The May Fourth Movement Redefined*

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I

The May Fourth Movement of 1919 was an epochal event in modern Chinese history. It marked the beginning of China's modern revolutionary era, and a new stage after the Republican Revolution of 1911. It was both anti-imperialist and anti-warlord, and represented the reaction of the Chinese people to the turbulent new forces unleashed by the First World War. In specific protest against the terms of the Versailles Peace Treaty as they affected China, and against the terms of Japan's infamous 'Twenty-one Demands', huge student demonstrations were held in Peking on 4 May 1919 to denounce the pro-Japanese Peking government. This revolutionary tide soon spread rapidly throughout China, spearheading a rapid growth of mass consciousness and cultural change, and culminating in the founding of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921, in the reorganization of the Kuomintang in 1924, and the establishment of a united front between the Kuomintang and the Chinese Communist Party. It is the very importance of the May Fourth Movement (MFM) as well as its manifold repercussions and ramifications, which have complicated the problems of defining, interpreting, and evaluating the movement per se. The definition of its true nature and character, the clear identification of its actual leadership, and the realistic appraisal of its scope and achievements have all become matters of dispute. Ideological commitment, political ties, or professional interest have too often clouded the objectivity of individuals who have studied the movement—and hence their interpretations of it.

In this paper I shall try to clarify certain points of view about the nature of the movement and to establish a basis upon which the MFM may be understood as neither the same as the New Culture Movement (NCM), nor, as alleged by some of the Communist writers, a movement inspired by the Russian Revolution and led by the Communist intelligentsia. Rather, it is primarily a patriotic protest movement of the

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Chinese people for direct political action, and in its collaboration with the new cultural ‘thought’ movement, rendered an invaluable service to the final dissolution of old Chinese tradition and the birth of a true Chinese nation.

II

The misconception of the MFM as synonymous with the NCM began, I believe, with the earliest liberal or independent view of the MFM, or at least the cultural aspects of the MFM, as a ‘Chinese Renaissance’.1 As early as 1915 a leading Shanghai journalist, Huang Yuan-yung, had begun efforts to promote a new literature which would ‘bring Chinese thought into direct contact with the contemporary thought of the world, thereby to accelerate its radical awakening’.2 This idea of reforming Chinese literature in accordance with Western models soon received favourable responses from China’s leading young intellectuals—men like Ch’en Tu-hsiu, Li Ta-chao, and Hu Shih. Their subsequent efforts to bring about the adoption of the vernacular in writing, and to introduce Western thought to China, had gradually brought about great advances in the awakening of the Chinese intellectuals all over the country. Soon there was a rapid expansion of Chinese publications of new books, translations and periodicals, and a growing enthusiasm for new thoughts and new ideas among the Chinese youth. By 1919 a Chinese Renaissance was truly in the making.3

However, this significant phenomenon of cultural and social change in this period took place prior to the occurrence of the May Fourth Incident. When the scholars later referred to this phenomenon, clearly they were not really discussing the MFM, but the NCM,4 which rejected

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1 To a certain degree, the characteristics of China’s new culture movement resembled those of the European Renaissance, namely: (a) both faced semi-medieval economic and social conditions; (b) both faced the vernacular problem; (c) both expressed the need to emancipate the individual from the bondage of traditional ideas, institutions and customs. See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1960, pp. 338–9.

2 Huang remarked that ‘the basic ideals of world thought must be related to the life of the average man. The method seems to consist in using simple (plain) and simplified language and literature for wide dissemination of the ideas among the people. Have we not seen that historians regard the Renaissance as the foundation of the overthrow of mediavalism in Europe?’ *Ibid.*, p. 272.

3 Both Ch’en Tu-hsiu and Hu Shih, through their writings during the period 1915–18, expressed in *Hsin ch’ing-nien* (New Youth) their feelings that a Chinese Renaissance was in the making, and they pointed out the similarity between the current Chinese literary movement and the Renaissance in Europe.

4 The designation ‘New Culture Movement’ gained common usage in the half-year
old Chinese tradition in favour of modern Western thought. The NCM therefore was primarily cultural in content, 'thought' oriented rather than 'action' oriented.

The term 'May Fourth Movement' first came into use with the students and the press shortly after the May Fourth Incident (MFI) and was applied only to a series of political actions, such as the student demonstration in Peking on 4 May and the associated nation-wide events which immediately followed the Incident—most notably the boycott of Japanese goods, the general strikes, and the refusal of the signing of the Peace Treaty at Versailles. Since then the term 'May Fourth Movement' has become almost interchangeable with the term 'May Fourth Incident'. Only in later years did the term gradually acquire a broader meaning. Thus, for example, author Li Ch'ang-chih, writing in 1944, came to regard the movement not merely as a popular protest which took place on the fourth day of May, but also as a 'cultural process resulting from China's contact with Western civilization'. He viewed the MFI as 'but a signal in this process'. Pao Tsun-p'eng, writing on the history of the Chinese youth movement, considered that the essence of the MFM was the same as the NCM. In his opinion, the MFM was but 'a passing stage' in the entire NCM. Chow Tse-tsung, writing on this subject, defined the movement in a far broader sense. He said the movement was:

... a complicated phenomenon including the 'new thought tide', the literary revolution, the student movement, the merchants' and the workers' strikes, and the boycott against Japan, as well as other social and political activities of the new intellectuals, all inspired by the patriotic sentiments after the Twenty-one Demands and the Shantung resolution, and by the spirit of Western learning and the desire to re-evaluate tradition in the light of science and democracy in order to build a new China. It was not a uniform or well-organized movement, but rather a coalescence of a number of activities often with divergent ideas, though not without its main currents.

