Anarchism and the Question of Practice
Ontology in the Chinese Anarchist Movement, 1919–1927

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ABSTRACT

Ontology has been an under-realised aspect of historical analyses of the final years of anarchist organisation in China. However, in the latter stages of the movement a number of anarchist voices would emerge, which indicated the formulation of a new ontological direction in Chinese anarchism at a time when classical anarchist approaches were becoming practically divorced from local reality. In particular, a subjective, structuralist and localised application of anarchist theory was placed at the forefront of an emergent debate between two anarchist factions, namely an old guard of leftist classicalists and a younger group of divergent, conceptually malleable quasi-iconoclasts. This article sets out to establish this group of younger anarchists within the movement as theoretical antecedents of post-leftist anarchism, in particular with regards to their emphasis on pragmatism, locatedness and de-centered analyses of power and revolution. I theorise that this group was deeply influenced by the New Culture movement in China, and that the intellectual atmosphere the time, in synthesis with anarchism, allowed for the ideological space to act on the theoretical boundaries of anarchism itself for the first time.

> *If we can offer the masses something better, so much the better; but to stick one's hand up one's sleeve and engage in opposition from the sidelines, while perfectly all right for bourgeois scholars, is no less than a crime for revolutionaries. It is acceptable for an individualist to say, 'if it is not complete, it is better not to have it', but a*

revolutionary cannot say such a thing, because that is not what the masses demand. (Dirlik, 1993: pp. 258–9)
Ba Jin, "Anarchism and the Question of Practice," 1927

In 1907, when Li Shizeng predicted that the anarchist revolution was to be "one without end," it is unlikely that he or his early anarchist contemporaries in China could have foreseen the high-water mark of pragmatism the sentiment would represent for the movement (Li Shizeng, 1907).[1] Had Li been available for comment by the time of Ba Jin's above statement some 20 years later, he is more likely to have observed that the anarchist revolution had become "one without change," as essentialist mantras had become entrenched in a movement whose standard operating procedure was better suited to a China in which the country's post-Imperial societal revolutions had yet to begin.

For the vast majority of the period between Li and Ba's statements, the Chinese anarchists embodied classical anarchism to the point of self-abnegation; often not just on the sidelines but in the bleachers, with their hands firmly up their sleeves.[2] By the 1920s however, there emerged internal dissatisfaction with the prospects for an anarchist project built on these dissociative foundations. Ontology became the unspoken watchword for a generation of anarchists looking to re-involve the movement in the wider processes of the time. This was the case for the afore-mentioned Ba Jin, who in 1927 was openly forwarding an analysis which reflected both impatience with, and self-assurance toward, the doctrine of anarchism itself. The prioritisation of locality and practicality ahead of doctrinal essentialism in the application of anarchism to China, as well as the focus on the interests of the

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[1] Pusey (1983: p. 371) has suggested that Li was influenced by newly emerging social-Darwinist theories is China when he stated that "there is no affair of thing that does not progress . . . Revolution is nothing but the cleansing away of obstacles to progress."

[2] A great deal of attention (Krebs, 1998), (Dirlik, 1993) has been paid to espousers of classical anarchism in China, most notably Liu Sifu (the "soul" of Chinese anarchism), the Tokyo and Paris anarchist groups, and the "Six No's Society" founded by Cai Yuanpei. However, each of these factions succeeded in occupying a space more theoretical than functional—the Tokyo and Paris anarchist groups literally existed outside of the fetters of a Chinese setting as theoreticians rather than revo-lutionaries, whereas Cai Yuanpei and Liu Sifu and his followers' near-total non-involvement in anything from sedan-chairs to even the most equanimous organisational structures led them to a position of equal abstraction, even as they operated within China itself.

populis ahead of abstracted vanguardism, would both be recurrent themes of the time. So too was his choice to demure from the previously archetypal notion of the anarchist individualist, in Ba's case by referring to himself—invoking an appellative whose significance we will return to—simply as a "revolutionary."[3]

This assessment of the pertinent issues facing the Chinese anarchist movement during its final years was not an isolated one, as the mid-1920s find anarchist writings increasingly peppered with statements which belie more than a minor degree of ontological purposefulness. Yet although this development and its importance have been lost behind the broader narrative of the movement's material decline occupying the historical foreground, these were interrelated phenomena. This assertiveness found its roots in emergent and pressing divergences between theory and practice which were undermining the classical theoretical foundations which had informed the movement in China throughout its lifetime.[4] As the validity and relevance of classical anarchist essentialism was brought into question, the anarchists faced the question of how to adapt anarchism for the first time. We will consider how one group of younger anarchists looked to act adaptively through anti-ideological, situationalist and evolutionary approaches to anarchist doctrine—in effect proto-anarché. These anarchists' direct contact with the intellectual atmosphere of New Culture liberalism—including pragmatism, experimentalism, localism and evolutionism—will be nominated as a crucial factor in both the innovation and legitimation of a participatory, de-essentialized anarchist ontology.

The final generation of anarchists in China were the first to fully engage with enlightenment influences, situated as they were—ideologically, temporally and spatially—at the putative apex of early intellectual modernisation in China.[5] During the May Fourth and New Culture movements of the 1920s, urbanised

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[3] The changing meaning of individualism (个人主义) during the May Fourth period, covered in detail by Lydia Liu (1996, pp. 77–102), is relevant to this discussion.

[4] Anarchist opposition to the state, nationalism, and hierarchical organisation structures were all coming under strain by the 1920s as the material pressures of the time began to be drawn into discussions of idealised activity.

