate. Then, they concentrated on the problem of accessibility, discussing the relationship between elegance and accessibility and the extent to which Yan’s translations had been influential. Eventually, however, many reviewers spotted inaccuracies, debated their extent, and inquired into the nature of the conditions that had caused them. Earlier critics saw such inaccuracies as caused mainly by linguistic limitations or insufficient comprehension. Nevertheless, as time went on, they came to believe that Yan’s political outlook and cultural background had affected his understanding of the Western discourse. The most influential study on this topic was by Benjamin Schwartz, who drew a correlation between Yan’s political orientation and his translations.

Issues of Accessibility

Can Chinese readers comprehend Western thought by reading Yan’s translations? This issue is bound up with the development of literary and intellectual prose in modern China. In late Qing and early Republican China, when Yan was doing his translations, there were five
major prose styles. The first was "a style in which all the sentences run in pairs" (piantiwen), and was overburdened with flowery and often trite rhetoric. The second was "eight-legged essays" (baguwen), which were used in the civil service examinations. The third was the language used in the documents for bureaucratic communication, such as memorials. The fourth was "ancient writings" or pre-Qin prose (guwen), promoted by the Tongcheng School. Influenced by the eight famous essayists in the Tang and Song Dynasties, this School developed a list of rhetorical principles, such as "Literature is meant to convey the dao [or Confucian moral principles]" and "Literary writing should have its mood, rhythm, and color." The above-mentioned four prose styles were loosely called "literary Chinese" (wenyan). The fifth was the vernacular language (baihuawen), which had been used in writing novels from the Yuan through the Qing Dynasties. Inspired by Wu Rulun of the Tongcheng School in the late nineteenth century, Yan's prose tended to follow the tradition of "ancient writings."  

In the 1890s, those favoring a more colloquial prose style (baihua) started to criticize ancient writings. This turned into the famous debate between those favoring the vernacular and those who preferred literary Chinese. One of the origins of this debate can be traced to the vernacular magazines of the late 1890s and early 1900s edited by scholars like Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu. Authors in these magazines recommended using the vernacular as the basis for reform and as the most convenient way to convey new ideas to the common people. Ironically, however, even though Yan was a pioneer in introducing Western learning and promoting new values, he resisted the burgeoning vernacular movement and used ancient writings to translate Western works as well as to write essays and personal letters throughout his life. For him, there was no contradiction between the importance of Western-inspired progress and ancient writings as the most precious and civilized way to express important ideas in Chinese. Not surprisingly, therefore, many criticized Yan, holding that his prose style restricted his readership. In 1898, Wu Rulun wrote a preface for Yan's The Theory of Natural Evolution. He praised Yan's prose style as suitable for the task of translation but also pointed out: "When Master Yan presents us with a piece that has enduring prose value equal to the works of the pre-Qin scholars, I am worried that there exists a deep gap between him and his readers."  

Wu thus worried that Yan's elegant prose was not fully appreciated or even understood by some of the literati. Yet Wu might have been too pessimistic. The diary of Sun Baoxuan, a scholar in Shanghai, showed that he was able to read Yan's The Principles of Prosperity and to
obtain new ideas from it. His diary from May 1901 to January 1904 referred more than twenty times to his experience of reading *The Principles of Prosperity*. Sometimes he just copied parts of it, which he regarded as inspiring, and sometimes he recorded his reactions to the ideas in the book. More significantly, he did not complain about any language barrier. Also, reading *The Principles of Prosperity* changed Sun's intellectual orientation. For instance, he began to pay more attention to economic issues, such as how to "increase the circulation of commodities" and how to build railroads. Scholars like Sun were able to read Yan's translations, and in the process, enhanced their understanding of Western thought.\textsuperscript{14}