Chow regarded the movement as 'an intellectual revolution in modern China'.

Not quite as all-embracing as Li, Pao and Chow in the interpretation of the movement, Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Li Ta-chao, the early Chinese following the May Fourth Incident. The editor of New Tide, in December 1919, did indicate that their movement was a 'culture movement'. By the beginning of 1920, the term became popular. Ibid., p. 194.


Chow, op. cit., p. 5.
Communist leaders who played a prominent role in the NCM, recognized the political significance of the MFM, but rendered quite divergent interpretations about the movement. Li, writing a few months after the MF Incident, described the event as a patriotic movement 'against the Great-Asianism and aggression, but not for hating the Japanese'.\(^9\) Ch’en, writing in 1938, came to regard the MFM as one of the related events of the ‘whole era of democratic revolution’ which had begun with the Republican Revolution of 1911 and was still continuing.\(^10\)

Mao Tse-tung, in his first discussion of the MFM, seems to have a better understanding of the movement.\(^11\) Writing in 1939 on the subject of the MFM, Mao differed from the views expressed by Ch’en and Li. He considered the movement as one of the manifestations of China’s bourgeois-democratic revolution against imperialism and feudalism,\(^12\) and a definite step beyond the Revolution of 1911.\(^13\) He pointed out that the movement was actually a union of China’s working class, the


\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 347–8. However, Ch’en may either have failed to recognize the social significance of the movement, or may simply have wished to stress the intellectual aspect of the movement. He not only identified the MFM with that of the NCM, but also noted that ‘the MFM had had the defect of being mainly carried on by young intellectuals and not by the working masses’. Ibid., p. 348. Actually, as we know, the movement did have a popular base, particularly in its Shanghai phase.

The National Student Union, writing in 1926, remarked that the MFM was ‘the first time we engaged in a courageous popular movement’. (The italics are mine.) See Chung-kuo hsüeh-sheng, No. 25, 1 May 1926, p. 167.

\(^11\) He was also among the first to recognize several other significant aspects of the movement at this early stage; e.g., the importance of the coalition and mobilization of the various social forces to form a united front against Japanese imperialism and Peking warlordism; the importance of the intellectuals’ leadership of the proletariat; and the importance of the students and teachers as the great reservoir of the Chinese revolution.

\(^12\) Mao’s interpretation of the MFM as anti-imperialist and anti-feudal may contain little that is original. Prior to 1926 (the Northward Expedition) the two terms commonly used by Chinese writers to denote the two arch-enemies of the Chinese people were: ‘brute force’ (ch’iang-ch’üan) and ‘militarism’ (wu-li wan-neng chu-i). But since 1926, the terms ‘imperialism’ and ‘feudalism’ were clearly adopted by Chinese writers to replace the old terms. Interview with Professors T’ao Hsi-sheng and Lao Kan in Los Angeles 5 May 1967. See also Mu Wu, ‘Wu-yueh ti-i-chou’, Chung-kuo hsüeh-sheng, No. 24, 24 April 1926, p. 156; and Chung Lin, ‘Wu-ssu yu Chung-kuo min-tsu yun-tung’, Chung-kuo hsüeh-sheng, No. 25, 1 May 1926, p. 177. Both writers writing in 1926 had already regarded the MFM as an anti-imperialist, anti-warlord and anti-traditional popular movement led by the students.

\(^13\) According to Mao, during the Revolution of 1911, there was a total lack of mass participation, whereas the MFM had the support of the masses. See Mao Tse-tung, ‘Min-chung ti ta-lien ho’, Hsiang-chiang p’ing-lun, first issue, July 1919. Cited in Wu-ssu shih-ch’i ch’i-k’an chieh-shao, Peking, 1958.
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student masses, and the newly rising national bourgeoisie. However, he did not try to equate the MFM with the NCM, but noted that the MFM was later transformed into a movement for cultural reform.

Then, writing a year later in his essay on ‘New Democracy’, Mao elaborated on the subject and clearly set forth the Communist version of the movement. He stated that ‘the MFM was an anti-imperialist as well as an anti-feudal revolutionary movement.’ The movement had served as the dividing line between ‘old democracy’ (first eighty years before the MFM) and ‘new democracy’ (twenty years after the MFM) in China. He said the reason for this division was that:

(1) Before the MFM of 1919, the political leaders in the Chinese bourgeois-democratic revolution were the Chinese petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie. ... After the MFM, although the Chinese national bourgeoisie continued to participate in the revolution, the political leaders of China’s bourgeois-democratic revolution belonged no longer to the Chinese bourgeoisie, but to the Chinese proletariat.