[5] Various specialised approaches to Chinese modernity have placed the epicentre of modernity in some combination of, or variation on—the 1920s, modernising cities (in particular treaty ports), and radical youth, some examples are Esherick (2000), Wenxin Ye (2000), Yue Dong and Goldstein eds. (2006), Kai-wing Chow (2008), and Mitter (2004).

anarchist organisations would swell significantly, primarily with radical youth who came of age in the intellectual shadow of Dewey, Darwin, Hegel, and Bertrand Russell. However, the traditional understanding of the anarchists' relationship with the contemporary intellectual atmosphere of the New Culture movement has been one of mutual dislocation. Arif Dirlik has discussed in detail anarchism's (explicitly indirect) influence on the movement, yet the collective scholarship of Chinese anarchism has appeared unwilling to allow for any genuine reciprocity in this regard (Dirlik, 1993: p. 162). The resultant characterisation has at worst been that of a collective permeating antimodernism, at best a movement merely persistently subject to what Scalapino and Yu (1961, p. 33) referred to as a "political pendulum," which "could always swing back under certain conditions, causing them to revert to orthodoxy."[6]

The Chinese anarchists certainly had an ambiguous relationship with the intellectual modernity of which they were a part, often falling back on the kind of scepticism which presumably informed the above analyses from Dirlik and Scalapino and Yu. Yet in spite of this, the intellectual trends of the New Culture movement were not universally disregarded, and in the case of many of the younger anarchists, they were contingently internalised as the kind of theoretically productive jump start which was required in a time of crisis.

Jesse Cohn (2006: p. 15) has noted that anarchism's doctrinal essentialism requires every generation of anarchists to identify themselves "(diachronically) with the historical movement as well as (synchronically) with their living cohort." In the case of the younger anarchists their diachronic duties to classical anarchism came into conflict with a growing sense of modern dynamism, resulting in a pervasive frustration with classical anarchism's habitual reliance on dogma. Their response was not to abandon anarchism, but to direct themselves at dismantling inherited and idealistic notions of "correct" applications of anarchist doctrine for the first time, and to turn towards the task of forming a dynamic, adaptive and de-essentialized ontology for anarchism in China. With this is in mind it is worth noting that although reductive, Scalapino and Yu's political pendulum raises the critical concept that this inquiry is predicated upon, that of "orthodoxy" itself. Their explicit assessment—that orthodoxy was derived

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[6] Peter Zarrow's (1990) preoccupation with rooting anarchism in a Daoist tradition seems to have prefigured against a role for modernity in his narrative of Chinese anarchism.

from devotion to the strictures of anarchism and to be orthodox was to revert to a Westernised mean—represents an implicit assumption in much of the scholarship of Chinese anarchism. We will consider an alternative orthodoxy, in which the contingent adoption and application of New Culture liberal reformism impinged upon the linearity of the presumptive relationship between orthodoxy and piety. That the younger, more "modern" group of anarchists would come to define orthodoxy through the lens of a de-essentialized anarchist ontology afforded them the agency to act, not within or without, but upon doctrinal boundaries; as subjects rather than objects of classical anarchism.

THE NEW CULTURE MOVEMENT AND ANARCHISM IN CHINA

Subject-object relationships between doctrine and its adherents marked the discursive epicentre of the political wing of the New Culture movement during the 1920s. At this time, a new generation of intellectual leaders came forward to criticise their forebears' over-reliance on doctrine as "a death sentence to the cause of improving Chinese society" (Bishop, 1985: p. 369).[7] Under the rubric of New Culture liberalism the multiplicity of political doctrines which had emerged in modernising China were no longer to be understood as a panacea, and instead genuine applicability was sought through investigation into their relevance to practical issues (Chow Tse-tsung, 1967: p. 218).

In arguing that the spirit of New Thought was a "critical attitude" which undertook to "oppose blind obedience," this aspect of the New Culture Movement owed an intellectual debt to the combined influence of John Dewey's notion of pragmatism (Hu Shi, 1924).[8] New Thought's distrust of determinism and conviction that political theories be studied in the light of evolution also shared fundamentally Dewey-esque principles. In this vein, a "genetic method" was made integral to a revolution which was understood to be achieved through "drop-by-drop reconstruction."[9]

In historical approaches to Chinese anarchism, the traditional understanding of the anarchists' relationship with these aspects of the New Culture and beyond has been one of comparative dis-

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[7] Furth (1972: pp. 59–69) offers a further discussion on this topic.
[8] For further discussion, see Min-chih Chou (1984), Lei Yi (2006: pp. 33–50), Manicas,(1982: pp. 133–158) and Grieder (1970).
[9] A "genetic method" was first broached by Hu Shi in 1920 (1920: pp. 15–25).

location. Dirlik (1993, p. 164) has discussed in detail anarchism's (explicitly indirect) influence on the New Culture movement, yet the collective scholarship of the Chinese anarchist movement has appeared unwilling to allow for any genuine reciprocity in this regard. However, many facets of New Culture liberalism and anarchism correlate; and the two ideologies occupied political spaces in China that were prone to overlap.[10]

Among the intellectual pioneers of New Culture liberalism, Hu Shi's dedication to non-political reform—advocating "no talking politics for twenty years; no political activity for twenty years"—was a position which was shared with the anarchists.[11] Chow Tse-tsung (1967; p. 223) has also pointed out that "people who advocated keeping remote from the politics of the time . . . included at least three groups: certain scholars and intellectuals such as Hu Shih and Chang Tung-sun; merchant groups . . . and the anarchists."[12] Many younger anarchists also occupied a physical space which overlapped with that of the New Culture Movement, both in their ties to the Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu-edited journal, *Xin Qingnian*, in which anarchist articles often appeared; and in Dewey's base at Peking University (Bishop, 1985: p. 369). University President (before Hu Shi himself took over) Cai Yuanpei was a quasi-anarchist, and the campus was a hotbed of anarchist activity.[13] Many prominent anarchists were based at Peking University during New Culture, including Liu Shipei and Li

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[10] Dewey himself professed a strongly anti-authoritarian streak; Sidney Hook (1939: p. 18) even characterised him as "a cross between a philosophical anarchist and Robert Louis Stevenson," which despite being made in passing, only mildly exaggerates some more systemic comparisons. For further discussions please see Manicas (2003), Lothstein (1978), and D'Urso (1980).

[11] This was a vow he would break repeatedly, of course, but the ideal remains ideologically consistent with the wider atmosphere toward anarchism at the time.

[12] See also Sor-Hoon Tan (2004: pp. 44–64).

[13] "During this period, anarchist thought and writings penetrated deeply into student circles at Peking University and elsewhere. Student journals such as *Chin-hua* (Evolution), *Hsin ch'ao* (New Currents), and *Kuo-min* (The Citizen), carried the mixture of Anarchist, Socialist, and democratic ideas that were now flowing into China" (Scalapino and Yu, 1961). One of the ways in which New Culture intellectuals and the older anarchists like Wu Zhihui were likely brought together is through the work-study organisations. In particular the Beijing Work-Study Corps could claim Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu as members alongside many young anarchists discussed in (Weston, 2004: p. 195).