On the other hand, although Liang Qichao surely had no problem reading Yan's classical Chinese, he worried about the difficulties faced by younger students. In 1902, he wrote a book review of *The Principles of Prosperity* in *New Citizen Journal* (*Xinmin congbao*). Liang said although Smith's book was published more than one hundred years ago, it still exerted enormous influence on contemporary scholars. Liang not only praised Yan's translation for helping Chinese readers understand the first important book in the history of Western economics but also approved of Yan's translations of economic terms—"[Yan's translations of them] are precise, suitable, and should not be replaced." Moreover, Yan's comments, he held, were "mostly based on the newest theories, greatly enhancing readers' abilities to evaluate [the new ideas]." Nevertheless, Liang worried that Yan's language was too elegant to be understood by school students, and that the content of the book was too profound to be fully grasped. He concluded: "even though Master Yan is a worthy person, I cannot hide the fact that his elegant prose style will prevent his book from conveying 'civilized thought' to the citizens."\textsuperscript{15} In response Yan tried to rebut Liang's criticism: "Language is the tool for expressing thought and feeling. Coarse terms [i.e. the vernacular] cannot express sophisticated ideas and refined feelings." Moreover, "the expected readers of my translations are not young school students but the literati, who are familiar with the classics. So if there is a problem of accessibility, responsibility for it lies with the reader, not the translator."\textsuperscript{16}

It was not easy, however, for Yan to brush aside the problem of accessibility, because, in the late Qing, intellectuals were increasingly concerned about how to "enlighten the people" in order to save the nation. Ironically enough, one of the origins of this idea was Yan's own concept of "bringing about the enlightenment of the people" (*kai minzhi*) in 1895. After all, Yan himself translated Western works in order to raise the intellectual level of the citizenry. The citizenry,
however, included many who were unable to read Yan’s prose. The purpose of the “prose revolution” at the turn of the century was precisely to reach the less educated strata. Yan never addressed the contradiction between his own goal of enlightening the citizenry and his decision to reach out to an audience of literati.

This contradiction became more serious after the May Fourth Movement, as Hu Shi, one of the leaders of this movement, was acutely aware. In 1905, when Hu was fifteen years old, he read Yan’s *The Theory of Natural Evolution* and *The Boundary Between Self and Group*. Hu felt that Yan’s prose was too elegant to be understood by youngsters.17 As he saw it, the older literati found Yan’s translations elegant and readable, while the young people unfamiliar with ancient writings found them elegant but not readable. Hu, however, did not criticize Yan for lack of accuracy: “His [Yan’s] carefulness and seriousness in translating books is really admirable and can be taken as a model.”18 It should be noted that even Hu Shi, who was the most famous liberal in the Republican China and had a deep understanding of the English language and Western civilization, believed that Yan had accurately translated Western writings, including Mill’s liberal ideas.

Another famous liberal and leader of the May Fourth Movement, Cai Yuanpei, had a similar opinion. In an article written in 1924, Cai said that, although it was not easy for the average reader to understand Yan’s translations, the classical prose could still meet the needs of a significant number of intellectuals. As Cai said, Yan’s works “seem to be old-fashioned and his literary style is difficult to comprehend, but the standard with which he selected books and the way he translated them are very admirable even today.”19

The appreciation of Hu and Cai of Yan’s translations, however, was not typical of the May Fourth Movement as a whole. By the 1930s, the vernacular had become more popular, and so there were fewer readers interested in reading or even able to read Yan’s translations. The comments of Qu Qiubai and Lu Xun illustrated this point. In 1931, Qu wrote a letter to Lu:

> Yan Fu’s translations put “elegance” above “accuracy” and “accessibility.” Recently the Commercial Press reprinted the [eight] famous books translated by Yan. I have no idea what their intention was! It is as though they were playing a joke on China’s people and youths. How could the ideals of accuracy and accessibility be reached using classical Chinese?