(2) Before the MFM, the struggle on China’s cultural front was a struggle between the new culture of the bourgeoisie and the old culture of the feudal class. After the MFM, there was born in China an entirely new cultural force—the cultural thought of Communism under the leadership of the Chinese Communists. The new Western knowledge from the natural and social sciences, useful only to the bourgeois class, thus came to be replaced by the Communist world view and the Communist theory of social revolution.

But Mao wanted to give credit where it was due. This new cultural revolution, he admitted, was ushered in as the result of the MFM.

Hua Kang, the Communist historian, seems to view the movement in a different light. Hua has argued that the MFM should not be regarded as a purely literary revolution, for to regard the movement as such would ‘reflect an intention to diminish deliberately the significance of its anti-imperialist and anti-feudal nature’. Instead, he chose to show the inter-relationship of the MFM and the NCM by making a

18 According to Mao, this new culture of the pre-May Fourth era of China was then serving the interest of the bourgeois-democratic revolution. Selected Works of Mao, pp. 143–5.
19 Selected Works of Mao, p. 145.
20 Chow, op. cit., p. 352.
clear distinction between what he called the May Fourth mass movement and the May Fourth new culture movement. He wrote:

The May Fourth mass movement resulted in the extension and deepening of the influence and scope of the new culture movement. It transformed a purely pre-May Fourth culture movement into a mass movement and caused its merging for the first time with the mass movement for national liberation. In such a way, the new culture movement which had occurred prior to the May Fourth Movement had prepared for the latter the conditions for self-awakening leading to thought liberation; and the MFM provided the NCM with a mass base. This is the basic reason why the May Fourth new culture movement was able to effectuate a great influence upon modern Chinese history.  

Contrary to the Communist view, the Nationalist views of the movement, as represented by Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek and Hu Shih, do not stress the class line. Although Sun, like Mao, did not equate the MFM with the NCM, he did, from the very beginning, regard the movement as a patriotic movement of the students, and as a movement having a close affinity to the literary and intellectual movements of the period.  

After the MFM was initiated by the students of the National Peking University, all patriotic youths realized that intellectual reform is the preparation for reform activities in the future. [As a result of the NCM], public opinion has developed rapidly and gloriously; students' strikes erupt all over the country; and with awakened consciousness and determination, almost everybody joins in the patriotic activities.  

However, Sun's support of the MFM was apparently on purely political grounds. For one thing, he realized that his party had by 1919 become politically impotent and badly in need of rejuvenation. The patriotic youth of the May Fourth could be recruited to form a new base of power for his ineffective party. Aside from these considerations, he actually withheld comment on the merit of the movement until 1924 when he practically reversed his support of the MFM by his hearty disapproval of the student strike of the same year (1924). His ideas

21 Hua Kang, Wu-ssu yün-tung shih, Shanghai, 1951, p. 198. Although in this paragraph he did not define clearly what constituted the 'mass', it appeared that he was willing to accept a general broad view of the term 'ch'üan-chung' as meaning 'people' with the exception of the bourgeois intellectual class. Ibid., p. 197.

22 Having recognized the impact of the NCM upon the Chinese society, Sun called for thought change within his party as the first step toward bringing about successful consummation of the Republican Revolution. Sun Chung-shan ch'üan-shu, Shanghai, 1933, 2nd ed., Vol. 4, Letters, p. 27. Pao, op. cit., p. 119.


24 In a lecture commenting on the student strike of 1924, he said: 'Having absorbed
about the roles of the students in the Movement therefore turned out to be quite different from those of the NCM leaders.

Chiang's personal views, in keeping with his orthodox, traditional Chinese education, were far from the new thought tide. It is true that, before his success in the Northward Expedition in 1927, he had followed Sun's policy of supporting the MFM. However, Chiang's support was largely a manifestation of his nationalistic sentiments against warlordism and, particularly, against the aggression of the Great Powers. Writing in 1944 (in *China's Destiny*), he considered the MFM as a form of China's response to a series of national humiliations suffered from Japan since 1915.25 He stated that the MF student movement was the Chinese people's 'strong demand for revolution, and for the destruction of the political system of the militarists and bureaucrats'. He noted that the subsequent National Revolution of the Kuomintang actually followed the spirit of the MF to 'struggle for the uprooting of warlordism and the abolition of unequal treaties'.26

But his approval of the MFM does not mean his approval of the NCM. As an ardent believer in Confucianism, Chiang disliked the iconoclastic trends of the new thought, and later severely criticized the new thought and student movements. He attacked both the liberals and the Communists because in his opinion, they had either failed to give due respect to the traditional Chinese civilization, had caused the Chinese people to lose their national self-respect and self-confidence, or had blindly worshipped foreign ideas which were incompatible with the Chinese tradition.27 He could not see the new culture as having substantive content.28 He implied that NCM was 'the piecemeal introduction of Western literature', 'the overthrow of the old ethics and the rejection of national history', 'the demand for individual emancipation and an ignorance of nation and society', 'the destruction of all disciplines and the expansion of individual freedom', and 'the blind worship of foreign countries and indiscriminate introduction and acceptance of foreign civilization'.29

The idea of liberty, the students can find no place to practise it except in their schools. Insurrections and strikes followed, under the dignified guise of fighting for "liberty". The liberty which Westerners talk about has its strict limitations and cannot be described as belonging to everyone. When young Chinese students talk about liberty, they break down all restraints. Because no one welcomes their theory in the society outside, they can only bring it back into their schools, and constant disorders result. This is abuse of freedom.' See Wang, *op. cit.*, p. 335.