Shizeng; as well as numerous anarchist journals, including *Ziyou Lu* (Freedom Record);[14] *Jinhua Zazhi* (Evolution);[15] *Xin Ch'ao* (New Currents), *Guomin* (The Citizen) and *Fendou* (Struggle);[16] and the *Peking University Students' Weekly*, edited by vocal anarchist Huang Lingshuang.[17]

A new understanding of the anarchist relationship with New Culture liberalism will undergird this discussion. That the final generation of anarchists were able to approach anarchism *through* New Culture, as the epistemologies coalesced with no implicit exclusivity between the two. This does not imply that these new approaches were taken up universally however. In fact, a localised version of the wider "leftist-liberal" divide which had emerged in the May Fourth community also materialised amongst the anarchists during the mid-1920s.[18] While the "post-leftist" anarchists, as we will refer to them, appear to have selectively incorporated liberal ideals into an emergent assertive approach to anarchist doctrine, the "leftist" anarchists professed the classical

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[14] *Freedom Record* was a product of the "Truth Society" (Shishe) at Peking University, a group of primarily Guangzhou anarchists studying at the university, there was only one issue (Weston, 2004: p. 194).

[15] *Evolution* was a publication of the Evolution Society, an umbrella organisation which incorporated three smaller anarchist groups at Peking University, it lasted three issues (Weston, 2004: p. 164).

[16] *Fendou* was founded by Yi Junzuo, Zhu Qianzhi and Guo Chuliang (Weston, 2004: p. 191).

[17] The physical links here deserve further investigation (Zarrow, 1990: p. 222, Weston, 2004: p. 191). It is worth at this point noting some of the titles of these journals as indicative of some of the new approaches to anarchism that we will be discussing, in particular "Evolution" and "Struggle." The Peking University anarchists were evidently preoccupied questions of "struggle" and "evolution," which as we will come to see, were separate aspects of a wider pragmatic liberal turn for a younger generation of anarchists germinating in an environment steeped in these ideals.

[18] The schism between Shen Zhongjiu and the younger anarchists fits into another wider discussion which was occurring at the time, namely the "debate between science and metaphysics," which began in 1923. The defenders of science in this discussion again read as a relative who's who of the ideological core of Liberal Reformism amongst the older May Fourth radicals, including Wu Zhihui. The wider resonance of the debate is well understood; Zarrow (1990: p. 179) considers it to be a debate over "not so much science versus metaphysics but how to define roles for the scientific and the spiritual or intuitive; not so much West versus East but how to selectively adapt; not so much determinism versus free will but how to balance inner and outer freedom."

anarchist distrust of reformism and experimentation.[19] While the 1923 debate between Wu Zhihui and Shen Zhongjiu marks the ostensible core of this division within the movement, this article focus on a group of younger "post-leftist" anarchists who were developing in a more radically subjective and ontological direction. The primary source material for these anarchists will be a symposium entitled 'Anarchism and the Question of Practice,' which was also printed in *Ziyou Ren*. Although some of Ba Jin's comments from the symposium have been referenced before, the other participants, Wei Huilin and Wu Kegang, and its broader overarching post-leftist / ontological implications have been previously been overlooked.

A LOCALISED, EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO ANARCHISM

The first aspect of the post-leftist position to be considered is a developing subjectivity toward the inherited doctrinal pillars of anarchism itself, and a reemphasising of presence and locality when it came to the application of this doctrine to the Chinese setting. A sense of subjectivity also informed the prevalent attitude of "ceaseless experimentation" toward inherited ideologies which had emerged during the New Culture movement. This pragmatism borrowed from post-Kantian subjectivism in its "spirit of *fansi* (reflection), *pipan* (critique) and (*zijue*) self-consciousness" (Fung, 2010, p. 10). During the 1920s, "to rethink values, to bring them to the level of consciousness, and to ask whether they [were] still suitable to the needs of the day was defined as the true meaning of new thought."[20] These qualities formed the basis

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[19] It would be tempting to characterise Shen Zhongjiu as a staunch traditionalist. In fact Shen occupied more common ideological ground with his opponents in the debate than with any of the Shifu and He Zhen-associated "old guard." He was a supporter of anarchist youth and labour organisations, as both a founding member of the Federation of Shanghai Syndicates and as editor of one of the prominent Zhejiang anarchist journal *Tides in Education*, and later as editor of Geming Zhoubao, both of which often provided platforms for some of the more radical voices in the movement. It might be more accurate to characterise him as the rhetorical standard-bearer of countermodernity in the anarchist movement.

[20] Localism was another of the underpinnings of the New Culture pragmatic doctrine, as Hu Shi believed that intellectuals must always be aware of the setting in which the doctrine that they were appropriating was formulated, and should compare this to the material realities of the

of a fundamental ontological shift during New Culture—the broadening of orthodoxy beyond piety and the growing sense that transgression *was* orthodox when it looked to make doctrine more effective in application.

The discursive intellectual space of the 1920s was characterised by prevalent synthesis and cross-applicability between science and wider societal issues. The massive expansion in interdisciplinary journals between philosophy, politics and science included two titles, *Eastern Miscellany* and *New Youth*, in which anarchist articles were frequently published (Wang Hui, 2006: p. 86).[21] In their engagement with the contrasting requirements of doctrinal piety and localised practicality, and parallel questions over the universality of anarchist doctrine, the post-leftist anarchists would share more than a discursive arena with the broader New Culture community, they would also face the same implicit dilemmas. Their pursuit of a more subjective relationship with anarchist doctrine in response to this certainly bears the hallmarks of New Thought pragmatism, as this group looked toward an anarchism which was not functionally dislocated and "untouchable," but a malleable entity which required adaptation to remain relevant.

In Wei Huilin's section of "Anarchism and the Question of Practice" for instance, he offers a post-leftist understanding of doctrine which closely corresponds to the ontological underpinnings which we have already identified, in which the past is minimised and the present is placed in the centre of a discussion on practicality.

