

Searching for the Chinese Autonomy: Leo Strauss in the Chinese Context

by

Dongxian Jiang

Department of Political Science  
Duke University

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Approved:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Michael Gillespie, Supervisor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ruth Grant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Malachi Hacohen

\_\_\_\_\_  
David Wong

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in the Department of  
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2014

ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

Focusing on the current “Strauss fever” in contemporary China, this thesis addresses two issues: Why Leo Strauss is popular in China, and how Chinese Straussians interpret and apply Leo Strauss’s thought in the Chinese context. I argue that, Chinese Straussians are creatively accepting Leo Strauss’s thoughts: Strauss’s revival of the ancient Western political philosophy reminds Chinese Straussians to turn their eyes toward ancient Chinese thought. By reemphasizing the value of traditional Chinese wisdom, Chinese Straussians find that they have gained a perspective from which to reevaluate the justification of modernity and all relative Enlightenment and postmodern “isms.” According to them, returning to the Chinese philosophical tradition will liberate China from the dominance of modern and contemporary Western thought and reestablish the autonomy of Chinese civilization.

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## List of Abbreviations

**CCM** *Correspondence Concerning Modernity*, trans. George Elliott Turker, Independent Journal of Philosophy, 4 (1983), 105-119 and 5/6 (1988): 177-192.

**CM** *The City and Man*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1964.

**GN** "German Nihilism," Interpretation 26 (1999), 352-378.

**HPP** *History of Political Philosophy* (Third Edition), ed. Leo Strauss & Joseph Cropsey, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

**JPCM** *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity*, ed. Kenneth Hart Green, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1997.

**LAM** *Liberalism, Ancient and Modern*, New York, Basic Books, 1968.

**NRH** *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1953.

**OT** *On Tyranny: Including the Strauss-Kojeve Correspondence*, ed. Victor Gourevitch & Michael S. Roth, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2000.

**PAW** *Persecution and the Art of Writing*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1952.

**RCPR** *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*, ed. Thomas Pangle, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1989.

**SCR** *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*, trans. Elias M. Sinclair, New York, Schocken, 1965.

**WPP** *What is Political Philosophy and Other Studies*, Glencoe, The Free Press, 1959.

# 1. Introduction

One of the most striking yet controversial intellectual phenomena in China during the first decade of the twenty-first century has been the rise in popularity of Leo Strauss, the Jewish-American political philosopher. Oddly enough, many young Chinese scholars and students are reading and discussing Strauss's books, defending and criticizing Strauss's opinions, even following Strauss's teaching to read ancient Western classics. In short, they have become his spiritual disciples. On the other hand, the Chinese intellectuals who dislike Strauss, especially Chinese liberals, find themselves in an awkward situation: They do not accept Strauss, but they must pay adequate attention to Strauss in order to criticize him and defend themselves. Ignoring Leo Strauss is now impossible in China. As Strauss advanced many important criticisms on modernity, the Chinese Straussians feel that they have the responsibility to continue his inquiry in the Chinese context, while the anti-Straussians feel that they are being forced to face Strauss's challenges.

Not only Chinese intellectuals, but also some American political philosophers have noticed "Strauss fever" in China. Stanley Rosen told the *Boston Globe* that "A very, very significant circle of Strauss admirers has sprung up in, of all places, China."<sup>1</sup> Like Rosen,

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<sup>1</sup> Jeet Heer, "The Philosopher the Late Leo Strauss has Emerged as the Thinker of the Moment in Washington, but His Ideas Remain Mysterious. Was He an Ardent Opponent of Tyranny, or an Apologist for the Abuse of Power?" *Boston Globe*, May 11, 2003. A very interesting thing I must mention here is that many Chinese Straussians quote Stanley Rosen in order to expose the great influence of Leo Strauss and Straussians in China. But they replace Rosen's sentence by "The location admires Leo Strauss most nowadays is mainland China." They note that the source of this sentence is *Boston Globe*, May 11, 2003, but

other Western Straussians have also been surprised by this special interest. In fact, both Harvey C. Mansfield and Heinrich Meier asked the same question while lecturing on Strauss at Chinese universities: Why are you Chinese interested in Leo Strauss?<sup>2</sup> It seems that it is somewhat difficult for Western intellectuals to understand why Strauss, a philosopher who focused on the Western tradition and said almost nothing about China, is now becoming an intellectual celebrity in an East Asian country.

Frankly speaking, it is also not easy for us Chinese to answer this question. As “Strauss fever” is an on-going intellectual phenomenon, its further influences are far from clear in Chinese intellectual history. Therefore, this paper is just a preliminary attempt to examine this phenomenon. The article will address two issues: Why Leo Strauss is popular in China, and how Chinese Straussians interpret and apply Leo Strauss’s thought in the Chinese context. I will first introduce how Leo Strauss gradually became popular in China, then focus on the thoughts of two Chinese scholars, Liu Xiaofeng (劉小楓) and Gan Yang (甘陽), who first introduced Leo Strauss to Chinese intellectuals. Finally, I will discuss some political implications of Chinese Straussians.

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none of them shows the original link or checks the original text. As can be seen, there is a huge difference between Rosen’s original sentence and the Chinese paraphrase. Readers can see the Chinese paraphrase in Zhang Xu (張旭), “Shitelaosi zai zhongguo” 施特勞斯在中國 (“Strauss in China: a Review of the Researches and Debates on Leo Strauss”), *Jishou University Journal (Social Science)* 吉首師範大學學報(社會科學版), 24 (2003), 13.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Tao, “Leo Strauss in China,” *Claremont Review of Books*, Spring 2012, accessed March 19, 2014. [http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1955/article\\_detail.asp](http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1955/article_detail.asp), and Deng Zhenglai (鄧正來) & Harvey C. Mansfield, “Yu shitelaosi xuepai xiangguan de ruogan wenti (2008)” 與施特勞斯學派相關的若干問題 (“Questions regarding the Strauss School: a Dialogue with Professor Mansfield, 2008”), Xu Jian ed, *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue* 古今之爭與文明自覺 (*Quarrels between the Ancients and the Moderns and the Self-consciousness of a Civilization: Leo Strauss in the Chinese Context*), Shanghai, Huadong Normal University Press, 2010, p. 142-43.

Readers will see that Chinese Straussians are not passive receivers of Western philosophy. On the contrary, as they have strong concerns about particular Chinese problems, they are creatively adapting Leo Strauss's thoughts: Strauss's revival of the ancient Western political philosophy and his reinterpretation of classical "great books" remind Chinese Straussians to turn their eyes toward ancient China. By reemphasizing the value of traditional Chinese thought, such as Confucianism, Chinese Straussians have gained a perspective from which to reevaluate the justification of modernity and all relative Enlightenment and postmodern "isms." For them, returning to the Chinese tradition will liberate China from the dominance of modern and contemporary Western thought and reestablish the autonomy of Chinese civilization. Therefore, it is clear that the "Strauss fever" is an important philosophical movement. In terms of political implications, unlike American Straussians, Chinese Straussians do not feel they have a heavy responsibility to reconcile the relationship between Strauss's anti-modern political thought and modern liberal democratic regime. As China is not a liberal democracy, Chinese liberals are afraid that the Straussians cannot play a positive role in Chinese liberalization and democratization.

There have already been three English articles on this controversial phenomenon. Zhou Lian's article "The Most Fashionable and the Most Relevant"<sup>3</sup> was the earliest one introducing "Strauss fever" to the Western audience. Zhou expressed his worry about

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<sup>3</sup> Zhou Lian, "The Most Fashionable and the Most Relevant: A Review of Contemporary Chinese Political Philosophy," *Diogenes*, 56 (2009), 128-137. Zhou Lian (周濂) is Professor of Philosophy at Tsinghua University in Beijing, specializing in political philosophy.

Chinese Straussians and Schmittians because both of them were critics of liberalism. He quotes Mark Lilla's words to warn them that they should "be scrupulous in distinguishing liberalism's genuinely philosophical critics from those who practice the politics of theoretical despair."<sup>4</sup> However, this article only focuses on the political implications without mentioning anything about Straussians' philosophical attempt to revive traditional Chinese thought.

Mark Lilla's "Reading Strauss in Beijing"<sup>5</sup> might be the most well-known article among Western intellectual circles. He had met several Chinese students interested in political philosophy during his teaching career and was invited to give some lectures in China in 2010. Therefore, some of his observations in this article were insightful. He was also curious about the political implications of Chinese Straussians, and believed that they were interested in cultivating a new gentry class in order to guide China to its political maturity. Besides this point, he also correctly found that Leo Strauss provided a bridge between ancient Chinese and ancient Western traditions.

Once published, Lilla's article was quickly translated into Chinese and provoked some discussions among intellectual circles. Wang Tao's "Leo Strauss in China"<sup>6</sup> was a response both to Lilla and Mansfield. He criticized that Lilla's "analysis of what he

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<sup>4</sup> Mark Lilla, *The Reckless Mind: Intellectuals in Politics*, New York, The New York Review of Books, 2001, 76.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Lilla, "Reading Strauss in Beijing," *New Republic*, 2010, accessed March 19, 2014.  
<http://www.newrepublic.com/article/magazine/79747/reading-leo-strauss-in-beijing-china-marx#>.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Tao, "Leo Strauss in China," 80-82, accessed March 19, 2014,  
[http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1955/article\\_detail.asp](http://www.claremont.org/publications/crb/id.1955/article_detail.asp). Wang Tao (王濤) is an assistant professor in Division of Social Sciences, Fudan University in Shanghai, specializing in ancient philosophy and political philosophy.

observed is nonetheless faulty.”<sup>7</sup> He then demonstrated that “the Chinese encounter with Strauss is a meeting of classical mentalities,” and indirectly diluted the Westerners’ curiosity about the political implications of Chinese Straussians. This concise yet precise article is the best one for the Western intellectuals to understand “Strauss fever” in China.

Though many advantages can be discovered in these three articles, it is still necessary for me to present a more detailed analysis of “Strauss fever” in China. Before investigating Liu Xiaofeng’s and Gan Yang’s philosophy in detail, some important facts about “Strauss fever” in China need to be described briefly.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 80.

## 2. Strauss Fever: Context and Facts

China has a long history and a strong interest in absorbing Western thought. As China was a country frequently impacted by Western and Japanese imperialism, intellectuals, generation by generation, had no choice but to think: Why is the West strong? Why is China weak? How can China survive in the modern world? Should we still defend Confucianism, or should we learn from the West in order to protect ourselves, just like what Japan had already done? Is modernity desirable or disastrous?