28 He considered the new culture 'simple', 'cheap' and 'dangerous'. Chow, *op. cit.*, p. 344.
29 Ibid.
Somewhat in line with Sun’s thinking of 1924, Chiang also accused the intellectual reformers of corrupting youth by teaching them to act contrary to moral principles, law and government orders. From the 1930s to the recent years (particularly in view of the destructive nature of the recent Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution on mainland China) Chiang and his followers have continuously promoted a traditionalist policy of glorifying China’s national heritage and upholding China’s traditional values and ethics. He approved the nationalistic sentiments of the MFM, but rejected the iconoclastic aspects of the NCM.

Hu Shih, one of the leading exponents of literary reform, recognized the close relationship between the students’ roles in the MFM and NCM, but opposed the interpretation that the term MFM should include the latter. In fact, he said that ‘the MFM was really a setback for the NCM’. He agreed with Chiang, regarding the MFM as a patriotic movement of the students, but also accepted Sun’s views by emphasizing the significance of its cultural rather than its social and political activities. Whereas Sun may have rated the element of new thought above all other considerations, Hu paid more attention to the new literature movement.

III

Although these authors are entitled to define the movement as they see fit, their analyses seem to contain several basic fallacies. First of all, in their attempts to establish a proper relationship between the NCM and the MFM, some scholars appeared to have failed to make the basic distinction between what each movement actually was, and what it was before, and what it later became. Quite obviously, viewing the two movements in their proper historical perspective, what had taken place before the MF Incident was clearly the early phase of the pre-May Fourth NCM, and what had followed after the conclusion of the MFM was clearly the second phase or the post-MF NCM. The MFM falls in between and separates two distinct periods—the pre-MF new culture period and the post-MF new culture period.

Second, some scholars seem to have also failed to make the basic

31 Interview with Professor T’ang Te-kang who co-authored with Dr Hu Shih the forthcoming book Autobiography of Hu Shih, in New York, 6 February 1968.
distinction between the student movement of the Peking MFM and the MFM as a nation-wide, total, protest movement. When they referred to the term MFM, some were actually referring only to the Peking MFM rather than the entire MFM. But the Peking MFM, as we know, represents only one integral part of the entire movement.

Third, as pointed out previously, there is an unfortunate tendency both in Chinese and Western academic circles to suppose that the MFM is identical with the NCM, or, at least, its cultural aspect. Some scholars have even stressed the overall 'intellectual' aspect of the movement and have neglected or slighted the 'popular' aspect of the movement. Although here I am not asserting that the 'popular' side of the movement is of more importance than the 'intellectual' side of the movement, I do believe that the 'popular' side is just as important as the 'intellectual' side. This author's study on *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai*, shows quite clearly that the Shanghai MFM actually represents the combined effort of all social classes in China, and not just the intellectuals.\(^{32}\) If the 'intellectual' side of the movement is over-emphasized and the 'popular' aspect of the movement slighted, the true nature of the movement is distorted.

But several questions are basic in our inquiry: (1) Should the movement be interpreted as one single event or as a progression of events which covered several years? (2) Should the term MFM embrace, on the one hand, the social and political activities of the people, and on the other, the new literature and new thought movements which began earlier in 1917 and later came to be called the NCM? Or is the MFM essentially different from the NCM? (3) What was the true identity of its leadership?

My answer to the first question is that the movement should be studied primarily as one single event. That is, the term should apply only to the student demonstration in Peking on 4 May and the associated nation-wide events which immediately followed the Incident and concluded with China's refusal to sign the Peace Treaty in June 1919. This definition is in accord with the spirit of the main participants at that time, and in line with the term as it was first coined by the students and the press shortly after the May Fourth Incident. As we all know, the movement's prime objective was *political*: to protest against the traitorous acts of the Peking warlord government, the predatory designs of the

\(^{32}\) See this author's Ph. D. thesis, 1964, *The May Fourth Movement in Shanghai*, University of California, Berkeley. The movement actually included the participation of intelligentsia, students from various colleges, high schools and elementary schools, young Chinese women, merchants, industrialists, workers, as well as the lumpen proletariat (e.g., beggars, sing-song girls and prostitutes).
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Japanese government, and the unjust treatment of China by foreign powers at the Peace Conference. As soon as the political objectives of the movement were obtained in July (the punishment of three ‘traitors’, and the refusal to sign the Peace Treaty at Versailles), the national protest movement quickly subsided. The MFM, therefore, should not be construed as a transitional phase which continued for several years.