> An anarchist is not an exceptional person or a scholar who just plays with words. It is a person that has been freed from the old social system and morals, making efforts to develop himself fully. The anarchist movement is about 'people' but not about pious people who harbour simple beliefs . . . Although anarchism has become systematic and detailed through the efforts of several smart antecedents, it is not yet absolutely right or rigid. We should think it over through the truths we have experienced and the problems

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setting in which it is applied (Bishop, 1985: p. 369); See also Schwarcz (1986: p. 122).

[21] That both *New Youth* and *Eastern Miscellany* were key sources of anarchist writings, is indicative of just how close to the epicentre of these scientific ideals—and Chinese intellectual modernity itself—they stood.

of our time. The anarchism I refer to here is closely connected to the practical problems of our time.

The reason why our past movements ended in failure is that they failed to take action based on practical situations. It is completely incorrect to think that the anarchist movement merely an ethical one. (Huilin, 1927)[22]

The dilemma of needing to selectively adapt anarchism whilst remaining *anarchist* lay at the heart of the post-leftist incorporation of New Culture pragmatism. Consider what Wei distances himself from here, inherited universal standards and the presumptive reliance on piety and morality ahead of practicality and locality, but not anarchism itself. By equating the younger anarchists' focus on practical problems with the desire for a less canonical and more practical relationship with doctrine, Wei arrives at what is ultimately a situationalist and utilitarian, rather than openly iconoclastic, approach to forging a new anarchist ontology. In reiterating that *duty* to anarchism was inclusive of questioning, refining and ultimately adapting anarchism, a constructivist quality—indicative of the influence of New Culture's sense of experimentalism—informed much of these discussions.[23] In fact, when one unnamed anarchist ("A.D.," 1924) stated that, "I hope we youth will not become followers of such doctrines, but will act as critics of such doctrines," he could have been channeling Hu Shi himself.

The influence of the New Culture critique of intellectual piety toward doctrine is equally evident in Wu Kegang's parallel evaluation of anarchist utopian individualism. In support of the claim that anarchism in China was "underdeveloped," Wu focuses in particular on the abstracted dislocation that the movement had come to embody in China, associated with an overreliance on classical anarchist dogma. By establishing that the failings of his forebears in China were rooted in this ideological piety and sloganeering, and by disavowing "doctrine, theory and principles" (主义, 理论, 学说), he makes the kind of statement of pragmatic and localised agency which once again bears the hallmarks of the wider culture of localism of which it was a part:

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[22] All quotations are author's own translation unless otherwise indicated.
[23] Bishop (1985: p. 369) paraphrases Hu Shi's thought in this regard as such, "Hu Shih did not really oppose the study of isms. Isms were worthy of study as long as they are regarded as theories, hypothesis or instrumentalities."

The reason why anarchism is underdeveloped is that we have paid too much attention to doctrine, theory and principles, but neglected reality and action.

This is a common fault of the anarchist party in the world, and China is no exception. However, we should try to control it. Anarchism is a civilian movement, but Chinese anarchism is totally unrelated to civilians. Phrases like 'splendid individualism,' 'we should put our hopes in the great past or ideal future,' and 'escape from the depressing reality and into utopia' should not have been uttered by anarchists. (Wu Kegang, 1927)[24]

New Culture's notion of scientific subjectively was of particular importance to the anarchist movement (as opposed to say Marxism) because it did not subject itself to the kind of pure/impure binaries which undergird classical anarchism. As this subjectivity took hold among the younger anarchists, the dialectical nature of classical anarchist tropes, here referred to as anarchism's "idealism," became a common point of departure, as doctrine's practical dislocation from the modern Chinese reality came under fire. Although anarchism was never directly stated to be impractical, the repeated criticism of the doctrinal intransigence and monotheism of the previous generations of anarchists functioned as a byword for this realisation. In the place of this outmoded idealism, as Ba Jin indicates below, facts could determine the future direction of an anarchism of which the post-leftist anarchists had taken rhetorical ownership.

Although we can not deny that some articles in the publications of Chinese anarchists have neglected the facts and just deduced everything from one principle, it does not represent all the comrades of anarchism. That is what I want to declare.

The reason Kropotkin could systematize anarchism is not because he was an extraordinary thinker but because he was born in the time that capitalism was broken and the proletariat was active. Kropotkin has never said that any part of anarchism was created by him, so we certainly can not take his principles as something sacred. (Ba Jin, 1927)

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[24] It seems possible that the reference to "escape from the depressing reality and into utopia" is a transliteration of classical anarchist slogan "another world is possible."

As a manifesto of constructive transgression in response to this awareness; these statements embody the kind of "call and response" between an anarchist legacy and an anarchist necessity in which a unique approach was forged by the post-leftists. When Kuli (1925) suggested that "anarchism's attitude towards other parties has two aspects, theory and fact (无政府主义者对他党之态度有理论与事实两方面)" it appears that he too was fully aware of this divergence. In fact, in all of the above statements the authors appear acutely aware of the boundaries of classical Western anarchism, and critically appraise their *relevance* to a Chinese situ. This was an appraisal which was bolstered through the adoption of the ideals, and even in many cases the terminology, of New Culture liberalism. When the younger anarchists talked of "practical problems," "neglecting facts," and "relying on principles," they were not simply aping these aspects of New Culture but utilising them to 'modify the discursive field' of Chinese anarchism, to establish a space for their ontology.

The conviction borne of these appraisals stands in relatively stark contrast with the leftist anarchists, as evidenced in Shen Zhongjiu's response to Wu Zhihui in 1924. The leftist response relies on oppositional binaries, reducing the dualities of the time to a value judgement informed solely by the perpetuated theoretical strictures of classical anarchism.