Keeping those questions in mind, in Late Qing Dynasty, an increasing number of intellectuals started to see that Confucianism had lost its justification and was incapable of defending China in the modern world. Enlightened by Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism, Mill's *On Liberty*, Montesquieu's critique of oriental despotism and Rousseau's democratic theory, the first generation of modern Chinese intellectuals and revolutionaries overthrew the *Ancien Régime* and established a quasi liberal republic. Inspired by Nietzsche's philosophy of the Overman, John Dewey's American pragmatism and all liberal democratic theories attainable, the second generation of intellectuals harshly criticized Confucianism and attempted to enlighten the entire Chinese people. Obsessed by Marx's scientific socialism and Lenin's Bolshevism, the third generation of intellectual-revolutionaries rejected the liberal project and founded Communist China. Therefore, it is clear that Western thought stood behind almost every political practice in China, and even today, Chinese intellectuals can not discuss Chinese

issues without the aid of Western terminology.

The Post-Mao reform and opening up gradually diluted China's communist character and welcomed some Western-style practice, such as the establishment of the market economy. In this new era, intellectuals gradually recognized that contemporary China was confronted with two tasks: first, instituting Western liberal constitutional principles to prevent the revival of Maoism and all other kinds of tyrannies, and second, finding intellectual resources to resist the negative influence of modernization, such as unconstrained mammonism, aimless hedonism, technological tyranny, and social inequality. The contemporary Chinese intellectual landscape is thus a battlefield between these two separate but interrelated concerns. Each person invites his/her own Western intellectual hero and criticizes the others, making the Chinese debate a mirror of the Western one. Until now, among the intellectual circles, liberalism and its variations are the dominant philosophical and political discourses. However, liberals are facing vigorous challenges from Maoists, New-Leftists and all kinds of conservatives who support traditional values. Some intellectuals wish to simultaneously implement liberalization and resist the diseases of modernity, and they choose either to synthesize those two opposing aspects, or to express their different stances in accord with different circumstances.

It was in this atmosphere that Strauss entered China. Chinese intellectuals are interested in Western theories, and many of them have already read some most

influential criticisms of modernity. In the 1980s and 1990s, Liu Xiaofeng and Gan Yang, with other young scholars, rediscovered Nietzsche and also introduced Heidegger for the first time. They even triggered a similar “Heidegger fever” in the 1980s. As they had been familiar with contemporary continental philosophy, it seems that they would encounter Leo Strauss sooner or later, because Strauss was also a follower of Nietzsche and Heidegger. The well-known literary talent of Liu and Gan is also a good requisite for the spread of any philosophy they admire.<sup>8</sup>

Actually, even before Liu’s and Gan’s introduction, Strauss’s name had appeared in Chinese books. As early as 1985, a scholar translated a book containing Strauss’s “What is Political Philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> In 1993, the Straussian textbook *History of Political Philosophy* was also translated.<sup>10</sup> Eight years later, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes* came out in a Chinese version.<sup>11</sup> However, those early introductions did not attract Chinese intellectuals because they tended to regard Strauss merely as an ordinary scholar rather than a philosopher.<sup>12</sup>

It was Liu Xiaofeng who first treated Strauss as a preeminent political philosopher.

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<sup>8</sup> Zhou Lian, “The Most Fashionable and the Most Relevant: A Review of Contemporary Chinese Political Philosophy,” *Diogenes*, 56 (2009), 130.

<sup>9</sup> English Version: James A. Gould & Vincent V. Thursby ed., *Contemporary Political Thought*, Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1969. Chinese Version: 古尔德、瑟斯比:《现代政治思想》。Beijing, Commercial Press, 1985.

<sup>10</sup> English Version: Leo Strauss & Joseph Cropsey ed., *History of Political Thought* (3<sup>rd</sup> edition), Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1987. Chinese Version: 列奥·施特劳斯、约瑟夫·克罗波西 编:《政治哲学史》(上下)。Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Press, 1993.

<sup>11</sup> English Version: Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes: Its Basis and Genesis*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1963. Chinese Version: 列奥·施特劳斯:《霍布斯的政治哲学》。Nanjing, Yilin Press, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> Zhang Xu, “Shitelaosi zai zhongguo” (“Strauss in China: a Review of the Researches and Debates on Leo Strauss”), *Jishou University Journal (Social Science)*, 24 (2003), 12.

In 2001, Liu asked his friends to translate four articles of Strauss and published them in a Hong Kong journal.<sup>13</sup> Then, in 2002, another seven essays were translated into Chinese.<sup>14</sup> In the meanwhile, Liu collected twenty-one secondary articles on Strauss written by Western Straussians and edited a 775 page book, *Strauss and Ancient Political Philosophy*.<sup>15</sup> Soon, in 2003, Strauss's masterpiece, *Natural Right and History*, was published in China, with Gan Yang's eighty-two page preface introducing Strauss's overall philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, 2002 and 2003 were the prelude of "Strauss fever" in Mainland China.

In 2003, Liu found that a book series he had already created, "Classics and Interpretations," was a good base for him to implement the Straussian project. He quickly published Allen Bloom's *Giants and Dwarfs*,<sup>17</sup> Seth Benardete's *The Bow and the Lyre*,<sup>18</sup> and Stanley Rosen's *The Quarrel between Philosophy and Poetry*.<sup>19</sup> In addition, he also completed a new literal translation of Plato's *Symposium*.<sup>20</sup> Yet merely translating the works of Strauss's disciples was far from enough. From 2006, Liu created the "Leo

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<sup>13</sup> The four essays were "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections," "The Mutual Influence of Theology and Philosophy," "How to Begin to Study Medieval Philosophy," and "Exoteric Teaching," published in *Dao feng: jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風: 基督教文化評論 *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*, 14 (2001).

<sup>14</sup> He Zhaotian ed. *Xifang xiandaixing: quzhe yu zhankai* 西方現代性: 曲折與展開 (*The Modernity of the West: Complications and Development*), Changchun, Jilin Renmin Press, 2002.

<sup>15</sup> Liu Xiaofeng ed., *Strauss and Ancient Political Philosophy*, Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Press, 2002.

<sup>16</sup> English Version: Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1953. Chinese version: 列奧·施特勞斯:《自然權利與歷史》。Beijing, SDX Press, 2003.

<sup>17</sup> English Version: Allen Bloom, *Giants and Dwarfs: Essays 1960-1990*, Touchstone Books, 1991. Chinese Version: 布鲁姆:《巨人与侏儒:布鲁姆文集》。Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> English Version: *The Bow and the Lyre: a Platonic Reading of the Odyssey*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1997. Chinese Version: 伯纳德特:《弓弦与竖琴:从柏拉图解读奥德赛》。Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2003.

<sup>19</sup> English Version: Stanley Rosen, *The Quarrel Between Philosophy and Poetry*, New York, Routledge, 1988. Chinese Version: 罗森:《诗与哲学之争》。Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Bolatu de huiyin* 柏拉圖的會飲 (*Plato's Symposium*), Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2003.

Strauss Collection” as a sub-series under “Classics and Interpretations,” aiming to publish Strauss’s original works and excellent secondary materials on him. Since 2010, Liu’s group has accelerated the translating project and up to now published fifteen books of Strauss’s writings. In addition, the “Classics and Interpretations” also published literal translations and detailed interpretive works regarding Plato, Aristotle, Xenophon, Rousseau and Nietzsche. Among them, the “Plato Commentary” is the most mature sub-series. Liu’s ultimate goal is to translate Plato’s complete works directly from Ancient Greek. A noteworthy phenomenon is that most of the secondary works selected by Liu are written by Western Straussians. Nowadays, “Classics and Interpretations” has become one of the largest and most popular book series in Mainland China.

“Strauss fever” is the most controversial cultural phenomenon in the Post-Mao period. It has lasted for over a decade, and is becoming increasingly energetic in present day. Members of the movement have rapidly translated almost all of the works of Strauss, including his correspondence with his contemporaries. This movement has attracted more and more young students who admire Liu and led them to expand his project, conduct classical studies, and criticize modernity.<sup>21</sup> Because of this, it also challenges the mainstream academia, questions established custom, and by so doing irritates liberal intellectuals. Liu’s enthusiasm for Strauss, however, paid its price. Some

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<sup>21</sup> Xu Jian, “Siyán zhīdiàn” 斯言之玷: 審視一個中國的施特勞斯門人 (“A Flaw in Speech: Examining a Chinese Straussian”), Xu Jian ed, *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue* (*Quarrels between the Ancients and the Moderns and the Self-consciousness of a Civilization: Leo Strauss in the Chinese Context*), 302.

of his old friends from the 1980s broke with him. For example, Deng Xiaomang (邓晓芒),<sup>22</sup> the best Kant scholar and a Kantian Enlightenment promoter in China, accused Liu of being a Nazi.<sup>23</sup> In response, Liu also accused Deng of being a Nazi because Kant is regarded by Berlin as a predecessor of Nazi ideology.<sup>24</sup> Leaving those ad hominem attacks aside, the next two chapters will show that Liu and Gan made sincere attempts to apply Strauss's philosophy in the Chinese context.

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<sup>22</sup> Deng Xiaomang is Professor of Philosophy at Wuhan University. He is the most authoritative translator of Kant's Three Critiques in China and has published many lengthy books regarding Kant, Hegel, and other classical German philosophers. He is a liberal defending rational monism, and like Liu, harshly criticizes Berlin, but from a different perspective.

<sup>23</sup> Liu Suli (劉蘇里) & Deng Xiaomang, "Zhexuejia jintian de juese, Sept 19, 2010" 哲學家今天的角色 ("The Present-day Role of Philosophers, Sept 19, 2010"), accessed March 18, 2014, [www.aisixiang.com/data/37948.html](http://www.aisixiang.com/data/37948.html).

<sup>24</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Zhi bashi diandai de laoshuren dengxiaomang jiaoshou de xin, Nov. 2013" 致八十年代老熟人鄧曉芒教授的信 ("Letter to Professor Deng Xiaomang, My Acquaintance in the 1980s, Nov. 2013"), accessed March 18, 2014, [www.21ccom.net/articles/sxwh/shsc/article\\_2013112095673.html](http://www.21ccom.net/articles/sxwh/shsc/article_2013112095673.html).