> Lu Xun’s view was more qualified. He thought one should divide Yan's
works into two stages. Representative of the first stage was *The Theory of Natural Evolution*, which emphasized elegance and accessibility but downplayed accuracy. This approach was modeled after the methods used to translate the Buddhist sutras during the Six Dynasties. The second stage included *The Principles of Prosperity*, *The Boundary Between Self and Group*, *The Spirit of the Laws*, and *Mill's Logic*, which were modeled on the Tang translations of the Buddhist sutras, placing more emphasis on accuracy and less on elegance and accessibility. Lu Xun said: "When one first looks at them, one can barely understand the works in the second stage. . . . So far as I remember, the most difficult ones were *The Boundary Between Self and Group* and *Mill's Logic.*"²⁰ Lu Xun thus saw a dilemma—accuracy at the expense of elegance and accessibility, or vice versa. The criticisms regarding accessibility had pointed to the major problem Yan had not solved in trying to transfer ideas from one complex, changing intellectual world to another.

**Issues of Accuracy**

Another such problem was that of accuracy, and in time criticism of the translations came to focus more on this one. At first the complaints revolved around the lack of competence, such as an inadequate grasp of English and of the Western intellectual tradition and a tendency to paraphrase rather than to translate exactly. Wu Rulun was the first to bring up the question of inaccuracy. Having read *The Theory of Natural Evolution* before publication, Wu argued that Yan failed sufficiently to respect the content of what he translated because he wanted to use his work to influence the thinking of the readers. Wu said translation was different from writing a book. If one wrote a book, one could write whatever one liked, but if one translated a book, one had to respect the original text. Thus Wu criticized Yan for replacing Huxley's references to Western historical or literary *loci classici* with similar Chinese examples. He said, "Huxley had no ideas about these [Chinese] events and persons. . . . it would be better [for Yan] to translate the original references faithfully."²¹

The famous scholar Wang Guowei, who had a particularly brilliant grasp of Western thought, appreciated Yan's translations on the whole. Yet he also picked up inaccuracies. In an article in 1905, he gave several examples of inaccuracies, such as translating *Evolution and Ethics* as *The Theory of Natural Evolution*, ignoring "ethics" in the title, "evolution" appearing as *tianyan* (natural evolution or heaven's progress), "sympathy" as *shan xianggan* (good at having feelings of
mutual appreciation), and “space and time” as yu (infinite space) and zhou (infinite time). He felt these translations were imprecise and loaded with meanings from Chinese culture.22

Fu Sinian was a Beijing University student in the late 1910s and a supporter of the May Fourth Movement. He lived in England and Germany for seven years (1919-1926) studying history, linguistics, experimental psychology, mathematics, and other subjects. Remembered best for introducing Rankian historiography and advocating the values of democracy and liberty among university students, Fu said Yan did not translate Western works word for word but rather shifted around the passages of the original text.23 According to Fu, Yan was paraphrasing and not translating, and his translation sacrificed accuracy for accessibility.24

As Chinese scholars became more knowledgeable about the West, they increasingly questioned Yan’s translations. A good example was Qian Zhongshu, who was famous in China for his deep understanding of the languages and civilization of the West. In 1948, he questioned Yan’s understanding of Western thought:

Yan Fu was not a profound person. His grasp of Western learning reflected this characteristic. The contents of the books he translated, such as those by Spencer, Mill, and Huxley, are not so elevated as the language he used. His œuvre was limited by his vision and interests.25

Declining to be more specific, Qian also briefly mentioned that Yan Fu and Lin Shu had a similar problem, that of using their own judgment to change the contents of the original texts. Thus their translations turned out to be “literary creations.” 26 Apart from this problem of incompetence or irresponsibility, some scholars criticized Yan for distorting the Western texts in the interest of expressing his own political concerns. A good example was the use of social Darwinism, to emphasize his concern for the building of a wealthy and powerful Chinese nation and so making democracy or individual freedom secondary. The first scholar to make this point was He Lin (1902-1991). In a book published in 1945, He Lin said: “Yan was not interested in any truths set forth in the doctrines he translated. He was just using these doctrines as medicine for China’s illness.” Therefore Yan translated them selectively:

When he translated the texts on the theory of evolution, he emphasized the concepts of “the weak are the prey of the strong”
and “survival of the fittest” to warn the Chinese people. He introduced British utilitarianism with the purpose of encouraging the Chinese people to search for wealth and power. As for the former theory, he ignored its biological and embryological aspects. As for the latter, he neglected democratic ideas stressing laissez-faire, tolerance, liberty, and equality, along with ideas about social reform, social welfare, and the practical improvement of living conditions.  

Benjamin Schwartz, perhaps without knowing He Lin’s work, shared this perspective. In his book *In Search of Wealth and Power* (1964), Schwartz held that Yan was more interested in the pursuit of the wealth and power of the state and the importance of group solidarity than individual liberty. Discussing Yan’s translation of Mill’s *On Liberty*, he described it as “inevitably paraphrastic, and the paraphrasing embodies striking examples of the unconscious adoption of Mill’s thought to Yen [Yan] Fu’s concerns.” Distorting the original text, according to Schwartz, Yan suggested that “the value of individual liberty lies in its power to advance the wealth and power of the nation-state.” In other words, Yan did not understand the Western concept of the individual and mistakenly regarded individual liberty as just a means with which to create a wealthy and powerful state. This problem included “the forcing of many of Mill’s ideas into a framework of Spencerian categories.” Criticisms raised by Schwartz dominated Chinese and Western historiography for more than three decades. Works on Yan’s thought by Chinese scholars such as Xu Gaoru, Lin Zaijue, and many others were all influenced by Schwartz’s interpretation. 

Still another major cause of inaccuracy came to be discussed, as some scholars pointed to the influence of tradition on Yan’s way of thinking and style of writing. They argued that because Yan made excessively use of traditional ethical-philosophical categories and terms, he failed to convey various specifically English ideas or nuances. Some even argued that Yan’s misunderstandings were due to epistemological barriers, such as a failure to grasp Mill’s reasoning. In an article examining Yan’s translation published in 1923, the famous philosopher Zhang Junmai noted that the terms from classical Chinese were always culturally loaded with specific philosophical connotations. The meaning of a Western idea could be distorted when such Chinese terms were used to convey it. For instance, Huxley said that “the state of nature, at any time, is a temporary phase of a process of incessant change.” Yan Fu used *yunhui* to translate “a process of incessant
change.” Yunhui, taken from the Neo-Confucian cosmology developed by Shao Yong, who lived in the 1000s, referred to a cosmically predestined change. In the late Qing some reformers used this term to describe the new situation after 1860.\textsuperscript{31} Zhang felt that while Huxley’s words were simple, clear and scientific, Yan’s translation called to mind China’s traditional cosmology and metaphysics.\textsuperscript{32}

A philosopher, Taiwan’s Lin Anwu, took a similar view. Comparing Yan’s translation of Mill’s \textit{On Liberty} with the original, Lin says that the classical Chinese used by Yan contained too many ethical connotations. Thus his translation turned Mill’s primarily logical argument into an ethical one.\textsuperscript{33} A similar point was made by Tian Modi (Matthias Christian, an Austrian, then a graduate student in Taiwan) when he analyzed Yan’s \textit{The Theory of Natural Evolution}. He found discrepancies between Huxley’s original text and Yan’s translations. Some alterations were deliberately designed by Yan for the sake of accessibility. For example, Yan deleted some unimportant passages, changed some of the original content, and added his own explanations of Huxley’s work. Tian said that another kind of discrepancy probably went unnoticed by Yan himself and stemmed from his use of classical Chinese. Tian suggested that it was difficult to use classical Chinese to express analytical concepts and logical relationships, the situation being comparable to “using Zhang Daqian’s [a famous contemporary artist] way of painting to copy a piece by Picasso.” As a result, objective and scientific descriptions were turned into passages with an emotional and sentimental flavor, and precise words became vague notions.\textsuperscript{34}