> 'Presence' and 'absence' are always opposites. Presence of government and absence of government; Presence of private property and absence of private property; which are obviously adverse. I am not smart enough to understand how a person holds two opposite opinions and goes in for two adverse movements. I would guess even those with scientific minds can not find out the reason for this absurdity.
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> Those who are linked through doctrine can be called partisans, while those who are just linked via feelings can only be called friends. Friendship is friendship and doctrine is doctrine, and we cannot change our doctrine because of friendship. It is strange that Mr Wu [Zhihui] advocates the combination of doctrine and following personal considerations at the same time. (Xin Ai, 1924)

By juxtaposing Wu Zhihui's actions as a contradiction between "personal considerations" and a conversant piety to doctrine, Shen is speaking to the fundamental contradictions which we

have established. His is a judgement made from within the dialectical boundaries of classical anarchism, reducing ideological transgression to the typical (and oft-perpetuated) narrative of ethical subordination.[25]

Although pragmatism functioned as part of an affective reconceptualisation of anarchism and ultimately a re-situation of the place of power, through its constructivism rarely did the post-leftist position openly reject the epistemological foundations of anarchism. The focus on practical problems which the anarchists made central to their discussions was in fact a pursuit of complexity, a refusal to frame the diversity of the contemporary Chinese environment through delimiting dialectics of opposition. New Culture's reinforcing of the importance of locatedness also provided a framework by which the younger anarchists could prioritise action over inaction and, much like Bakunin, "throw themselves into the whirlpool" of the times:

> What I have said does not mean that there is something wrong with the principle of anarchism, rather to express that a principle is not everlasting and almighty. Furthermore, anarchism is the product of practical mass movements, so it can not go without reality. Practically speaking, anarchism is not a kind of fancy that can *transcend time*.
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> If we want to be true revolutionaries, we should throw ourselves into the whirlpool like Bakunin, and lead the tide of revolution into the ocean of anarchism. (Ba Jin, 1927)

Ba Jin's above statement speaks to a crucial new development in the anarchist conceptualisation of anarchism, formed in the atmosphere of the New Culture. This was the supra-historical nature of classical anarchism, that in existing outside of the fetters of setting and practical necessity it was able to "transcend the times" (超时代) of which it was a part. Unwilling to perpetuate this pedestal, the post-leftist approach endeavoured to draw anarchism into the practical and the complex. The quotidian questions of practice and scientific methodology which had infiltrated to

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[25] Fascinatingly he may even by alluding to the fundamental presence-absence dialectic which defines structuralism in opposition to post-structuralism, suggestive of an greater degree of epistemological awareness pertaining the modern thought; although this is an avenue deserving of further study.

discursive arena in China were utilised by the younger anarchists as means by which to develop a "limit attitude" and to disregard the more essentialist notions of anarchism which had ensured that the anarchist movement had remained so unvarying in China. For the post-leftist anarchists, the classical binaries had resulted in a rigid and outmoded anarchist movement in China, a future was required in which action became prioritised over inaction and malleable, contingently divergent understandings of orthodox anarchist activity were brought to the fore.

REVOLUTION AND REFORM

The intellectual atmosphere of the New Culture period was not only characterised by the subjective critique of doctrine, but also by a coeval collective faith in evolutionism (Popp, 2007). The valorising of the political and social relevance of *jinhua* (evolution, 进化)—a rhetorical conflation of the new evolutionary concepts of Darwin and Spencer with evolutionary determinism—was both a popular trope of the period and a further factor in the developing ontology of the post-leftist anarchists.[26] The oppositional counterpart of *jinhua—bianhua* (change, 变化)—better describes the classical anarchist preoccupation with singular and total revolution however; in which progress and development eventually lead to a point which requires the totalising change and immediacy of revolution.[27] Zarrow (1990: p. 99) summarises the attitudes of the previous generation's leaders along these lines when he notes that "Liu [Sifu] fundamentally saw nothing inevitable about progress . . . Liu and He Zhen did not believe in incremental improvement. They believed in revolution."

The influence of *jinhua* however would subvert this immediacy and totality, allowing for the forging of a new conception of anarchist revolution which was closely intertwined with, and

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[26] This was comparable to a Hegelian anthropomorphic notion of development in which "collective human experience in time appears to undergo the same stages of growth as human life" (Tang, 1996: p. 230). In fact Li Shicen, editor of the anarchist journal People's Bell (Possibly Li Shizeng, although he was not the editor), associated himself with the evolutionary abstract ideals of Henri Bergson, stating that, "His [Darwin's] so-called origin is nothing less than the vital impulse of life, and this impulse is hidden in our consciousness to stimulate and encourage ourselves to incline toward creative paths constantly . . . Bergson, however, considers fitting to be no more than illustrating the tortuous and unsteady path of evolution;" (Tang, 1996: p. 118).

[27] Tang (1996: p. 117); see also Schwartz (1964: p. 46).

furthered the justification of, approaching anarchism through staged diachronic tactics. This evolutionary form of revolution was forwarded with particular directness by Zhu Qianzhi in his 1925 article "Prophecy of Universal Revolution" (宇宙革命地预言), in which these new evolutionary understandings were set up as the antithesis of both dialectics and the classical anarchist growth-revolution-growth dynamic, a migration which Zhu disregards as a form of nihilism (虚无主义).[28]

> Nihilism is based on dialectics, thinking that the evolution of the universe is a kind of *migration* that turns nothing to existing, and existing to nothing. Universal revolution is a kind of evolutionary progress. What's more, evolution is always heading for the true, the good, and the beautiful. The range of revolution will expand wider and wider as snowball runs. From middle class revolution to the fourth class revolution; from political revolution to anarchic revolution, the climate of revolution never stops. Universal revolution meets the needs of the true, the good, the beautiful, so it simply fits the theory of evolution. (Zhu Qianzhi, 1925)

The characterising of revolution as an 'ever-widening snowball' (滚雪球一般, 越滚越大) marks a crucial development, which established a parallel aspect, alongside pragmatism, of the new ontological approaches which were being fostered. By introducing the possibility that the anarchist revolution was neither a linear, nor a totalizing, project, goals both outside of a purist anarchist understanding and even those that seemed to initially work *against* an anarchist future were increasingly justifiable, as quantitative changes become prioritised ahead of qualitative ones.[29] The disavowal of dialectics—a recurrent theme of evolutionary approaches to anarchism—is symptomatic of the influence of both *jinhua*

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[28] Presumably this was a response to the leftist faith in dialectical materialism during the New Culture—Qu Qiubai for instance was the "first teacher of dialectical materialism" in China after his return to China in 1923 (Bo Mou, 2008: pp. 520–521).