### 3. Liu Xiaofeng and Leo Strauss

Chinese intellectuals constantly bring the Western thinkers into the Chinese context and “encourage” them to participate in Chinese debates. Therefore, the ultimate reason for them to study Western thought is to deepen their understanding of the particular Chinese situation. Liu Xiaofeng and Gan Yang are two such intellectuals. They creatively received the work of Leo Strauss: On the one hand, Strauss changed some of their old ideas; on the other hand, they developed new ideas that Strauss himself and Western Straussians had not fully developed.

I have shown that Liu is the most important figure of the “Strauss fever” in China. But who is Liu? How did he exercise such great influence in intellectual circles? Liu was born in 1956 in Chongqing, a mountainous metropolis in southwestern China. According to his own words, he was raised in a proletarian family, and started to do hard manual labor when he was 12 under the strict oversight of his mother.<sup>25</sup> After the Cultural Revolution, he gained his bachelor degree in literature from Sichuan College of Foreign Languages. His life changed when he was accepted by Peking University, where he pursued his master’s degree in aesthetics, Western philosophy and Christian theology. In 1985 and 1988, he published two of his most well-known books, *Poetic Philosophy* and *Salvation and Rambling*, and shocked the entire intellectual circles in the 1980s when he advanced a revolutionary idea concerning Chinese culture -- Chinese

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<sup>25</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Tian bu sang siwen” 天不喪斯文 (“Heaven Does Not Let the Cause of Truth Perish”), accessed March 19, 2014, <http://www.infzm.com/content/2940>.

culture should be complemented and rectified by Christianity. In addition to those personal achievements, he was also selected by Gan Yang as an associate editor of “Culture: China and the World,” one of the most influential book series in the late 1980s. While from 1989 to 1993, he left China and pursued his ThD in Die Universitaet Basel. Then he went to Hong Kong and translated Christian theological works for a church-funded institute. Now he has returned to Mainland China, and occupies faculty positions both at Sun Yat-sen University in Canton and Renmin University in Beijing. He is also an adjunct professor at Peking University.

Liu’s academic trajectory started from his reflections on the Post-Mao social atmosphere of China. Different from many common people who celebrated the end of the Maoist totalitarianism, Liu sensitively pointed out that there was a huge and serious “vacancy of faith” in the 1980s. Following modern Western philosophers, he called this vacancy “nihilism” and discovered that both China and the West had a common responsibility to fight against this intellectual disease. In *Salvation and Rambling*, Liu argued that the Post-Mao vacancy had to be filled, because absolute nihilism was as dangerous as fake absolute values. Therefore, the rejection of old and hypocritical Maoist values was precisely the starting point to find the “true, eternal, transhistorical and hyperlocal” “Absolute Value” that could be effective in every culture.<sup>26</sup> But where does such a value come from? What substance can guarantee the effectiveness of this

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<sup>26</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Zhengjiu yu xiaoyao 拯救与逍遥 (Salvation and Rambling: Different Worldviews between Chinese and Western Poets)*, Shanghai, Shanghai Renmin Press, 1988, 30.

value? Liu's answer shocked most of the Chinese intellectuals and even many Westerners: Only the all-loving and all-embracing Christian God can give Absolute Value, because the transcendence of God can redeem every individual from the abyss of desperation and endow common life with an other-worldly meaning.

Faith in Christ is a miracle occurring in the individual body, or in other words, a mystery in the individual body but also a boundlessly beautiful happening -- Pascal named it God's bestowal. Faith in Christ makes the divine grace enter the innermost of each individual, and makes the soul of the individual integrate with the boundless, warm, loving God.<sup>27</sup>

However, following Max Weber's studies on comparative religions, Liu contended that Chinese culture lacked this transcendental dimension, making China most vulnerable in the face of nihilism. Compared to Christianity, the ultimate idea of Confucianism and Daoism, the two mainstream thoughts constructing Chinese culture, was the ontological unity of man and a personified yet undivine heaven, which was incapable of providing all-embracing love from outside of the world to appease individual desperation.<sup>28</sup> Inspired by Soren Kierkegaard who differentiated three stages of life, Liu also claimed that Chinese culture regarded aesthetics and ethics as the

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<sup>27</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Zou xiang shizijia shang de zhen 走向十字架上的真 (Towards the Truth of the Cross)*, Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Press, 1995, 133-34. Translated by Fredrik Faellman in his *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Revised Edition), Lanham, University Press of America, 2008, 56.

<sup>28</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Zhengjiu yu xiaoyao (Salvation and Rambling)*, 165-66.

highest values but that both were actually lower than the religious value.<sup>29</sup>

After this pessimistic depiction of Chinese culture, Liu concluded that it was a misfortune for Chinese to have deviated from God's redemption in their long history because Chinese individuals, purely as individuals, also needed the love of God to redeem their pain. China, he argued, had to turn to Christianity to rectify itself. This turn, in his view, however, did not mean replacing Chinese culture with Western religion. "Judaist culture, Greek culture and Roman culture are, like Chinese culture, national-provincial cultures which have their particular genealogies of ideas. [However,] Christian culture is not a national-provincial culture," because it promoted universal brotherhood and individual redemption. Therefore, Liu argued that the meeting between Christianity with Chinese culture was not a clash between two mutually exclusive national ideas, but an encounter between God and every Chinese individual.<sup>30</sup> Following Karl Barth and Max Scheler and criticizing the cultural anthropologists, Liu took an obvious anti-nationalistic stance and argued that Chinese people should welcome this intellectual "conversion" and abandon their "corrupt historical root" that led them to "depart from the Heavenly Father."<sup>31</sup> Therefore, a "Sino-theology" was needed. This theology should not be a merger between Christian doctrines and

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, 37-40.

<sup>30</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Dao yu yan: huaxia wenhua yu jidu wenhua xiangyu* 道与言: 华夏文化与基督文化相遇 (*Dao and Logos: The Meeting between Chinese and Christian Cultures*), Shanghai, Shanghai SDX Press, 1995, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Zhengjiu yu xiaoyao* (*Salvation and Rambling*), 17& 25.

traditional Chinese culture, but merely “the creation of the Holy Word in Chinese.”<sup>32</sup>

Possessing those theories, in the 1980s and 1990s, Liu and his intellectual companions and followers claimed they were “cultural Christians,” which means that they did not affiliate to any particular denomination but believed in God. Like Leo Strauss, Liu tried his best to resist nihilism, a disease generated from modernization, but he did not regard modernity as a purely bad thing. As one can see, many of his theories were similar to modern liberal values, such as his interpretation of Christian faith as a direct connection between God and individuals without any intermediate support from church or state, his cosmopolitan worldview, and his negative assessment of traditional Chinese culture.

Liu’s research on Christian theology lasted for a long period. According to an autobiographical essay, he said that “After *Salvation and Rambling* (1988), under the support of the absolutism of Scheler’s value phenomenology, I stepped forward to Christian theology, and my strict absolutist stance became more and more strict. Then, through Scheler’s sociology of knowledge, I turned to Weber’s and Manheim’s social theories in order to understand the root of value relativism.”<sup>33</sup> From modern sociology, around 1998, he further stepped into political philosophy, and met Isaiah Berlin, the relativist, and Charles Taylor, the multiculturalist. His lecture in 1998 on Taylor showed

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<sup>32</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, *Dao yu yan (Dao and Logos)*, 8. Translated by Fredrik Faellman, *Salvation and Modernity*, 55.

<sup>33</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Ciwei de wenshun: xuyan (June 2000)” 刺猬的温顺：序言 (“Preface to ‘the Moderation of the Hedgehog’ (June 2000)”), *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue (The Quarrels between the Ancients and the Moderns and the Self-consciousness of Civilization)*, 35-36.

that he was a defender of classical Lockean liberalism: He criticized Taylor for claiming collective cultural rights rather than defending individual rights. Under the mask of communitarian liberalism, Liu argued, Taylor replaced political liberty with the equality between different ethnic groups. But Liu thought that this approach was as dangerous as Hegel and Rousseau because an emphasis on the collective character of an ethnic group would inevitably restrict and reduce individual freedom. He then criticized some Chinese intellectuals who, like Taylor, were attempting to create nationalistic liberal theories and to search for “non-Western modernity,” a term that Liu totally denied. In contrast, Liu regarded modernity as an undeniable reality, and he stated that Chinese intellectuals had no choice but to participate in this universal and necessary tendency rather than pursuing special national characters.<sup>34</sup>

Therefore, up to 1998, Liu was a liberal defending universal individual human rights rather than multiculturalism. He stopped talking so much about Christianity, making his universalism and individualism increasingly secularized. However, as liberal individualism does not presuppose a unity of value, we can discover a tension within Liu’s thought between his “strict absolutism” and his limited permission of value relativism.

Almost in the same year, Liu encountered the thought of Carl Schmitt, and from Heinrich Meier’s papers on Schmitt and Leo Strauss, he started to take the latter

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<sup>34</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Pingdeng de chongxin fenpei zhenli?” 平等地重新分配真理？ (“Equally Redistributing the Truth?”), *Ciwei de wenshun 刺猬的温顺 (The Moderation of the Hedgehog)*, Shanghai, Shanghai Literature and Art Press, 2002, 38-39.

“political philosopher” seriously. Actually as early as 1994, Liu had known Strauss and briefly read the Preface and Epilogue of *History of Political Philosophy*. He was shocked by Strauss because he believed that “Strauss’s unremitting struggle with value relativism and nihilism [were] the same as my stance in *Salvation and Rambling*. How am I so close with this man!”<sup>35</sup> However, as he was temporarily occupied by Scheler and Weber, he did not read Strauss intensively until reading Meier. At this time, Liu discovered new ideas in Strauss other than his anti-nihilistic thoughts -- the tension between philosophy and the city, and the related tension between reason (Athens) and revelation (Jerusalem).