The answer to the second question must be negative. I recognize the close relationship between the MFM and the NCM, for the influence and the impact of the NCM which occurred prior to the MFI did indeed serve as one of the major contributing factors to the general awakening of the Chinese people during the MF period, and the influence and impact of the MFM also brought about an extension and deepening of the influence and scope of the NCM. However, the two were essentially two different movements. Not only did each movement contain unique features of its own, but in some instances, these unique features also tend to make the two movements quite distinct from each other.

First, the MF Incident itself definitely was not directly caused by or linked to the NCM. The pre-MF NCM primarily grew out of the suffocating conditions in China and foreign aggression. The deplorable social, economic and political situation in the country led to the rise of modern Chinese nationalism and prompted China’s leading intellectuals to search for answers to China’s salvation. However, these leaders of the pre-MF period believed that in order to ‘save’ China, they first needed to change China’s ancient tradition and bring about the awakening of the people, especially the youth. It was primarily a ‘thought’ oriented movement. The MFM, on the other hand, developed,

33 Chang Kuo-t’ao, one of the early Communist leaders, called the movement definitely a political movement. See his article, ‘Hsüeh-sheng yun-tung ti wo-chien’, Hsiang-tao, No. 17, 24 January 1923, p. 139. The National Students Union, in ‘A letter to fellow students in commemoration of the May Fourth Movement’, also unequivocally called the movement a political movement led by the Chinese students. See Chung-kuo hsüeh-sheng, No. 25, 1 May 1926, p. 169. P’an Kung-chan, an important student leader during the Shanghai May Fourth Movement, told the author in a personal interview held in his New York residence in July 1962, that he too considers the MFM purely a political movement. He noted that the movement subsided as soon as the political demands of the people were realized. Mr Pan’s views were also shared by Professor Kumano Shohei, an eye witness of the Shanghai MFM. He told the author in a private interview held in his Tokyo residence in August 1965, that he also regarded the MFM as primarily a nationalistic movement in China in contrast to the NCM.

34 Fu Ssu-nien, writing in October 1919, stated: ‘After the MFM, the social trend in China is changed. There is a large increase of the “awakened” people. Hereafter is a [new] era for social reform movement.’ Fu Ssu-nien ‘Hsin-ch’ao chih hui-ku yü ch’ien-chen’, Hsin-ch’ao, II: 1, 1919, p. 203.
as stated previously, as a reaction of the Chinese people to the turbulent new forces unleashed by World War I, and a direct response to Peking warlordism, Japanese imperialism, and the injustice China suffered in the Paris Peace Conference. It was China's concern over her national sovereignty, and particularly the Shantung question which prompted the MF leaders to initiate a national protest 'action' movement against the Peking Government.

Second, in the pre-MF period, the backbone of the NCM was the new intellectuals and students. They recognized the importance of awakening the people, particularly the youth, but in this early period they made no real direct contact with the masses, and certainly had not allied themselves with them. The MF intellectuals and students, on the other hand, fully recognized the importance of mass mobilization and mass support. They not only secured the support of the masses and actually formed an alliance with them, but also actively mobilized and directed them for concerted political action. The broad mass eventually formed an integral part of the MFM. In the case of the NCM, only in the post-MF period, as the result of the MF mass movement, did the NCM acquire for the first time a popular mass base.

Third, the new intellectuals of the pre-MF period were concerned mainly with the question of cultural change, and hardly recognized that 'politics' was one of the important aspects of political life. They generally shied away from any direct political involvement. In fact, when they first gathered in 1917 under the leadership of Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei to promote the NCM against the old conservative forces, they had a loose mutual understanding that their reform movement would concentrate on other than political activities and involvements. But during the MF period, many MF leaders actually joined hands with many scholars and the masses, and in unison actively participated in the national protest movement. It was mainly this MF attitude of active participation in national politics that eventually brought changes in the post-MF period when many new culture leaders also began to participate in politics and became interested in mass movements. This change of attitude, however, occurred largely as a result of the MFM, and was not inherent in the basic spirit of the early period of the NCM.

Fourth, there was a marked difference in the goals and orientation of the two movements. The 'thought' or theoretical basis of the anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism concept may have been laid and

35 However, one exception to this fact was that Ch'en Tu-hsiu's interest at this period was centred primarily on political and social affairs. The founding of the Weekly Critic was to serve Ch'en's political purpose. Chow, op. cit., p. 57.
popularized by a group of intellectuals in the period before the MF uprising, but such a concept was not distinctly defined and pronounced in the pre-MF period. Only the slogan of ‘democracy’ and ‘science’ was clearly enunciated. However, in the MF period, the national goal had become ‘actions’ of thorough and uncompromising opposition to imperialism and warlordism.