III. The Influence of Tradition on Yan’s Thought

Scholars have also focused on the intellectual trends that influenced Yan and sought to assess to what extent his thought was related to, or departed from, the Chinese tradition. Yan had enormous admiration for the modern West, and wanted China in some basic sense to emulate the Western world. In looking to the West for inspiration, how far did he break with the cultural tradition he had grown up with? To what extent was he still pursuing the modes of thought integral to this tradition as the most effective way to realize his goals?

Certainly Schwartz argued that intellectual elements from both the East and the West were intertwined in Yan’s mind.\textsuperscript{35} Regarding Yan as having “roots in the traditional culture,” Schwartz said: “Yen [Yan] Fu is, of course, deeply immersed not only in Chinese culture but also in [the] particularities of China’s social, political, and intellectual situation.
at the end of nineteenth century. . . . Yen [Yan] Fu certainly felt at home with Confucian family morality and comfortable with the principle of authority in general.⁴⁶ Schwartz also noted Yan's links with the non-Confucian parts of the tradition: "his praises of Confucius are intermingled with his invocation of Legalism and of the 'tough men' of Chinese history."⁴⁷ Besides his Confucian and Legalist links, Yan inclined toward Daoism: "In the end, Yen [Yan] Fu's deepest commitment within the world of Chinese culture probably remains what it had been in the past—the commitment to the mystical strain in Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu."⁴⁸ This mystical aspect of Yan's thought was regarded by Schwartz as a "religious" and "ultimate" perspective, leading to a mixture of Eastern and Western elements.⁴⁹

Schwartz argued that this intercultural religious mix was in turn mixed in even with Yan's "most aggressively Westernizing mood":

The "Inconceivable" remains for Yen [Yan] Fu the source of ultimate comfort and consolation, even in this, his most aggressively Westernizing mood. It is perhaps not easy to explain this Janus-like attitude. Yet it is there. One face is oriented toward wealth and power, toward the cult of dynamism, energy, self-assertion, struggle, and the realization of all human capacity, while the other face still seeks solace for life's sufferings in a mysticism which radically denies the significance of the whole phenomenal world and all its works. For Yen [Yan] Fu the same "Unknowable" which lies behind the whole process of evolution is also the ultimate refuge from life's storms.⁵⁰

From this perspective, Yan remained "imbedded in his Western premises."⁵¹ Schwartz pointed out that Yan's authoritarian tendency and his turn toward conservatism in his later years could be explained by "a most rigorous logic from the particular Western ideas which he espoused, and not simply from the Chinese 'love of the old.'"⁵² In other words, even though Schwartz alluded to the intertwining picture of the East and the West in Yan's thinking, Yan in his eyes was mainly a bearer of foreign ideas, representing discontinuity with the tradition. Agreeing with Schwartz, Chang Hao also emphasized the discontinuity between Yan's thought and the tradition:

Yen [Yan] was interested in the Western values of vitality and struggle because, in his view, these values were the key to the wealth and power of Western nations. By the same token, Yen [Yan] was led to believe that the lack of these animating values in the Chinese tradition accounted for the weakness of China. . . . It
is little wonder that Yen [Yan] became critical of both the cultural and political traditions of China.\(^43\)

In the *Cambridge History of China*, Chang further explained:

Thus in terms of both world view and basic values, Yen [Yan] Fu was an unreservedly ardent admirer of Western civilization—which led him to unrelenting criticism of Chinese tradition. While he saw an overflow of collective energy in the modern West, he saw only an atrophy of dynamism and public spirit in the Chinese tradition. . . . It is not surprising then that he almost completely refuted the indigenous trends of thought in his own time, not only attacking the mechanistic requirements of the examination system but dismissing likewise all the current schools of Confucianism as intellectual waste. The remedy to China’s ills lay only in Western ideas and values.\(^44\)