On the one hand, Liu’s introduction of Strauss was comprehensive and deep. From the quotations in Liu’s essays, we can see that he has read almost all of the works of Strauss with plenty of secondary materials written by Strassians and other independent scholars. On the other hand, Liu has been obsessed by Strauss’s special thought on the subtle situation of the philosopher in the face of the religion and laws of a political society.<sup>36</sup> He repeated this idea in *every* essay and *every* lecture, and he also practiced the Straussian hermeneutics to analyze the esoteric teachings of *every* thinker he found interesting. In his first, seventy page essay on Strauss, “The Moderation of the Hedgehog,” Liu began his introduction of Strauss with a fictitious debate he designed

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<sup>35</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Ciwei de wenshun xuyan” (“Preface to ‘the Moderation of the Hedgehog’”), *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue*, 35

<sup>36</sup> It is not clear why Liu found this idea such fascinating. In addition to the charm of this idea itself, we cannot find any words from his essays showing that he met any problems in his life similar to the Straussian philosopher. More interestingly, without any hesitation, after encountering Strauss, he quickly identified himself as a follower of the Straussian philosopher who was on the side of Athens, as if he forgot that for a long time he had been a Christian theologian who was on the side of Jerusalem.

between Isaiah Berlin and Leo Strauss which resulted in a total triumph of the latter. Liu admitted Berlin's proposition that values were always in conflict, but he rejected Berlin's relativist solution and defended Strauss's return to the ancient definition of philosophy, that philosophy was a way of life pursuing truth but not possessing truth, and that philosophers had the responsibility to discover the "natural right" or the happy life in the face of different social conventions.<sup>37</sup> This defense of philosophy as a defense against nihilism can be regarded as a restatement of Liu's early absolutist stance.

However, after this brief description of the quarrel between ancient and modern political philosophy, Liu quickly turned to the introduction to the "theologico-political conflict between the Athenian philosopher and the multitude" in ancient political society. The virtue of the philosopher as an endless questioning of the "nature" (*physis*) by his unaided human reason inevitably challenges the virtue of the multitude as the obedience of the social conventions (*nomos*) supported by authority, law and religion. Therefore, ancient philosophers invented a mask, exoteric writing, in order to protect themselves, because the special way of life of the philosopher would irritate the multitude and in turn threaten his own life. The death of Socrates was a good example. In addition, this mask also signifies a social responsibility of the philosopher not to overthrow the "value of the multitude," both because the philosopher pursues but can never "determine" what good values are, and because the philosophic reason can never

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<sup>37</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Ciwei de wenshun" ("The Moderation of the Hedgehog"), *Shitelaosi de lubiao* 施特劳斯的路线 (Strauss's Pathmark), Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2013, 34-40.

totally refute the validity of revelation as the basis of social morality. Therefore, in addition to the “egoist” self-protection, the philosopher should also altruistically respect, though not agree with, the social conventions. Once philosophers replace religion with reason as the very foundation of the political society, modernity starts to evolve wave by wave, from the classical theory of natural rights to the reason of history, and finally to German nihilism and relativism.

Liu’s later essays on Strauss mainly focus on Strauss’s particular books or essays, but he never abandoned his interest in the tension between philosophy and the city. In the meantime, praising the Straussian philosopher, he also repeatedly accused modern and contemporary Chinese intellectuals of engaging in politics too deeply. He claimed that the essay “The Moderation of the Hedgehog” was a valediction to the “cultural spirit since 1919, and even the philosophical spirit since 1789.”<sup>38</sup> According to Liu’s observation, contemporary Chinese public opinion has been occupied and divided by modern “isms” -- liberalism, conservatism, neo-leftism and post-modernism, and every ism strongly interferes with Chinese politics.<sup>39</sup> This depiction corresponds, though Liu did not quote it, with Strauss’s warning that “the philosopher ceases to be a philosopher at the moment at which the ‘subjective certainty’ of a solution becomes stronger than his awareness of the problematic character of that solution. At that moment the sectarian is

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<sup>38</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Preface,” *Shitelaosi de lubiao (Strauss’s Pathmark)*, i. On May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919, liberal Chinese intellectuals and students led a patriotic movement to resist the Japanese occupation of Shandong Province. As the leaders were radical thinkers who attempted to overthrow the old Confucian morality, 1919 or May 4<sup>th</sup> became a symbol of China’s “modern spirit.”

<sup>39</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Introduction,” *Shitelaosi de lubiao (Strauss’s Pathmark)*, 9-10.

born.”<sup>40</sup> Liu further called this sectarianism the “corruption of the intellectuals.”<sup>41</sup> Following Strauss instead of Kojève, he indicated that he would retreat from politics and cultivate his “classical mentality” by reading great books rather than concerning himself with Chinese reform like liberal intellectuals.<sup>42</sup> Only by breaking the intense connection between philosophy and politics can philosophy return to its ancient but original sense, and Liu wanted himself to be a model of the Straussian philosopher in the Chinese context.

But here we have to ask: Strauss said that we should revive ancient political philosophy to search for the “natural right,” but he also said that the philosopher could never reach the truth, therefore, is philosophy as effective as Liu’s “Sino-theology” in resisting nihilism? Liu gave an interesting account in a footnote in his essay analyzing Strauss’s “Exoteric teaching.” He accepted that the Straussian philosopher might be a nihilist because he was constantly skeptical, but he defined “anti-nihilism” not as maintaining the Absolute Value, but as limiting nihilism to the philosophical circle and never letting the multitude know that truth.<sup>43</sup> Therefore, it seems that Liu regarded the “retreat from politics” per se as an adequate fulfillment of the philosopher’s responsibility of resisting nihilism, beyond which the Straussian philosopher has no

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<sup>40</sup> Leo Strauss, “Restatement on Xenophone’s Hiero,” *WPP*, 116.

<sup>41</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Shitelaosi yu zhongguo” 施特劳斯与中国 (“Strauss and China: the Meeting of Classical Mentalities”), *Shitelaosi de lubiao (Strauss’s Pathmark)*, 345-46.

<sup>42</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Shitelaosi yihuo keyefu” 施特劳斯抑或科耶夫 (“Strauss or Kojève?”), *Jianjin hanzhi 拣尽寒枝 (Picking up the Winter Branches)*, Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2013, 160-161.

<sup>43</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Xueren de dexing” 学人的德性 (“The Virtue of Intellectuals”), *Shitelaosi de lubiao*, 330-331.

duty to participate in politics.

However, Liu's overemphasis on the philosopher's self-retreat created a further problem. In a society where social morality is perverted by a tyrant, will the philosopher exercise his political influence? Liu nowhere answered this question, but actually Strauss permitted the philosopher's social role of rectifying politics, for he said that "it is of the essence of political life to be guided by a mixture of political knowledge and political opinion. Here, all political life is accompanied by more or less coherent and more or less strenuous efforts to replace political opinion by political knowledge."<sup>44</sup> By so doing, the philosopher "will improve rather than subvert the city."<sup>45</sup> Moreover, as the philosopher is man rather than god, he has a natural attachment with human beings, and for this reason, he "will try to help his fellow man by mitigating, as far as in him lies, the evils which are inseparable from the human condition. In particular, he will give advice to his city or to other rulers." Simonides talked to the tyrant Hiero; Socrates talked to Alcibiades and young Pericles -- those are good examples of the Straussian philosopher's political influence.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, unlike Liu's interpretation, detachment from politics is not the ultimate good of the Straussian philosopher. Even though the philosopher knows clearly that the evil rooted in the human condition can never be eradicated, he is not a fatalist who gives up all human initiative.

Though the philosopher can exercise political influence, according to Strauss, we

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<sup>44</sup> Leo Strauss, "What is Political Philosophy," *WPP*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Leo Strauss, "A Giving of Accounts," *JPCM*, 463.

<sup>46</sup> Leo Strauss, "Restatement on Xenophone's Hiero," *WPP*, 120.

should not entrust any political project to the philosopher. The maintenance of social virtue and the resistance of the unrestrained nihilism depend more on religion in the form of laws. But we necessarily meet a further problem in the face of the fact that the world is divided into different religions and social conventions, and of Strauss's endorsement of this division in his thoughts on the "closed societies." (*NRH, OT*) Therefore, it seems that no effective force can resist relativism, because the philosopher should not replace social conventions with his knowledge, and because different religions disagree with each other about the contents of morality.

Liu continued to keep silent on this problem. Retreating from politics, Liu emphasized over and over again that religions even superstitions of the multitude must be maintained because even the worst rule of superstition was better than the "tyranny of reason."<sup>47</sup> However, he said nothing about whether there was a "universal morality" that was guaranteed by religion instead of philosophy. In fact, Strauss had some words on this problem. He articulated that the morality of the multitude should be maintained by conventions and laws generating from religion, and he also implied that a revelational religion could generate "universal morality."<sup>48</sup> In "Preface to *Spinoza's Critique of Religion*" where he touched the topic of Jerusalem and Athens, he said,

God's revealing Himself to man, His addressing man, is not merely known through traditions going back to the remote past and therefore now "merely

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<sup>47</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Xueren de dexing" ("The Virtue of Intellectuals"), *Shitelaosi de lubiao*, 330.

<sup>48</sup> Leora Batnitzky, "Leo Strauss and the 'Theologico-Political Predicament,'" Steven Smith ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, 56-60.

believed," but is genuinely known through present experience which every human being can have if he does not refuse himself to it. This experience is not a kind of self-experience,... but of something undesired, coming from the outside, going against man's grain. It is the only awareness of something absolute which cannot be relativized in any way as everything else, rational or non-rational, can; ... it is the experience of an unequivocal command addressed to me here and now as distinguished from general laws or ideas which are always disputable and permitting of exceptions. Only by surrendering to God's experienced call which calls for one's loving Him with all one's heart, with all one's soul, and all one's might can one come to see the other human being as one's brother and love him as oneself.<sup>49</sup>

Several pages later, Strauss even further claimed that "the experience of God is surely not specially Jewish."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, it can be seen that Strauss regarded a universal experience of God's revelation as the basis of the universal morality. Moreover, the more striking thing is that this idea has an obvious similarity to Liu's early thoughts in his "Cultural Christian" period, because Liu also regarded faith as a transcendental experience of the all-embracing God "coming from the outside."

It is not a "mistake" for Liu not to introduce this particular dimension of Strauss's thought in his essays. However, new problems started to emerge when Liu applied

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<sup>49</sup> Leo Strauss, "Preface to *SCR*," *SCR*, 8-9.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

Strauss's theory in the special Chinese context. Before introducing Liu's application, we must ask: Did Strauss know that China did not have a corresponding revelational religion?