Fifth, concerning the important question of the treatment of China’s national heritage on the eve of the outbreak of the MFI, the attitudes of the NC leaders and the MF leaders appeared not only incompatible, but almost diametrically opposed to each other. The leaders of the NCM stressed the ‘inferior’ quality of the traditional Chinese institutions and ideas in comparison to those of the West, and they were contemptuous of China’s national past and cultural heritage. In the very early stage of the pre-MF new culture period, these leaders rejected the Chinese past in toto and proposed the wholesale Westernization and modernization of China in all important aspects of its culture. The essence of the movement was the intellectuals’ revolt against traditionalism. The NCM therefore was not only the negation of China’s national traditional culture, but also the destruction of all traditions and conventions. On the other hand, in the MFM, some of the leaders may have been sympathetic to new culture ‘thought’, but in view of the national crisis, they had to support political nationalism in order to achieve their political goals. Hence, many of the iconoclastic elements of the NCM had to become subordinate. Throughout the May Fourth period, their main concern was the preservation of China’s national rights and the upholding of China’s national dignity. The leaders called for the ‘elimination of traitors’ from within and the ‘resistance to foreign [imperialist] powers’ from without. They exhorted the Chinese people to place China’s national interest above all other considerations. The exaltation of the Chinese nation by its people, viewed from the MF context, undoubtedly came from its people’s admiration and respect for its national past. Such exaltation unquestionably contained elements for the affirmation, not negation, of its national cultural heritage.

36 Commenting on the Tsingtao Problem, the Editor of Shen Pao (Shanghai) wrote on 9 May 1919 in a short editorial entitled ‘The National Humiliation’: ‘We must not allow these humiliations to blemish our glorious historical past.’ (The italics are mine.) Shen Pao, 9 May 1919, p. 11. The Shanghai Student Union, in its proclamation issued on 9 May 1919, also stated that: ‘We students have studied the works of our ancient sages, and have come to understand and respect their great teachings on “righteousness”. We hereby solemnly vow to live or die with the Republic of China.’ (The italics are mine.) Shen Pao, 10 May 1919, p. 10.

respecting and safeguarding China's national rights and affirming China's national cultural value was the nation able to rally its entire people for popular political action. This is the essence of Chinese political nationalism and the spiritual foundation of the MFM.

IV

Now if the above analysis clearly establishes the basis that there are distinct differences between the two movements, what is the real value of making such distinctions? The real value seems to lie in the fact that as two distinct movements—the NCM as a ‘thought’ movement for cultural change, and the MFM as an ‘action’ movement for direct political involvement—one actually complements the other, and contributes to the other in the actual breaking down of the old tradition and the creation of a modern state with true mass consciousness.

Of course, at first glance, this statement may sound rhetorically contradictory. How could an allegedly ‘action’ movement which ‘exalted’ the cultural past ever complement a ‘thought’ movement which ‘negated’ the cultural past? How, in fact, did these two allegedly incompatible movements complement and collaborate with each other? The answer is that certain elements of incompatibility in the two movements do not necessarily preclude the possibility of their collaborating to further their common goals and objectives. As we know, both movements stressed the primacy of the Chinese nation (since both were concerned with the main question of the existence and independence of the nation). Both movements made great efforts to promote the political consciousness of the people; both called for the awakening to the national crisis; and both aimed to bring social pressure on the government by popular action. In this sense, the two movements actually did contain certain common and compatible objectives.

Also, as stated before, since the beginning of the NCM, men like Ch'en and Hu had generated a new momentum in the nation towards cultural change and social reform through literary reform. Mainly through their efforts, and through the introduction of new Western literature and thought, an intellectual revolution, though still on a rather limited scale, had taken place. This intellectual ferment had already had an effect in altering the outlook of China's new youth. In fact, shortly before the MF Incident, some of these young people had advanced to the stage of calling for direct political action to quicken the
cultural and social reforms which they sought. These new intellectual trends thus provided some of the main ideologies of the forthcoming MFM. And, as the MFM brought about a general awakening of the Chinese people to the urgent need for fundamental social, political, and economic changes, the MFM made the Chinese people more receptive to the new ideas of the NCM. In this sense, the MFM not only provided the NCM with a popular base which it had previously lacked, but also extended and deepened the scope and the influence of the NCM upon the whole of Chinese society. It is in this light that the first main complementary effect of the two seemingly incompatible movements may be seen.

Another point that should be stressed here is that the leading intellectual reformers of the pre-May Fourth period were in no way directly connected with the initiation of the MFM. The main leaders of the MFM (both in Peking and Shanghai) came primarily from the rank and file of the student body. Nevertheless, these intellectual reformers soon recognized the political significance of the MFM, and began to support the movement; and it was only when they had recognized the political impact of the MFM upon China that the NCM leaders shifted their emphasis from attacking the traditional Chinese culture to upholding the primacy of the Chinese nation and China's national rights. Only then did the goals of the two movements finally become identical—maintaining the existence and independence of the Chinese nation. It is in this light that we may see the collaboration between

38. Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei, writing in Kuo-min in January 1919, advised the students that their main task was 'to love [their] country and to engage [themselves] actively in the task of saving the nation'. He pointed out that their obligations to the country were three-fold: 'to arouse the majority [of the people] who are apathetic to national affairs; to aid the minority [of the people] who are patriotic; and to oppose any action which will betray the Nation'. See Ts'ai Yuan-p'ei, 'Prologue', Kuo-min, I:1, 10 January 1919, p. 1. Hsu Te-heng, a student leader of the Peking May Fourth Movement, wrote in the same periodical calling for direct actions on the part of the Chinese people. He stated that 'public utterances are not sufficient to influence the nation'. He pointed out that often 'words are spoken but not heard; heard but not understood; and understood but not acted upon'. See 'Wu so-wang yu chin-hou chih kuo-min che', Ibid., 'General Discourse', p. 1. Yang Ch’ang-chi, another student writing in the same period called for 'the awakening of the people', but added that 'after their awakening, they must quickly carry it through by direct action. [In this way], knowing (thought) and doing (action) become one'. See Yang Ch’ang-chi, 'Kao hsueh-sheng', Ibid., p. 3.