By the mid-1970s and 1980s, however, a major trend began to develop emphasizing a rich variety of continuities between pre-modern and modern Chinese thought. Works by Lü Shiqiang and Wang Ermin in Chinese and by Thomas A. Metzger and Lin Yü-sheng in English showed that modern Chinese intellectuals were strongly influenced by various Confucian ideals and inherited modes of thinking.\(^45\) For instance, Lü Shiqiang argued that the Confucian tradition was not an obstacle to modernization in China. On the contrary, many intellectuals were inspired by this intellectual heritage to absorb Western learning and to create a new innovative momentum.\(^46\)

Wang Ermin’s research supported this view of continuity. He emphasizes that because Chinese intellectuals in the late Qing were deeply influenced by the Chinese tradition, they tended to use traditional conceptual frameworks to understand Western ideas and the Western impact. For example, in the late Qing many scholars used the concept of *yunhui* (cosmically predestined change) to describe China’s new situation after 1860. As already noted, Yan emphasized this idea. Yan said: “China is experiencing the greatest change since the Qin dynasty, and the reasons for the change are unknown. But if I had to name one, it is *yunhui*. Once the force of *yunhui* is at work, even a sage cannot alter its course.” Wang explains that the term “*yunhui*” was developed by Shao Yong in the Song Dynasty. It refers to a cosmic power which effects momentous historical changes, and which people cannot resist.\(^47\) The strength of Wang’s study is that he examines the views of many intellectuals on this particular issue. Thus he shows that Yan’s concept of *yunhui* was shared by many late Qing scholars.
Metzger agrees with Lü Shiqliang and Wang Ermin. Furthermore, in Metzger's view, modern Chinese intellectuals by and large inherited the moral goals and aspirations of the Confucian tradition; what they accepted from "Western learning" was mainly new technologies and institutions to pursue these goals and aspirations more effectively. Wang and Metzger both point out that at the turn of the century Chinese intellectuals came to be filled with a new optimism about the imminence of great moral-political-economic progress, and that this optimism had traditional roots. As Metzger puts it, "this new optimism, logically consistent with the Confucian belief that the highest moral-political goals are attainable in the present, was the indispensable basis of Mao's utopianism and personal appeal."

In the 1990s, Mainland scholars such as Li Zehou, Gu Xin, and Jin Guantao, often influenced by Lin Yu-sheng, also came to emphasize a variety of such continuities. Yu Yingshi emphasizes discontinuity when he described the modern Chinese mainstream as "discovering" Western values different from the Chinese tradition. But he has also emphasized the continuity of the latter with the former. Moreover, in his recent writings, he has emphasized the continuity: "Chinese perceptions of [Western] 'democracy,' 'science,' and 'scientism' are in fact mostly old ideas in modern disguise. . . . we tended to accept Western civilization through the intellectual framework of Chinese tradition." Thus the theme of continuity has come to be developed in different ways, whether from normative standpoints viewing continuity as either desirable or undesirable or from more simply empirical standpoints.

Chang Hao's second book represents part of this new trend appreciating the continuities with tradition. In it, he examines the moral-spiritual thought of four major figures of the transitional era (1895-1911) and finds a complicated relationship between the tradition-rooted moral-spiritual thought and their pursuit of the Faustian-Promethean ethos of the modern West. In his analysis of Tan Sitong's thought, he says:

All of T' an's [Tan's] observations reflect a spotty, limited knowledge of modern Western civilization, but they do represent an awareness of what Benjamin Schwartz calls the Faustian-Promethean ethos of the modern West. It is the fulfillment of a strain of dynamism and vitality that he had already admired in the philosophies of Chang Tsai and Wang Fu-chih. These philosophies, in short, provided a standpoint from which T'an [Tan] was able to view the exuberant and expansive Western
view of life and the world as something not entirely extraneous to Chinese cultural tradition.  