Actually Strauss knew. In his "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," a unique place where he touched comparative philosophy between the East and the West, Strauss said that the Westerners must learn from China to overcome the tyranny of modern rationalism. He then asserted that the Biblical tradition as the East within the West shared similarity with the Chinese tradition, not because China also had a revelational religion, but because China regarded "to be" as "to be elusive or to be a mystery," which was similar to the Biblical understanding but was in opposition to the Western rationalists who regarded "to be" as "to be always present" and to be "accessible to man." Therefore, Strauss concluded that "the possibility of a world religion" should be founded not on the ground of Western rationalism (whether ancient or modern), but on an Eastern understanding of "Being" simultaneously including both the Biblical and the Chinese traditions.<sup>51</sup>

After analyzing Strauss's own words on the universal morality and "a world religion" which are not relativistic, we may anticipate two approaches Liu may take to apply Strauss's thought in the Chinese context. First, Liu may use Strauss's thought on the universal experience of revelation to reinforce his early stance in *Salvation and*

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<sup>51</sup> Leo Strauss, "An Introduction to Heideggerian Existentialism," *RCPR*, 43-44.

*Rambling* that China should accept God's Holy Word. Second, Liu may change his early stance and start to reevaluate the Chinese tradition in order to find the common attitude toward "Being" between the Bible and the Confucian-Daoist thought. However, as Liu had never paid special attention to Strauss's thought on "world religion," he silently denied either of the approaches and developed his third one. Enlightened by Strauss's thought on "closed societies" and "exoteric teaching," Liu attempted to rediscover the "Chinese *nomos*" as a counterpart of Western conventions, and to reinterpret Chinese intellectual history as a tension between the philosopher and the political society.

One of the reasons why Liu was quickly obsessed by Strauss is that, according to Liu, esotericism was also an art of writing employed by ancient Chinese sages for thousands of years. In *Analects*, Liu discovered sentences showing that Confucius had noticed that truth should not be told to everyone: "The Master said, When a man may be spoken with, not to speak to him is to err in reference to the man. When a man may not be spoken with, to speak to him is to err in reference to our words. The wise err neither in regard to their man nor to their words."<sup>52</sup> According to Liu, this "unfrank" attitude of Confucius led to the most important distinction in Chinese thought, i.e. the distinction between "Weiyan" (微言) and "Dayi" (大義), which respectively corresponded to esoteric and exoteric teachings. Confucius employed this art when he was writing *Spring*

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<sup>52</sup> "Wei Ling Gong," *The Analects* 論語·衛靈公, translated by James Legge, accessed March 19, <http://ctext.org/analects/wei-ling-gong>. Liu Xiaofeng, "Liuyi shengren zan, May 2000" 六譯聖人贊 ("In Honor of Liuyi the Sage, May 2000"), *Zhe yidai ren de pa he ai* 這一代人的怕和愛 (*The Fear and Love of This Generation*), Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2007, 162-63.

and *Autumn* (春秋), the first Chinese chronicle. Then, Kung-Yang (公羊學派), a special hermeneutic school interpreting this chronicle, aimed to uncover the esoteric teachings (Weiyan) through reading between lines precisely like what Strauss had done. But why did Confucius conceal the truth of his thought? One of the reason is that the “noble men” the chronicle praised and criticized were powerful rulers who would persecute Confucius and his disciples.<sup>53</sup> Due to this dangerous situation, “Intelligent is he and wise / Protecting his own person.”<sup>54</sup> But this is not the only reason. Furthermore, as there is an unbridgeable gap between the morality of the multitude and the sage, it is inappropriate for the latter to publicize the truth which might result in the total disintegration of the society into a situation of “floods and beasts.” According to Liu, this is why Confucius and Mencius said that “the people... may not be made to understand it”<sup>55</sup> and that “words do not have to be sincere.”<sup>56</sup>

Inheriting his early opinion that Confucianism and Daoism were ultimately the same, Liu observed a parallel phenomenon in Daoist works. Following Xu Fancheng,<sup>57</sup> a modern Chinese philosopher Liu admired, Liu interpreted Laozi’s *Tao-Te Ching* as a

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<sup>53</sup> “Yi Wen Zhi,” *Han Shu* 漢書·藝文志. Liu Xiaofeng, “Liuyi shengren zan” (“In Honor of Liuyi the Sage”), *Zhe yidairen de pa he ai*, 163.

<sup>54</sup> “Zheng Min, Greater Odes of the Kingdom,” *Book of Poetry* 詩經·大雅·烝民, translated by James Legge, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://ctext.org/book-of-poetry/decade-of-sheng-min>.

<sup>55</sup> “Tai Bo,” *The Analects* 論語·泰伯, translated by James Legge, accessed March 19, <http://ctext.org/analects/tai-bo>.

<sup>56</sup> “Li Lou II,” *Mencius* 孟子·離婁下. Liu Xiaofeng, “Nikai de weiyan dayi” 尼采的微言大義 (“The Weiyan and Dayi of Nietzsche”), *Ciwei de wenshun*, 83.

<sup>57</sup> Xu Fanzheng (徐梵澄, 1909-2000) was a student of Lu Xun, known as the greatest writer in modern China. Xu was both a commentator and a translator. He studied Western, Chinese and Indian philosophy. What made Xu an academic celebrity in China might be his translation of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (published in 1935). He was the first Chinese scholar who completely translated this book. Besides this accomplishment, he was also a commentator of many ancient Chinese texts, such as *Tao Te Ching*.

teaching that the sage should not challenge the conventions, even superstitious conventions, of the multitude. As Laozi said, “We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should attemper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others.”<sup>58</sup> The sage should disguise himself as a member of the multitude, while using a special “manner of writing” to express their ideas.

Paralleling Strauss’s “quarrel between the ancients and the moderns,” Liu also implied that even before the nineteenth century when modern forces came to China, a transformation of the sage’s attitude toward the multitude had taken place. In the twelfth century when China was under the rule of Song Dynasty, some Neo-Confucians lost the moderation of the ancient sages, rejected the distinction between “Weiyan” and “Dayi,” and alleged that “everybody can be Yao and Shun.”<sup>59</sup> In the view of Liu, this statement symbolized a democratic revolution within the Confucian tradition,<sup>60</sup> and Mao Tse-Tung was actually a secret successor of the spirit of Neo-Confucianism even though he claimed himself to be a worshiper of communism. The Cultural Revolution as interpreted by Liu was thus essentially a movement of “collective sage-cultivation” which was a total disaster for the country.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> *Tao-Te Ching* 老子·道篇, translated by James Legge, accessed March 19 2014, <http://ctext.org/dao-de-jing>. Liu Xiaofeng, “Shengren de xujing, Nov. 2001” 聖人的虛靜 (“The Tranquility of the Sage, Nov. 2001”), *Jianjin Hanzhi*, 235-36.

<sup>59</sup> Yao and Shun were sage-kings in ancient Chinese myths and Confucian stories. They were regarded as the moral models of Confucianism.

<sup>60</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Liuyi shengren zan” (“In Honor of Liuyi the Sage”), *Zhe yidairen de pa he ai*, 161.

<sup>61</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Nicai de weiyandayi” (“The Weiyan and Dayi of Nietzsche”), *Ciwei de wenshun*, 83.

If the sage should not challenge the multitude, then what did the sage endorse in his exoteric teachings? Obviously he endorsed the moral doctrines that the multitude must obey. But what was the basis of the morality of the multitude? According to Liu, that basis is the Chinese “ritual-law” (禮法 Lifa) tradition containing a whole system of costumes, moral principles and political obligations rather than legal articles which were impartially enforced by punishment. Different from the authoritative opinion in contemporary Chinese academia that this system was similar to the Platonic “ideas,” Liu argued that it was actually a counterpart of the Western *nomos*. He further argued that “Confucianism was neither philosophy of ‘idea’ (metaphysics) nor religion (theology), but ‘the study of ritual-law.’ Similarly, traditional Jewish study was neither philosophy nor theology of faith, but ‘the study of law’ (Torah Study).”<sup>62</sup> This system of “ritual-law” constituted the social bond and ethical rules that prevent society from degenerating. Therefore, in a manner, similar to Strauss, Liu also built a bridge between the Biblical and Chinese traditions. But in contrast to Strauss, Liu emphasized the *social function* of these traditions rather than their common *understanding of “Being”* as an inexpressible mystery.

If the Chinese “ritual-law” corresponds to the Biblical law, then the aforementioned Chinese sage must correspond to the Straussian philosopher. Liu never denied this analogy, and he asserted that both Confucian and Daoist sages were philosophers.

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<sup>62</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Shengren de xujing” (“The Tranquility of the Sage, Nov. 2001”), *Jianjin Hanzhi*, 219.

However, it has been a controversial issue for a hundred of years whether traditional China had any narrowly defined “philosophers.” According to Strauss, Western philosophy generated from the discovery of “nature,” i.e. things that were neither created by gods nor produced by human beings but could be discovered by human reason. Though political philosophy is different from natural philosophy, it still presumes the political realm or human world as “nature” which could be studied in a similar way by human reason. The task of the philosopher is to find the best way of life and the complete knowledge of the world through asking “what is.” As Strauss said, Socrates “always conversed about ‘what is pious, what is impious, what is noble, what is base, what is just, what is unjust, what is sobriety, what is madness, what is courage, what is cowardice, what is the city, what is the statesman, what is rule over men, what is a man able to rule over men,’ and similar things.” Those questions are “meant to bring to light the nature of the kind of thing in question, that is, the form or the character of the thing.”<sup>63</sup> This means that the answer to the question of “what is” should not be an occasional or accidental feature of a thing, but the innermost “essence” that determines the “nature.”