THE MAY FOURTH MOVEMENT REDEFINED

the two apparently incompatible movements. This is the second main complementary effect of the two movements.

Moreover, the leadership of the NCM of the post-May Fourth period was further strengthened by the May Fourth youth who joined the NCM. As we know, quite a few of them, upon the conclusion of the MFM, had gone abroad to study, and many of them, upon returning, joined the NCM and became its prominent leaders. The visits to China of men like John Dewey and Bertrand Russell, during and after the MFM, and their introduction of pragmatism and other Western ideas also provided some of the main ideologies for the second phase of the NCM. Subsequently, the new demands by the new intellectuals of the post-May Fourth period for the modern 'scientific culture' and for an effective 'democratic' government to sustain the independence and equality of China in the family of nations were intensified. It is in this light that we may say that the MFM actually promoted the further development of the NCM. This is the third main complementary effect of the two movements.

Now, if we may look from another vantage point, the whole characterization of the MFM really involves not only intellectuals and cities, but also populace and country. In the past, the mainstay of the Chinese intellectuals had come predominantly from urban centres and cities. Their main influence was confined chiefly to the educated élite. They had hardly touched the general fabric of the populace and the country as a whole. Now greatly influenced by the MFM, many intellectuals finally came to recognize the power of the organized mass, both in the cities and in the country, and went directly to the people. When the minds of the intellectuals finally met with the minds of the populace, when the cities finally joined hands with the country, and through forces of history, when all the four elements are meshed into one total situation (such as seen in the MFM), a truly dynamic social revolution in China was born. The NCM leaders may have realized the importance of meeting with the masses, and may have even suggested 'going' to the people, but the MFM leaders actually put this idea into realization. In this sense, this meeting with the masses becomes one of the intellectual deductions from NCM premises. And the masses, in their turn, not being inert, also rose to the occasion. NCM is 'thought', but it includes thought about action. MFM is 'action', but (viewed in its entire perspective) it is action alien to the old thought which NCM was challenging. Perhaps in this amalgam, we see an interesting dialectic—the traditional ideal of chih-hsing ho-i (知行合—), or the 'one-ness of

thought and action'—being at last realized in the collaboration of movements which, for all practical purposes, are both subversive of old tradition. The ultimate achievement of the MFM then is the actual dissolution of the 'great tradition' and the final birth of a 'nation state'.

V

The identity of the actual leadership of the MFM has become another point of dispute among scholars. Certainly there have been many individuals and groups claiming leading roles in it. Hu Shih, for example, was often mistakenly regarded by some writers as the leader of the MFM. This misconception was apparently based upon the important role he played in the new literary movement. However, since we conclude that the MFM and the NCM are essentially two different movements, such a role certainly does not qualify him as the leader of the MFM.

Another point that should be re-stated here is that the leading intellectual reformers of the pre-May Fourth period were in no way directly connected with the initiation of the MFM. In fact, neither Ch'en, Hu, nor Li took any part in the planning or execution of the May Fourth uprising in Peking. The main leaders of the MFM, as stated previously, came primarily from the rank and file of the student body.

As for the role played by the Kuomintang, some of the party leaders have declared, or implied, that members of their party actually led or influenced the movement, and that Sun Yat-sen was also active behind the scenes in the Shanghai MFM. However, as noted previously, since the failure of the Second Revolution of 1913, the party members of

42 See page 76 and footnote No. 40.
43 T’ao Hsi-sheng, then a junior in Peking University, took part in the 4 May and 3 June demonstrations in Peking. He noted that at the time of the May Fourth uprising, Hu Shih had already gone to Shanghai (to welcome John Dewey). According to T’ao, with the exception of Ts’ai Yuan-p’ei, who exhorted the students during the uprising, none of the Faculty and staff members of Peita had taken a part in the movement throughout the entire May Fourth period. In his opinion there was definitely a lack of communication between Faculty and students outside the classroom. Interview with Professor T’ao in Los Angeles, 5 May 1967. See also T’ao, op. cit., p. 10.
Kuomintang were scattered all over the country without any central leadership. Although men like Shao Li-tze, Lo Chia-lun, and Tuan Hsi-p’eng did take an active part in the movement, it seems most likely that they joined the movement as private individuals and not as party members.\textsuperscript{46} Even Sun was then merely an ‘observer’ in Shanghai.\textsuperscript{47} Therefore, Sun and the Kuomintang exerted little or no political influence as far as the movement was concerned.\textsuperscript{48}