[29] In terms of ascertaining the physical links with New Culture on statements such as this, it is worth noting that Zhu was—to return to our point on the physical proximity of pragmatism and anarchism—one of the editors of the Beijing University-based journal *Fendou* (Struggle), and was a student in the law division during the New Culture heyday (Weston, 2004: p. 191).

and experimentalism, as once again essentialist responses were put aside in favour of an embracing of complexity.

In the atmosphere of New Culture, many anarchists began to prominently utilise terms such as struggle, development, and adaptation, without associated stigma. Even older totemic anarchists like Wu Zhihui were unafraid to approach evolutionary concepts with heretofore absent commitment, as in this statement from 1924.

> Today we are in the transitional stage of republicanism and anarchism. From dawn to dusk, will it take a hundred years? A thousand? No one can yet say, for we only know it will take a long time. But if we acknowledge the infinitude of the universe, then the number of years it will take is just from dawn to dusk. (Zarrow, 1990: p. 82)

By 1928, Li Shizeng (1928) too would justify both his membership in the GMD, and his contentious interpretation of Sun Yat-Sen's Three People's Principles, through a progressive conceptualisation of revolution. As Dirlik (1993: p. 271) has noted, "he [Li] now explained that 'present-day revolution' meant nothing more than 'present-day progress.' Revolution, as progress, signified the evolution of mankind from bad to good, simple to complex." Whilst Zarrow (1990: p. 220) too has noted that "Wu [Zhihui]'s emphasis shifted from fast and easy solutions to long and complex struggles," neither has chosen to tie these developments into a reformist dynamic, even though Wu and Li had emerged as the custodians of these ideals within the movement.

Turning to the younger post-leftist generation of anarchists—who were steeped in this temporal awareness—it becomes clear that this evolutionary perspective had taken on a broader purchase. As with Zhu Qianzhi, once again the evolution-revolution-evolution teleology was rejected, in the case of the younger anarchists to be replaced with the repeated *conflation* of evolution and revolution. Take Ba Jin, who explicitly states that evolution was not just the maker of revolution but that they are essentially one and the same—a conclusion justified once again through the situationist necessities of a specifically Chinese setting:

> Revolution doesn't collide with evolution. Shao Keli has said: 'Evolution and revolution are successive activities of the same phenomenon; evolution comes before revolution, and then evolves into revolution.' The realization of anar-

chism can not be achieved in a short time, but will be achieved after constant revolutions and constructions. In the present environment of China, it is impossible for us to realize the ideal of anarchism immediately . . .

Although the result of the Russian Revolution is far away from the expectations of the former revolutionaries, we have to confess that Russia is much better than Czarist Russia. If you studied revolutions in history, you would find that the result of each revolution was far from its expectation. In the French Revolution, the brave masses, even women, took up arms to fight against their oppressors. But what was the result? Did they just want to set up a capitalist government? 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité' were their slogans. How much has been realized between the Napoleonic Government and now? Maybe you will be angry because French Revolution was just a half-measure since you know that there are still monarchical parties in France, but what kind of time would we be in if there had not been the French Revolution? (Ba Jin, 1927)

Although the allusion to diachronic approaches is not as explicit as in Zhu Qianzhi's article, the above statement is nonetheless telling in its more conciliatory and less essentialist juxtaposition of failure and success, which relies more on the space between essentialist responses. The discursive capacity which we have begun to establish, to look at both abstract examples such as these and at the material realities of applying anarchism to China from outside of classical binaries, was heavily dependent on this evolutionary conceptualisation of time and revolution. For when the notion of building the unique conditions required for an immediate anarchist revolution was removed, a constructive future for anarchism potentially emerges from any number of parallel and previously "unorthodox" activities.

Wei Huilin's contribution to the same symposium echoes Ba in its favouring of contingent approaches and progressive non-linear development ahead of waiting for a totalising revolution.

We can not say like a determinist that some social system is an inevitable journey before the realization of anarchism, which will delay the arrival of our aim. This claim will just prolong the old system that ensures antagonism between the dominator and the dominated. What we should do is to realise our ideals based on the present

truth and the tendency of our time. We all know that the progress of the human being comes from the efforts people take gradually. We don't plan to build an anarchist society suddenly, but we can try to get as much freedom and happiness as possible as we do so. (Wei Huilin, 1927)

That the classical anarchist conviction that only certain situations are legitimate precursors to anarchist revolution could be brushed aside as "determinism" (定命论) is indicative of the assertiveness which was manifesting itself among the younger anarchists. The influence of the New Culture movement is once again tangible in this regard, as the use of determinism (in particular as a pejorative) had emerged as part of the critique ideological piety in only the preceding five or ten years. Perhaps even more interestingly Wei speaks more explicitly to the classical anarchist preoccupation with dialectical power structures when he states that "the old system" ensures "antagonism between the dominator and dominated." To disavow antagonism between dominator and dominated—a bold contradiction of a fundamental tenant of anarchist theory—is a perfect example of the agency wrought by evolutionism. Much as with Zhu above, the dialectical overturning of power that was the anarchist revolution failed to suit a Chinese reality. In place of this old system, Wei returns to our repeated New Thought pattern of approaching doctrine pragmatically and prioritising localised and necessitated responses ahead of inherited approaches.

The converse faith in a spontaneous and total anarchist revolution would however remain a persistent identifier within leftist groups, whom pursued the fervent belief that the conditions for a total anarchist revolution were imminent and that revolution could be achieved through commitment and purity of ideals alone. Shen Zhongjiu saw progression as a linear act toward anarchism, in which divergence was characterised as "regression" (退步):

It is progress to develop from the Nationalist Party to anarchism, which surely deserves praise. However, if we change from anarchists to nationalists, we can only say that it is a kind of regression. (Xin Ai, 1924)

It is clear that the perpetuation of the ethical pedestal of singular revolution remained a key aspect of Shen's understanding of "true anarchism," characterising evolutionary and adaptive ideals

merely as a means to justify ideological capitulation and opportunism. For example, Shen wrote:

> In my opinion, we should know the difference between revolution and reformation if we want to understand revolution. First, they both seek for evolution and alteration, but revolution seeks for complete and fierce change while reformation seeks for partial and slow alteration. The evolution from revolution is always more fierce than that from reformation, which can last for hundreds of years. Reformation changes the old state and old power gradually while revolution overturns them fundamentally. Secondly, they adopt different methods. Reformers often compromise with the old society in a moderate way . . . Third, the reformers often mix themselves with the targets to be reformed, and sometimes they cooperate; Revolutionaries adopt adverse attitude to their targets. Reformers just want to get personal improvement, but revolutionaries want to overturn some class. Revolution always changes with the times. (Xin Ai, 1924)

Much of Shen's analysis is rooted in classically dialectical approaches to reformism—that a revolutionary self-defines by relying on oppositional binaries (表示敌对的行动), and that reformism always acts as a veiled cover for ethical dalliance. This approach has at various junctures been retrospectively associated with a kind of ideological and moral purity of purpose by anarchist historians.[30] Yet, as Todd May (1994: p. 54) has noted, "the mistake that is made in contrasting revolution and reform lies in the assumption that the former involves a qualitative change in society, while the latter involves only a quantitative change." This is an analysis which adeptly characterises the binary approaches to revolution and evolution amongst this group.

For the post-leftist anarchists, their diachronic understanding of an anarchist hereafter became one that was less utopian, even

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[30] Take for instance the following assessment—"Anarchists demand our attention, not for who they were or what they accomplished, but because against a revolutionary strategy that presupposed a necessary compromise of revolutionary goals in order to confront the demands of immediate political necessity, they reaffirmed a revolutionary consciousness that provides an indispensable critical perspective from the Left" (Dirlik, 1993: p. 198) I would also like to note this does not say "not *only* for who they were," although this would seem far more reasonable.

less singular; there was no longer the typically precise anarchist programme for action but more of a collective and continuous negotiation and refinement. The political field would have to be seen without the "hope of a final emancipation," as the anarchist revolution was decentered via the notion of evolutionary development. This sense that unitary understandings of revolution were becoming an anachronism is evident in Wu Kegang's open refusal of the singular essential tactic, associating it with a time of more ideological certainty and less practicality within the movement:

> "Better none than imperfect. A 'pure' anarchist movement should not take part in any movements unrelated with anarchism."
>
> I had the same thoughts as above three years ago, but now I have the courage to confess that I was wrong. I did not know revolution at all then. Any revolution can never be purely of anarchism. I assert that we don't need to talk about revolution any more if we wait until there is anarchist revolution . . . There has never been and will never be a revolution which is controlled only by one ideality. (Wu Kegang, 1927)[31]

Throughout this period, evolutionary approaches are associated with the decentering of power relationships, of dominator and dominated, in the post-leftist understanding of revolution. The twin notions of reformism and decentered power structures are often closely intertwined in anarchist theory as it faces modernity, and it is worth noting the chronological equivalence in China.[32] Newman has noted that the

> notion of dispersed power renders the idea of revolution as the final, dialectical overturning of power an anachronism . . . once the strategic picture of concentric circles or hier-

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[31] Wu Kegang, "Wuzhengfu zhuyi yu shiji wenti" in *WZFZYSX*, 826–49; It is potentially illuminating that Wu cites 1923—the year of the "Debate Between Science and Metaphysics" and Wu Zhihui and Shen Zhonjiu's defining debate as the turning point in which he began to look at anarchism from outside of the boundaries of the pure and impure divide (Schwartz, 1986: p. 433).

[32] For a discussion on the decentering of power in Early-Modern China see Fitzgerald (1996: pp. 70–80), Rankin (2000) and Bodenhorn (2002) among many others in an expanding field.

archies is dropped, so is the idea that revolutionary change can be distinguished qualitatively from reformist change. (Newman, 2001: p. 79)

It is clear that for the post-leftist anarchists even distinguishing revolution from evolution had become a misnomer, they believed them to be one and the same.

As the temporal boundaries of revolution were made more malleable, divergent acts could be justified as part of a long-term continuum, broadening the boundaries of orthodoxy considerably. It is in the combining of these two elements, the focus on the practical and the local, and temporal decentering of the anarchist revolution, that we find the root of my contention that these anarchists were early adopters of the "tactical" aspects of post anarchism. May (1994, p. 10) has noted that,

One of the central characteristics which binds various strategic political philosophies together, and which distinguishes them from tactical political philosophy, is that a strategic political philosophy involves a unitary analysis that aims toward a single goal. It is engaged in a project that it considers the center of the political universe.

The incorporation of evolutionary approaches pushed the post-leftist analysis in China beyond a mere focus on pragmatic application, and into the realm of the undermining of the unitary analysis of power and revolution.

Forming Orthodoxy from Heterodoxy—New Culture as a Means of External Legitimation

Beyond providing the framework around which the post-leftist anarchists structured their new approach to anarchist doctrine there remains a secondary aspect to the importance of New Culture ideology and terminology to post-leftist anarchism. The epistemological framework offered by the New Culture functioned as an alternative source of legitimacy for the younger anarchists as they distanced themselves from their more conservative counterparts and adopted a heterodox position toward anarchism. As the essentialism at the heart of the movement was reducing divergent approaches to ethical subordination, New Culture provided the kind of externally-legitimated structure and identity which was required if this heterodoxy were to become orthodoxy.

That both the leftists and post-leftists looked to the terms "revolution" and "revolutionary" as territorial spaces to be claimed on behalf of their understandings of anarchism was reflective of their mutual desires to determine the direction of anarchism in China. Take for instance Shen Zongjiu's characterisation of a platonic revolutionary:

> Revolutionaries always try to build up a brand new power to fight against the old society. Before the revolution succeeds, the old society usually frustrates the new power in many ways, but revolutionaries *never compromise* with the old society. (Xin Ai, 1924)

And compare with that of Wu Kegang's:

> I believe that China is truly in the midst of revolution. This revolution seems to have no direct relation with anarchism, it is not a pure revolution from anarchism's perspective. However, are there no other revolutions besides a purely anarchist revolution? Now China is in the time of revolution, so the anarchist party *should take part in it* if they are revolutionaries. (Wu Kegang, 1927)

Although revolution marks the apex of these passages, both are imprecated within a more resonant question—"what is an anarchist?" This was not a discussion of whether either group were anarchists *or not* so much as an appraisal of their role *as* anarchists. For the leftists, to be a revolutionary was to embody purity of conception and dedication, the revolutionary as antithesis of the reformer. The post-leftist anarchists' revolutionary self-conceptualisation however was scaffolded by the broader ideas which were drawn from New Culture. Their revolution was reliant on involvement in a "revolutionary moment" rather than standing on an ideological pedestal, the antithesis of the revolutionary ideologue. As they repeatedly asserted a more participatory role for themselves in the application of anarchism, the post-leftist anarchists were looking at reconceiving the role of anarchism itself in China, rooted in a more participatory anarchist paradigm which no longer spent so much time on the sidelines. By participating in a long-term project, the revolutionary reformer understood the flaws in the notion of revolution and perhaps had, much like Bey's ontological anarchist, given up wanting the idealised anarchist revolution at all.