Strictly following Strauss’s definition of philosophy and the philosopher, now we can start to investigate why Liu treated Chinese sages as philosophers. Liu admitted that “Zhe-Xue” (哲学), the Chinese translation of philosophy, was actually an invention by

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<sup>63</sup> Leo Strauss & Joseph Cropsey, *HPP*, 4-5.

modern Japanese scholars. Ancient Chinese language did not have this word. However, following Liao Ping,<sup>64</sup> a modern commentator of Confucian classics, Liu argued that Confucius was a philosopher, and that the Confucian classical studies were philosophic studies. Why? According to Liu, like Socrates and Plato, Confucius was “a legislator, caring about and investigating what the ideal life and just order are.”<sup>65</sup> In addition, Confucius also concerned about things that beyond the human world. Therefore, Liu concluded that Confucius had “double esoteric teachings,” i.e. the “doctrine of the Human” (人學 Renxue) conveying the theory of the ideal politics as a “Great Harmony” (大同 Datong) ruled by the sage-king, and the “doctrine of the Heaven” (天學 Tianxue) promoting the ultimate unity of the individual and the Heaven. The latter doctrine is higher than the former, but neither should be told to the multitude.<sup>66</sup>

Therefore, in Liu’s opinion, Confucius and other similar sages can be regarded as philosophers because all of them pursued the ideal life like Socrates and Plato did. However, while emphasizing this similarity, Liu kept silent on many crucial differences between Chinese sages and Straussian philosophers. The Straussian philosopher pursues truth and the ideal life by asking and answering “what is” to discover the essence of things. In contrast, even though Chinese sages ask “what is,” they never give

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<sup>64</sup> Liao Ping (廖平, 1852-1932) was a Confucian commentator who interpreted Confucianism in a special way. His intellectual trajectory had “six changes,” each one denied the preceding ones. In his later ages, his interpretation of Confucius became increasingly peculiar and unconventional. For this reason, the mainstream Confucian scholars regarded him as a charlatan. However, Liu Xiaofeng spoke highly of Liao because he discovered that Liao was actually a Straussian philosopher who was capable of decoding the “esoteric teachings” of Confucius.

<sup>65</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Liuyi shengren zan” (“In Honor of Liuyi the Sage”), *Zhe yidairen de pa he ai*, 162.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid*, 163-64.

definite definitions. As Tang Shiqi<sup>67</sup> said, Chinese sages “tend to describe the unfolding or ‘disclosing’ of a thing in giving circumstances, and encourage people to get their own understanding of it. People cannot exhaust all concrete circumstances, thus Confucius asks his disciples to know the three corners of a square through one corner.”<sup>68</sup> For this reason, when being asked about what is “Ren” (仁 benevolence), the perfect virtue in Confucian ethics, Confucius gave various answers such as “to love all men”<sup>69</sup> and “to subdue one’s self and return to propriety.”<sup>70</sup> He even explained this concept through concrete examples: “When you go abroad, to behave to every one as if you were receiving a great guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself; to have no murmuring against you in the country, and none in the family.”<sup>71</sup> “In retirement, to be sedately grave; in the management of business, to be reverently attentive; in intercourse with others, to be strictly sincere.”<sup>72</sup> Hence, there is a significant difference between Confucius and Socrates.<sup>73</sup> Actually, when discussing Laozi’s Daoism, Liu conceded that Laozi was

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<sup>67</sup> Tang Shiqi (唐士其) is Professor and Associate Dean of School of International Studies at Peking University, specializing in Western political philosophy, Chinese philosophy, comparative political philosophy and comparative politics. He is an independent Straussian who encountered Leo Strauss’s works during his post-doctorate study at Tokyo University in Japan.

<sup>68</sup> Tang Shiqi, “Zhongdao yu quanliang” 中道與權量 (“Moderation and Measuring: Traditional Chinese Wisdom and Classical Rationalism in the View of Strauss”), *Studies in International Politics* 國際政治研究, 2 (2011), 116-117.

<sup>69</sup> “Yan Yuan,” *The Analects* 論語·顏淵, translated by James Legge, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://ctext.org/analects/yan-yuan>.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> “Zi Lu,” *The Analects* 論語·子路, translated by James Legge, accessed March 19, 2014, <http://ctext.org/analects/zi-lu>.

<sup>73</sup> A joke in China may best illuminate this difference:

not a metaphysician in strict sense because he refused to give a theory of the cosmos. But he still affirmed that Laozi was a philosopher inasmuch as he studied the ideal politics like Confucius and a Platonic philosopher-king.<sup>74</sup>

After analyzing Confucius's "doctrine of the Human," we can turn to his "doctrine of the Heaven." Liu might argue that this teaching corresponds to natural philosophy pursuing the knowledge of the nature as a whole. However, Liu kept silent again about the difference between the East and the West. While the Straussian philosopher pursues the truth as the knowledge of the whole, the Chinese sages do not care too much about "knowing." As Liu interpreted, the teaching of the Heaven was the sage's ultimate unity with the Heaven. But in fact, this Heaven is not an object of cognition, but an object of mysterious experience that cannot be described theoretically. Furthermore, it is also inappropriate to call the "Heaven" an object, because the ultimate unity of the sage and the Heaven denies the epistemological subject-object distinction. The sage who peacefully lives in this unity is called "the true man" (真人 Zhenren), but obviously, this meaning of "true" is totally different from the Socratic sense of truth.

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*Socrates: What is Ren?*

*Confucius: To subdue yourself and return to propriety.*

*Socrates (asks a second time): What is Ren?*

*Confucius: When you go abroad, to behave to every one as if you were receiving a great guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself; to have no murmuring against you in the country, and none in the family.*

*Socrates: My dear Confucius! When I ask you what is Ren, you seem to reluctant to point out its nature and merely enumerate its accidental circumstances. But you have never told me its essence. Please tell me frankly: What Is Ren?*

*Confucius: Director! The scenario must be wrong!*

<sup>74</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Shengren de xujing" ("The Tranquility of the Sage"), *Jianjin Hanzhi*, 214-18.

Due to those problems, Liu's interpretation has not been accepted by the mainstream Chinese academia, even not by other independent scholars who admire Strauss. For example, Kai Marchal<sup>75</sup> was delighted to see that there was a concord between Strauss and Chinese thought, but he questioned on whether China had the same tension between philosophy and the city. "The Chinese [intellectual] tradition lacked the Socratic 'dialectics' or 'insoluble questions' (aporia), nor did it have a habit of exhaustive questioning. Therefore, challenging the conventional authority was not a matter of course [for Chinese sages]."<sup>76</sup> Tang Shiqi agreed with Marchal: "Different from the tradition of Western philosophy, ancient Chinese wisdom knows nothing of the distinction between essence and phenomenon, truth and opinion. People do not use different concepts, logics, and perspectives to understand political and trans-political phenomena, rather, they would know the entire universe, including human behavior, as a continuous spectrum."<sup>77</sup> Those particular features of Chinese thought may avoid the appearance of the tension between the philosopher and the political society in ancient China.

Facing those difficulties, a later essay shows that Liu made a striking concession, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Following Strauss's account of Western

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<sup>75</sup> Kai Marchal (Chinese name: 馬愷之 Ma Kaizhi) is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Soochow University (東吳大學) in Taipei, specializing in Chinese philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics. He got his PhD in 2006 from Die Universitaet Muenchen in Chinese studies (Sinologie) and philosophy.

<sup>76</sup> Kai Marchal, "Zhongguo de shitelaosi sixiang zhiqu" 中國的施特勞斯思想旨趣 ("On Leo Strauss Studies in China"), *Zhongguo tushu pinglun* 中國圖書評論 (*Chinese Book Reviews*), 81 (2008). For a German version, see "Die 'eigentlich konfuzianische Verschärfung' – Leo Strauss und China," *minima sinica* 2007/1, 1-14.

<sup>77</sup> Tang Shiqi, "Zhongdao yu quanliang" ("Moderation and Measuring"), 115.

intellectual history, Liu pointed out that there was a tension between philosophy and religion in ancient Greek. The falling of the Greek city-states was not the funeral of philosophy, because philosophy entered Judaism, Christianity and Islam during the Hellenistic and Medieval ages. (Liu must have Maimonides, Greek church fathers, Thomas Aquinas and Al-Farabi in mind.) When modernity had become an aeipathia, philosophy entered the last old religion -- Confucianism. Therefore, Chinese intellectuals should study how Judaism, Christianity and Islam reacted to the impact of philosophy in order to contemplate how Confucianism should respond to its modern dilemma.<sup>78</sup> Interestingly, this statement almost overturned all of his preceding interpretations of Chinese intellectual history because here he redefined Confucianism as a religion and even claimed that the entering of philosophy in China was a modern incident, which meant that Chinese did not have indigenous philosophic activity in its ancient history. However, as Liu still has not published any new books or articles reinterpreting ancient Chinese thought in accord with the Straussian approach, we cannot know Liu's most recent intellectual development on this topic.

Though controversial, Liu has made a reasonable attempt to introduce Strauss and to apply his philosophy in the Chinese context. Before encountering Strauss, Liu did not think that traditional Chinese thought was capable of finding the Absolute Truth, and he planned to employ Christian theology to rectify Chinese culture. After reading Strauss,

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<sup>78</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Shitelaosi yu wogelin" 施特劳斯与沃格林 ("Strauss and Voegelin"), *Jianjin Hanzhi*, 262-63.

however, he discovered that there was a parallel tension between philosophy and the city in Chinese history. By emphasizing the importance of social *nomos*, Liu also changed his attitude toward the Chinese tradition. In “Strauss in China” where he explained the significance of translating Strauss, he stated that Strauss could teach the Chinese intellectuals to cherish their own tradition, and this new evaluation of the Chinese tradition would lead the Chinese people to retrieve their own “ethical identity” which has been lost for over a century during modernization. The meeting between Strauss and China, and more generally, between classical Western and Chinese philosophy, is essentially a “meeting between classical mentalities.”<sup>79</sup>

However, there is a project that Liu has yet undertaken. If he really takes value absolutism seriously, then, after rediscovering the “ritual-law” tradition as the moral basis of Chinese people, he still needs to find a common basis for a universal morality. This basis may be discovered through a dialogue between the revelational religions and the Confucian “ritual-law” system. However, Liu may not be interested in this task, both because he keeps emphasizing the philosopher’s (and his own) detachment from the ethical-political realm, and because according to Strauss, “no one can be both a philosopher and a theologian.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Shitelaosi yu zhongguo” 施特劳斯与中国 (“Strauss in China: the Meeting of Classical Mentalities”), *Shitelaosi de lubiao*, 354-55.

<sup>80</sup> Leo Strauss, “Progress or Return?” *RCPR*, 270.