In analyzing the MFM leadership, the Communists have either exaggerated or distorted the facts. Mao, for example, in order to stress the role of the Communist intelligentsia in the movement, stated that ‘the MFM from its very inception was a revolutionary movement of the united front consisting of the Communist intelligentsia, the revolutionary petty-bourgeois intelligentsia, and the bourgeois intelligentsia’.\textsuperscript{49} In later years, other Communist writers carried Mao’s idea even further and claimed that the Communist intelligentsia actually played the leading role in the MFM.\textsuperscript{50} But the fact remains that the so-called ‘Communist intelligentsia’ hardly came into existence until after 1920. As several authors have pointed out, even Mao, in 1919 was only a subscriber to anarchism and one of the admirers of Hu, Ch’en and Li.\textsuperscript{51} In fact, Ch’en did not commit himself to Marxism until 1920, and Li still did not wholly embrace the doctrine before the end of 1919. There is no doubt that some of the young intelligentsia who participated in the MFM may have ‘possessed some elementary knowledge of Communism’ as noted by Mao,\textsuperscript{52} but the mere possession of such knowledge certainly does not qualify them as a Communist intelligentsia. In fact, during the May Fourth period, many youths, including Mao, were imbued with not just one idea but with many different non-Chinese ideas.\textsuperscript{53} And it

\textsuperscript{46} Ch’eng T’ien-fang, one of the leading student leaders of the Shanghai MFM, in a personal interview with the author held in Taipei in July 1965, reiterated his viewpoint which he had previously expressed in his letter to the author dated 28 March 1963, that neither the Kuomintang nor Sun was actually behind the Shanghai movement. In fact, he said, none of the responsible officers in the Shanghai Student Union during the movement was a member of the Party. The Party endorsed the students’ patriotic movement (such as the boycott of Japanese goods), but did not initiate nor promote the movement at that time.

\textsuperscript{47} Sun was then taking political refuge in Shanghai’s French Settlement, and had to remain ostensibly inactive lest his stay in the city be revoked by the French authority. Interview with P’an Kung-chan, New York, July 1962.

\textsuperscript{48} Hua, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 200–1.

\textsuperscript{49} Mao, p. 693.

\textsuperscript{50} Hua, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 160. Cited by Chow also, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 356.


\textsuperscript{52} Mao, p. 693.

\textsuperscript{53} T’ao, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 10.
was not until after the MFM had subsided (near the end of 1919), and when Marxist study groups and societies had been founded in Peking and Shanghai, that Communist influence upon the Chinese youth really began to manifest itself. So, any assertion about the role of the Communist intelligentsia in the MFM is also historically inaccurate.

Mao's statement that the MFM took place 'at the call of the Russian Revolution and of Lenin' is obviously far-fetched and without any substance. It is true that after 1919 numerous Chinese student leaders were impressed by the success of the Russian Bolshevik Revolution, as reflected in their writings in *New Youth* and *New Tide*. But one must remember that the new thought and the new literary movement had started before the October Revolution, and certainly, long before the MFM. Since we cannot, on the evidence, find any relationship between the MFM and a Communist intelligentsia (let alone between the MFM and Communist revolutionary ideas), how can the Chinese Communist leaders stretch their argument to linking the movement with Lenin and the Russian Revolution? In this respect, Ch'en Tu-hsiu and Li Ta-chao certainly were more honest than their successors. Neither of them ever claimed that the MFM was inspired by the Russian Revolution or led by them or by the Communists. They knew that neither one of them, nor any other leading Communist leaders (notably, e.g., Mao, Li Li-san and Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai), took any direct part in staging the May Fourth uprising or in the succeeding activities. They were quite aware of the fact that at the time of the May Fourth outbreak, the mobilization of the people was carried out by the enlightened intellectual leaders and students having no Communist connexion or leaning.

VI

The MFM had outstanding historical significance. Socially, the movement was a genuine patriotic popular movement involving the work of all classes. It was also the first true total movement ever to occur in Chinese history. The movement taught the new intellectuals and students the importance of effective mass mobilization and support, and

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56 Ch'ü did join the movement and was arrested and imprisoned for three days. See T. A. Hsia, 'Ch'ü Ch'iu-pai's autobiographical writings: the making and destruction of a "Tender-hearted" Communist', *The China Quarterly*, No. 25, January–March 1966, p. 187.
brought more of them into closer contact with the masses than ever before. Culturally, it provided the NCM with a true mass base. It also promoted the further extension of the NCM, and eventually ushered into China a true new cultural revolution with an uncompromising attack on traditionalism. Politically, this was the first popular movement which marked thorough and uncompromising opposition to imperialism and warlordism, a significant feature totally absent from the Republican Revolution of 1911 and the (pre-MF) NCM. It was also a politically responsible and mature movement as distinct from the politically irresponsible and violent Boxerism of 1900 and the recent Red Guard activities in Communist China. It gave rise to a new nationalism and a new spirit of national unity and solidarity. It paved the way for the establishing of the Chinese Communist Party in 1921 and the reorganization of the Kuomintang in 1924. The achievements of the movement also brought full awakening of the Chinese people, thus facilitating a true social revolution in China. For the first time, the 'nationhood' of China had come into being, and China had truly become China. Guided by the spirit of May Fourth, the Chinese people's revolution, after the failure of the Revolution of 1911, now truly began to move forward.

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