Shen Zhongjiu's attempts to reduce divergence to ethical subordination are indicative of a desire to rhetorically set the boundaries of anarchism; but the younger anarchists too, with this structure in place, were able to be assertive. New Thought pragmatism played a significant role in allowing the post-leftist anarchists to form a comprehensive anarchist identity which was not predicated on reaction or contrarianism but on a complete and yet divergent understanding of what it meant to be an anarchist. Once again, poststructural anarchism represents an analogous response to an analogous question. When May (1994, p. 61) asked, "are the struggles, and the vision which motivates that struggle reducible to a single strategic goal, or instead are anarchism's tactical moments its proper articulation?" he was referring to the very same grand question of theory and praxis that the decline phase anarchists wrestled with some sixty years before. The two groups' differing material attempts to rhetorically establish and justify their approaches are ancillary, what is important is that each side sought to *legitimate* their approaches. This is indicative of our key assumption, that neither side was reactionary or short-termist, that instead they harboured fundamentally divorced visions for anarchism in China, both of which were epistemologically complex conceptualisations, fully-rounded and yet existing at the relative extremes of a holistic anarchist nomenclature.

CONCLUSION: THE SYSTEMATISATION OF ANARCHISM

Most of the anarchists of China do not come from civilians, so we don't know the life, feelings, needs and wishes of civilians. Our anarchism is out of translated Western books, so our enterprise is just something theoretical. We don't know civilians, and they don't know us. (Ba Jin, 1927)

When the post-leftist generation of anarchists referred to anarchism as an "abstract theory" translated from Western books, this was indicative of a collective *dialogue* being established for the first time between the synchronic requirements of the anarchist movement in China and the diachronic doctrine of anarchism which we established at the outset.[33] This dialogue was mediated

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[33] Take one of the most well-known quotations of Wu Zhihui on Guomindang collaboration: "Burned to ash, I am a Guomindang party member, and at the same time one who believes in anarchism." Wu's statement is a statement of diachronic and synchronic duality, both a

by pragmatism and evolutionism and is worth noting in the long-run chronology of global anarchism and anarchist ontologies.

The result of this dialogue was that even as the classical anarchist binaries fell apart during the movement's decline, this younger generation neither clung to their continued relevance, nor did they abandon anarchism (as some anarchists had for the CCP over the previous seven years). With the declining relevance of classical anarchism a flourishing of possibilities took place, implicit in which was the opportunity to recalibrate anarchism in a manner which would make it more effective without leaving it behind. This resultant attempt to pursue early forms of non-foundational, post-structuralist ontology was referred to internally as "systematisation" (无政府主义系统化), as in Wei Hulin's statement here:

> We must have our own organization to fight against our enemies, which should have two functions: One is to set up the basis of the future society; the other is to cope with some of the problems of the particular period. Now our primary problem is the systematisation of anarchism, which is the practical problem of all anarchist movements. (Wei Huilin, 1927)

As a choice of wording alone, systematisation reflects two conclusions we have drawn regarding the post-leftist anarchists. First, that their divergent approaches were part of a *rational* attempt to overcome the deficiencies of the existing culture, rather than a reactionary aberrance. Second, this ontological approach was understood as a refinement of anarchism, a duty to make anarchism better, rather than a tacit abandonment. New Culture provided a diachronic source of reason for this process, just as the wider intellectual community was looking to "imaginatively transcend its one-dimensionality," the systematisation of anarchism served as a more localised but comparably emancipatory sense of reconstructive completion for the anarchist movement.

The post-leftist anarchists directed themselves toward achieving a position of objective analysis and subjective action, much like Hakim Bey or Reiner Schürmann. In this manner they were

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question of what Wu believed (he 'believes' in anarchism) and what he deemed to be necessitated (he is a 'member' of the GMD). Yet with the question of identity in mind it is interesting to note what has never been transposed or discussed, the closing phrase of Wu's very next sentence—"I am on the verge of depersonalisation" (我才是人格破产).

able to decenter the place of power in the anarchist paradigm, away from classical anarchism which, in application to China, had "lurched toward rigid polarities and flat totalisations" (Berman, 1987: p. 24). Had the movement's precipitous decline not stood as the logical endgame of these changing processes it is entirely plausible to assume that the post-leftists could have established a more codified version of these loose progressive ideas and eventually a fully-formed pragmatic programme for action. R.W. Sleeper (1986: p. 1) has argued that the Deweyan pragmatism which so informed New Culture, "seems to be teaching us how to transform the culture that is decaying around us, rather than just how to 'cope' with its collapse." The existing narrative of the anarchists has been one of them merely coping with collapse during the decline phase; our narrative has looked to establish the post-leftists as a group with the agency to actively transform anarchism in line with the doctrines they idealised. With this in mind, it is worth noting Wu Kegang's (1927) arresting commentary, that "reasons produce results, and results turn into reasons, which move in endless circles" (许多多因　产生一个果 果又变为因　循环不已　永不停止) in which he embodies the most lasting prognostication of modernity—that not only is it transitory, fleeting and a "ruthless centrifuge of change," but that to embrace it opens up transformative possibilities.

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ABBREVIATION

WZFZYSX 1 / 2: Ge Maochun et al., (1984) *Wuzhengfu Zhuyi Sixiang Ziliao Xuan* [无政府主义思想资料选]. Beijing: Beijing Daxue Chubanshe.

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