From this standpoint the moral-spiritual concerns of the late Qing intellectuals spilled over into their conceptualization of Western social and political ideals. In recent years, this standpoint has been further developed in numerous studies. Li Qiang's 1993 doctoral thesis on Yan also emphasizes continuities with the tradition. Li argues that Yan combined ideas from the West, such as social Darwinism, liberalism, and utilitarianism, with various ideas taken from the Chinese tradition—including the Confucian ideals of harmony and civilization, Xun Zi's way of combining voluntarism with belief in a natural order, Legalism's way of separating political from moral calculations, and a degree of utopianism. Moreover, he seems to agree with Metzger that Yan saw Western ways as means to pursue the essential goals of the Confucian tradition.

Ouyang Zhesheng's 1994 book on Yan also emphasizes continuity. This book is part of the recent change whereby Yan's thought has come to be appreciated rather than denounced by Mainland scholars. What Ouyang especially appreciates is Yan's lifelong effort to combine Chinese learning with Western theories. Ouyang disagrees with Wang Shi and Zhou Zhenfu who believe that Yan turned from Westernization to "feudalism," and with Chang Hao who emphasizes the gap between Yan's thought and the tradition. Liu Guisheng, Ouyang's mentor and a history professor at Beijing and Qinghua University, sums up this approach in his preface to Ouyang's book:

Yan Fu dealt with Confucianism by praising Song learning and criticizing Han learning. In the realm of Song Neo-Confucianism, he praised the Cheng-Zhu school and criticized the Lu-Wang school. But in his discussion of Wang Yangming, he adopted a critical approach, evaluating different ideas differently. For instance, Yan disagreed with Wang Yangming's idealism but agreed with his ethical practice of "viewing the people's hunger and drowning as though he himself were experiencing it." . . . Where can we find that Yan Fu rejected Confucianism in a wholesale manner? . . . Nor can we see that Yan Fu dismissed "all the current schools of Confucianism as intellectual waste."

Liu and Ouyang argue that, during Yan's lifetime, Western learning and Chinese learning interacted, "merged and were used to interpret each other" (jiaorong hushi). Neither negated the other in any wholesale way.
Wang Hui’s 1997 article discusses the interaction of Western and Chinese learning in Yan’s mind. Wang especially emphasizes the linking of the natural and the moral worlds in Neo-Confucianism, the concept of non-action in Daoism, and the importance of logic in the Book of Changes. For Wang, these were the traditional views that Yan adopted as a standpoint from which to criticize the Western modernity he introduced.54 I should add that my recent books on Yan Fu and Liang Qichao also emphasize the continuity between the tradition and the way in which these two intellectual leaders conceptualized the course that China should take.55 Thus, there has been a change in the interpretation of Yan’s relation to the intellectual tradition, emphasis on discontinuity having given way to a stress on continuity.

IV. Conclusion

These historiographical problems allow one to think of the further work needed on Yan Fu. Yan’s historical role was so complex not only because the biography of any pivotal intellectual figure is not easy but also because the political crisis he responded to was combined with a major case of what Ralph Linton called “cultural diffusion,” the intersection or confluence of one cultural pattern with another.56 Cultural diffusion was bound to be messy, and despite his brilliance, Yan’s translations suffered from many problems, including difficulties in the popular propagation of the foreign ideas he wanted to express in Chinese. The exact nature of his problems in translation still merited attention. Did he or did he not succeed in grasping the “Western premises” in which, Schwartz claimed, his thought came to be “imbedded”?57 If he did not, what was it that eluded him? More questions are waiting to be answered.

Notes

3. For the translation about scientific, social and political books from the West before Yan, see Xiong Yuezhi, Xixue dongjian yu wan Qing shehui (The gradual introduction of Western learning to the East and late Qing society)
(Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1994).