## 4. Gan Yang and Leo Strauss

As have been shown, Leo Strauss changed Liu Xiaofeng's attitude toward the Chinese political and philosophical tradition. Analogously, Gan Yang experienced a similar transformation. As a friend and intellectual comrade of Liu, Gan's personal experience was similar to Liu's in many respects. He was born in 1952 at Shenyang and raised in Hangzhou, a tranquil southern city with beautiful scenery. During the Cultural Revolution, he was first a Red Guard of Maoism but then started to question the justification of this movement. In 1970, he was assigned to labor in the rural area of Greater Khingan Mountains, a wild, remote and gelid forest area near Russian Siberia. After the death of Mao, Gan was admitted by Heilongjiang University and gained his bachelor's degree in 1982. Then he entered Peking University and studied Western philosophy together with Liu. During graduate studies, he developed an interest in continental philosophy, especially Heidegger and Neo-Kantianism. After graduation in 1985, Gan became the editor-in-chief of the aforementioned "Culture: China and the World" book series. Those books introducing the Western academy attracted many young students, and as a result, Gan became an intellectual leader during the 1980s. In 1989, he left China and became a PhD candidate in The Committee of Social Thought at University of Chicago where he studied with Edward Shiles, Allen Bloom and François Furet. Ten years later, he left Chicago without a PhD degree. After serving in a series of positions in Hong Kong and Mainland China, in 2009, he eventually became the dean of

the Institute for Advanced Studies in Humanities at Sun Yat-sen University in Canton, where he implemented a Straussian liberal education program.

Compared to Liu, a sophisticated theologian (then a philosopher) who was famous for writing lengthy books, Gan was a more straightforward scholar who never wrote books but gained his prestige from incisive essays. In 1985 and 1986, he clearly asserted that contemporary China had to respond to the challenge of the global modernization. As the most advanced “pre-modern culture,” China’s modernization must be hard and full of disharmony.<sup>81</sup> He harshly criticized the doctrines held by some Confucians that China must preserve its own value and even redeem Western rationalism. From his perspective, as culture was always changing and reforming, there was no so-called “abstract Chinese culture” or “abstract Western culture.”<sup>82</sup> If Japan, a former Confucian country sharing the same culture with China for thousands of years, was capable of modernizing its own culture, then according to Gan, there was no valid reason for China to rigidly preserve its own traditional values. In order to defend his stance, Gan employed the Heideggerian concept *Zeitlichkeit* (temporality) to argue that tradition was not a metaphysical substance, but a ceaseless flowing process from the past to the future.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Gan Yang, “Bashi niandai zhongguo wenhua taolun wuti (1985)” 八十年代中國文化討論五題 (“Five Topics on Chinese Culture in the 1980s (1985)”), *Gujin zhongxi zhizheng* 古今中西之爭 (*Quarrels between the Ancients and the Moderns, the Chinese and the Western*), Beijing, SDX Press, 2006, 28.

<sup>82</sup> Gan Yang, “Gujin zhongxi zhizheng (1985)” 古今中西之爭 (“Quarrels between the Ancients and the Moderns, the Chinese and the Western (1985)”), *Gujin zhongxi zhizheng*, 36.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 48.

It is clear that, at that time, Gan had a firmly optimistic faith in modernity. He was the successor of the Enlightenment tradition, and believed that China should learn from the advanced West in order to develop science and rationality. In 1987, however, because of his encounter with the thought of Ernst Cassirer, his attitude toward traditional Chinese culture experienced a subtle change. In the preface to Cassirer's *Language and Myth* (Chinese translation, 1988), Gan showed the readers that though reason was the dominant feature of Western culture, some philosophers had realized that reason had its own limitations and its legitimacy was questionable. Cassirer argued that scientific reason should not despise the importance of pre-rational cultural elements such as myth and ritual because these phenomena also had conceptual forms and structures which could be grasped by human reason.<sup>84</sup> Gan was inspired by this novel idea. At the end of the preface, he reminded the readers that "Traditional Chinese culture is precisely an illogical and ungrammatical culture." For Chinese, which lacked articles as well as gender and tense markers, it was much easier than in the Indo-European languages to break the fetters of logic. "The interesting thing is that while modern Chinese intellectuals are trying to overcome the illogical character of Chinese culture, continental European intellectuals are regarding logic and strict grammar as fetters and trying to overcome these deficiencies."<sup>85</sup>

Influenced by Cassirer, Gan began to be nostalgic for the Chinese tradition.

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<sup>84</sup> Gan Yang, "Cong lixing de pipan dao wenhua de pipan" 從“理性的批判”到“文化的批判” (“From the Critique of Reason to the Critique of Culture”), *Gujin zhongxi zhizheng*, 70-73.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, 91-92.

Simultaneously, his attitude toward modernity became equally ambivalent because he had become aware of the unacceptably negative aspects of modernity, such as mammonism and mass culture. He started to take the claim of cultural conservatism seriously and stated that the value of Confucianism in contemporary China was not to conform to modernization, but to compensate, to reconcile, and to counterbalance modernity.<sup>86</sup> Chinese intellectuals, according to his acute observation, had an unavoidable fate to fight a “two-front war:”<sup>87</sup> as members of society, intellectuals had the responsibility to unconditionally support the “providence” of modern “disenchantment” and to facilitate the “instrumental reason,” yet as “civilized intellectuals,” they must feel sorrowful about and should fight against the withering of nobility and valuable cultural elements during modernization.<sup>88</sup>

In order to solve this contradiction, Gan borrowed Berlin’s concept of negative and positive liberty to show that his pursuit of higher culture (he classified this as “positive” liberty) stemmed from his personal interest which would exercise no coercive influence.<sup>89</sup> In 1989, in partnership with Liu and other intellectuals, Gan supported the liberal democratic movement on the Tian’anmen Square. But the political coercion in June of 1989 worsened the situation and Gan had to leave his motherland. It might be a

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<sup>86</sup> Gan Yang, “Ruxue yu xiandai (1988)” 儒學與現代 (“Confucianism and Modern: also Concerning Confucianism and Modern China (1988)”), *Gujin zhongxi zhizheng*, 113-23.

<sup>87</sup> Gan Yang, “Zhongguo dangdai wenhua yishi qianyan (1988)” 《中國當代文化意識》前言 (“Preface to *The Cultural Consciousness of Contemporary China* (1988)”), *Gujin zhongxi zhizheng*, 106-09.

<sup>88</sup> Gan Yang, “Ruxue yu xiandai” (“Confucianism and Modern”), 135.

<sup>89</sup> Gan Yang & Zha Jianying (查建英), “Yu Zha Jianying tan bashi niandai” 與查建英談八十年代 (“Discussing the 1980s with Gan Yang”), *Gujin zhongxi zhizheng*, 220-21.

misfortune that he was marginalized during the 1990s in Mainland China, but his academic experience at The University of Chicago was profound. He was attracted by the conservative thinkers and their criticisms of liberalism and he was able to have conversations with the greatest American intellectuals face to face. It was here that he met Allen Bloom, the preeminent disciple of Leo Strauss and became a Straussian.

The publication in 2003 of the Chinese preface of *Natural Right and History* was a sign that Gan was back in the intellectual circle of Mainland China. Many observers have pointed out that Gan's interpretation of Strauss is different from that of Liu, so they treat Gan as the second source of Chinese Straussianism rather than as a follower of Liu. (Actually Gan's encounter with Strauss was more direct because he was a student of Bloom but Liu was not a student or friend of Meier before reading his papers.) Though a preface to a single book of Strauss, this article is a long and comprehensive introduction of Strauss's thought. As *Natural Right and History* is the most famous expression of Strauss's theory on the Quarrel between the Ancients and the Moderns, Gan started his introduction with this topic. He correctly recognized that the ancient political philosophers -- Socrates, Plato and Aristotle -- tried their best to find the natural basis of right and wrong, good and bad, noble and base. They believed that there was a "natural right" that could and should be discovered by human reason. However, from the birth of modern "natural rights" theory, modern political philosophers gradually abandoned the pursuit of absolute values, and after three waves of modernity, Weberian relativism

and Heideggerian historicism now dominated the intellectual world, which Strauss characterized as “nihilism.” Modern social scientists believed that human beings could only have consensus on issues of fact, and that it was beyond the capacity of science to discuss issues of value. Correspondingly, modern political philosophers believed that the criteria of good and bad varied from time to time, from nation to nation, and that there could not be naturally valid common values. In order to resist nihilism, according to Gan and Strauss, a return to ancient political philosophy is a great necessity.<sup>90</sup>

After dealing with this quarrel, in the next two parts, Gan put Strauss into the American political context and contemporary Western intellectual debates. Here we can see an important difference between Liu and Gan: while Liu repeatedly asserted his “retreat from politics” and emphasized Strauss’s academic life, Gan was interested in the relationship between the Straussians and the American ideological debates. He classified Strauss’s political thought as a kind of political and cultural conservatism. However, different from Shadia Drury, Gan thought that this Straussian conservatism was not a bad thing. He also compared Strauss with the Cambridge School, Kojève, Arendt, and Rawls, and paid special attention to Bloom’s critique of “the closing of the American mind” and the responses from Rorty and Nussbaum. In addition, Gan interpreted Strauss’s thought as a criticism both of liberalism and of all postmodern schools because none of them put virtue higher than freedom and by so doing tended to be nihilistic.

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<sup>90</sup> Gan Yang, “Zhengzhi zheren shitelaosi” 政治哲人施特勞斯 (“Strauss as a Political Philosopher: the Revival of the Classical Conservative Political Philosophy”), Leo Strauss, *Natural Right and History* (Chinese Version), ii-xx..

Therefore, Strauss is a valuable balance of the mainstream Rawlsian liberalism and the popular postmodern radicalism.<sup>91</sup>

Until now Gan's introduction of Strauss did not deviate from Strauss's original thought. However, when Gan touched the relationship between the Straussian philosopher and the political society, his interpretation began to be different from both Liu and Strauss. In this part, Gan followed Strauss's thought in "What is Political Philosophy?" and argued that the meaning of "political philosophy" was not only the philosophical reflection on the political issues but also the relationship between politics and philosophy. Therefore, political philosophy is a kind of "sociology of philosophy" because it concerns the situation of the philosopher among the multitude.<sup>92</sup> Gan then pointed out that the quarrel between the ancients and moderns was actually a quarrel between different views of the relationship between philosophy and politics. The development of modern philosophy was a process of "philosophy gone mad," which meant that philosophers constantly attempted to remake the political world in accord with their abstract philosophical imaginations.<sup>93</sup> The result of this madness is the "politicization of philosophy" and the "philosophization of politics" -- politics has to found its basis on philosophical doctrines and isms, and philosophy transforms itself from a *private* "loving of wisdom" to a weapon and instrument of *public* politics.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid, xx-lvii.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, lvii-lviii.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid, lxiii-lxiv.