5. Liang Qichao, "Qingdai xueshu gailun" (Trends in the Qing period) (Taipei: Zhonghua shuju, 1974), 71-72.

6. Cai Yuanpei, "Wushi nianlai Zhongguo zhi zhexue" (Chinese philosophy in the last fifty years), in *Zuixin wushinian* (The last fifty years), ed. The House of Shenbao (Shanghai: The House of Shenbao, 1923), 1.

7. Hu Hanmin, "Shu Houguan Yanshi zuixin zhi zhengjian" (Describing the recent political views of Mr. Yan from Houguan, Fujian), *Minbao* (People's tribune) 2 (1905), 1, 7.

8. The other one was Lin Shu (1852-1928). See Kang Youwei's poem in *Yongyen* 1, no. 7 (1913), section on poems, 1. Qian Zhongshu has analyzed Lin Shu's contributions and limitations in translation. Qian Zhongshu, "Lin Shu de fanyi" (Lin Shu's translation), in *Qi zhi ji* (A collection of various essays [by Qian Zhongshu]) (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1995), 79-117.


10. The Tongcheng School, primarily a literary school, was also concerned with the socio-moral meaning of Confucianism. The members of this school attacked the School of Evidential Research and supported the School of Song Learning. Chang Hao, *Liang Chi-ch'ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 18.

11. Yan Fu became Wu Rulun's student in 1880, one year after he came back from England. They then developed a close friendship. See Liang Yiqun. "Yan Fu yu Wu Rulun" (Yan Fu and Wu Rulun), in *Yan Fu yu Zhongguo jindahua xueshu yantaohui lunwenji* (Symposium on Yan Fu and China's modernization), ed. Fujian sheng Yan Fu yanjiuhui (Fuzhou: Haixia weny chubanshe, 1998), 567-77.


13. Wu Rulun, "Xu" (Preface), in *Tianyan lun* (The theory of natur
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17. Hu Shi, *Sishi zishu* (A self-account at forty) (Taipei [Taipei]: Yuan dong tushu gongsi, 1959), 49-50. It is noteworthy that Hu did not say it was difficult for him to read Yan Fu’s works.


20. The correspondence between Qu Qiubai and Lu Xun is collected in *Lu Xun quanji* (Complete works of Lu Xun) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1958), vol. 4, 370-79.


26. Qian Zhongshu, “Lin Shu de fanyi,” 87. This article was first published in 1964.


29. Ibid., 67-68, 73-74, 134, 141.

30. Xu Gaoruan, “Yan Fu xing de quanwei zhuyi jiqi tong shidai dui cixing sixiang zhi pipan” (Yan Fu’s authoritarianism and the criticism of this type of thought in his era), in *Jindai Zhongguo sixiang renwu lun: Ziyou zhuyi* (Collected essays on modern Chinese thought and figures: liberalism), ed. Zhou Yangshan (Taipei [Taipei]: Shibao wenhua chuban gongsi, 1980), 137-64. Lin


32. Zhang Junmai, “Yan Shi Fu shuru zhi sida zhexuejia xueshuo ji xiyang zhexue zhi bianqian” (Four major philosophical theories imported by Yan Fu and changes in Western philosophy), in *The House of Shenbao*, ed., *Zaijin wushinian*, 1.


37. Ibid., 235-36.

38. Ibid., 236.

39. Actually, the relationship between Buddhism and Yan Fu’s intellectual outlook is not close. This is distinctive since late Qing intellectuals such as Tan Sitong, Liang Qichao, Zhang Binglin, Liu Shipei, and others all admired Buddhism to a great extent. Yan’s lack of interest in Buddhism probably due to the reason that, influenced by empiricism, Yan was practical and hostile to metaphysics. Ibid., 104-5.

40. Ibid., 105-6.

41. Ibid., 170.

42. Ibid., 84.


54. Wang Hui, “Yan Fu de sange shijie” (Yan Fu's three worlds), *Xueren*