However, this is in fact the dual distortion of both philosophy and politics.<sup>94</sup>

As Gan interpreted, in order to cure this modern disease, Strauss emphasized the importance of the “Socratic problem,” and led us to reflect on the origin of “political philosophy.” “The very starting point of Strauss’s whole political philosophy can be regarded as an attempt to find a way out to restrain the madness of *philosophy* in order to avoid the madness of *politics*.”<sup>95</sup> He then further made a definite statement that “the origin of classical political philosophy was precisely for the restriction of philosophy’s madness and for the maintenance of a stable political society.”<sup>96</sup> Therefore, it seems that Gan treated philosophy and political philosophy as totally different things, as if philosophy was madness, and political philosophy was medicine -- the essence and function of philosophy and political philosophy were opposing. In addition, he also implied that political philosophy was a defender of the political society and that it shared the same nature with social conventions.

However, it must be said that Gan’s definition of political philosophy misrepresented Strauss’s original meaning. It is right that Socrates was the first man who brought philosophy from the heaven down to the earth and it is also right that Socrates was the inventor of political philosophy, but it is wrong to say that the nature of political philosophy was entirely different from philosophy. Actually, at the very beginning of the fourth chapter of *Natural Right and History*, Strauss had criticized an

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, lix-lx.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, lx.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, lx.

opinion similar to Gan's.

[T]he modern reader almost inevitably arrives at the following view: Socrates turned away from the study of nature and limited his investigations to human things. Being unconcerned with nature, he refused to look at human things in the light of the subversive distinction between nature and law (convention). He rather identified law with nature. He certainly identified the just with the legal. He thus restored the ancestral morality, although in the element of reflection.

However, Strauss clearly criticized this view by saying that "[t]his view mistakes Socrates' ambiguous starting point or the ambiguous result of his inquiries for the substance of his thought. To mention for the moment only one point, the distinction between nature and law (convention) retains its full significance for Socrates and for classical natural right in general."<sup>97</sup> Therefore, the change from (natural) philosophy to political philosophy was in fact merely a change of the object (or theme) of investigation. Strauss then further demonstrated that philosophy and political philosophy actually used the same methodology. Socrates's

study of human things consisted in raising the question "What is?"... But it was not limited to raising the question "What is?" in regard to specific human things, such as the various virtues. Socrates was forced to raise the question as to what the human things as such are, or what the *ratio rerum humanarum* is... Like every other

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<sup>97</sup> Leo Strauss, *NRH*, 120-21.

philosopher, he identified wisdom, or the goal of philosophy, with the science of all the beings: he never ceased considering “what each of the beings is.”<sup>98</sup>

Actually, in Strauss’s point of view, political philosophy was based on the assumption that the political world was also natural and could be investigated by philosophic methodology. This is why Socrates believed that the nature or essence of virtues could appear through his dialectics<sup>99</sup>. Therefore, political philosophy is as dangerous as philosophy and even more dangerous than philosophy, because while the former does not care about the human society, the latter directly questions the legitimacy of all established social authorities. In comparison, Gan’s definition of political philosophy as a medicine of philosophy misunderstood Strauss’s thought. In fact, Gan mistakenly identified political philosophy with a special art of writing.

Interestingly, Gan then said that “ancient political philosophy... did not change philosophy’s character, but changed philosophy’s way of expression... The political philosopher had the same intellectual madness as the philosopher, but he became very cautious on his expression and especially his writing.”<sup>100</sup> It is at here that he introduced the distinction between exoteric and esoteric teachings. Thereby, Gan clarified his previous statements and returned to the correct understanding of Strauss.

However, the more interesting thing is that at the end of this part, Gan made a final statement that “Strauss emphasized that the exoteric teaching was precisely political

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<sup>98</sup> Leo Strauss, *NRH*, 121-22.

<sup>99</sup> Leo Strauss & Joseph Cropsey ed, *HPP*, 3-4.

<sup>100</sup> Gan Yang, “Zhengzhi zheren shitelaosi” (“Strauss as a Political Philosopher”), lxi-lxii.

philosophy.”<sup>101</sup> We are not sure whether this statement means that “exoteric teaching is equivalent to political philosophy” or that “exoteric teaching is the essence of political philosophy,” but actually neither of those possibilities are correct understanding. Exoteric teaching is the qualified endorsement of the social conventions regulated by laws originated from the authority of religions. Its content is closer to *theology* than to pure *philosophy* because the philosopher himself has to *pretend* to be a pious man. Hence, it seems that Gan was overly concerned about the social function of political philosophy and the stability of the political society.

Actually he was. We have seen that Gan almost equated political philosophy with the art of writing. Then, what was his attitude toward the issue of persecution? Interestingly, Gan nowhere touched the philosopher’s being persecuted by the unphilosophic multitude, but repeatedly emphasized the multitude’s being persecuted by the philosopher. He also quoted Strauss’s original texts to support his interpretation: “Philosophy is the attempt to replace opinion by knowledge; but opinion is the element of the city, hence philosophy is subversive, hence the philosopher must write in such a way that he will improve rather than subvert the city.”<sup>102</sup> As has been said, Gan regarded philosophy as a disease of the political society which must be controlled. Therefore, the application of the art of writing is for the protection of the political society

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, lxxix. Gan made a footnote at here and showed that his paraphrase came from Strauss’s *Persecution and the Art of Writing*. However, he gave the pages ranging from 7 to 37, and did not pointed out where Strauss said the similar words.

<sup>102</sup> Leo Strauss, “A Giving of Accounts.” *JPCM*, 463.

rather than for the philosopher per se.<sup>103</sup>

Gan's interpretation was partial but not incorrect. The persecution conceived by Strauss is actually a mutual persecution: the *mania* of the philosopher "persecuted" the society, and in turn the society persecuted the philosopher and killed Socrates. However, just as a Chinese scholar had pointed out, Gan nowhere mentioned the death of Socrates, as if this famous historical fact had never taken place.<sup>104</sup> In contrast, Liu's interpretation of the persecution was more comprehensive because he emphasized this mutual persecution. The protection of the philosophic activity and contemplative life was, according to Liu, of equal importance as the protection of the political life and social conventions.

Even if Gan's interpretation was not wrong, it does not mean that the protection of the political society was the starting point and ultimate concern of Strauss's intellectual investigation. Unlike Liu, Gan did not directly quote anything from Strauss's "Persecution and the Art of Writing,"<sup>105</sup> the first hand document exhaustively exhibited Strauss's idea on persecution. At the beginning of the article, Strauss mentioned nothing about society's being persecuted by the philosopher. Having the totalitarian rule of Hitler in mind, he was concerned about how a political dissident or a free thinker could survive in the face of strict censorship. If this dissident does not want to be killed, but

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<sup>103</sup> Gan Yang, "Zhengzhi zheren shitelaosi" ("Strauss as a Political Philosopher"), lxiii.

<sup>104</sup> Shui Yidi (水亦棣), "Zhengzhi yu zhixue" 政治與哲學 ("Politics and Philosophy: Two Interpretations of Leo Strauss by Gan Yang and Liu Xiaofeng"), *Open Time* 開放時代, 03 (2004), 60.

<sup>105</sup> "Persecution and the Art of Writing" is both the name of an article and of a book. At this place we are focusing on the article.

also wants to express the truths he has discovered, he can “utter them in print without incurring any danger, provided he is capable of writing between the lines.”<sup>106</sup> He can write in a loquacious way, endorse the dominating ideology, and intentionally leave some contradictions which cannot be detected by the mediocrity but can attract the really smart readers. Strauss then argued that the persecution of free inquiry existed in almost every society in the past but took different forms.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, every philosopher in Western intellectual history faced the danger of being persecuted. However, unlike the modern philosophers who believed that persecution must be eradicated and the entire human beings should be liberated, the ancient philosopher confirmed that “the gulf separating ‘the wise’ and ‘the vulgar’ was a basic fact of human nature which could not be influenced by any progress of popular education.”<sup>108</sup> Strauss concluded that “Exoteric literature presupposes that there are basic truths which would not be pronounced in public by any decent man, because they would do harm to many people who, having been hurt, would naturally be inclined to hurt in turn him who pronounces the unpleasant truths.”<sup>109</sup> Hence, it is only at the end of the article that Strauss referred to the “mutual persecution,” but it does not mean that the philosopher’s “egoist self-protection” is not the ultimate reason why he creates the exoteric writing.

In comparison, Gan portrayed a purely altruistic image of the Straussian

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<sup>106</sup> Leo Strauss, “Persecution and the Art of Writing,” *PAW*, 23.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid*, 32-33.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

philosopher. Forgetting the death punishment, Gan's Socrates became a noble citizen who controlled himself in order to save his city and his fellows. Gan then claimed that, "Though the Straussian *political philosophy* underlines the conflict between philosophy and politics, it does not intend to escape politics and step to philosophy. In opposition, the chief issue of Straussian political philosophy is to return to the political world."<sup>110</sup> This statement makes him different from Liu who stressed the "retreat from politics" of the Straussian philosopher. By leading the readers back to the original political world, Gan further introduced Strauss's theory of the "closed society" in opposition to Kojève's "universal and homogeneous state."<sup>111</sup> According to Gan, Strauss identified "political society" with particular societies, such as Athens, Rome, the United States and China, each with its own particular conventions:

[E]very political society that ever has been or ever will be rests on a particular fundamental opinion which cannot be replaced by knowledge and hence is of necessity a particular or particularist society. This state of things imposes duties on the philosopher's public speech or writing which would not be duties if a rational society were actual or emerging; it thus gives rise to a specific art of writing.<sup>112</sup>

Again, this art of writing interpreted by Gan was more a protection for the particularistic society than for the philosopher himself.

Ultimately, Gan argued that what distinguished the thought of Strauss was not his

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<sup>110</sup> Gan Yang, "Zhengzhi zheren shitelaosi," p. lxix.

<sup>111</sup> Leo Strauss, *OT*, 236-39, 243-44.

<sup>112</sup> Leo Strauss, "Preface," *LAM*, viii.

claim that philosophy was beyond politics or that the enlightenment of the multitude was an illusion, but his insight into “the Socrates who defended justice and piety.” Gan did not mention that the philosopher was actually the most self-sufficient man who lived on the margin of the political community and only had a minimum attachment with his fellow citizens.<sup>113</sup> He intentionally diluted the aspect of the philosopher’s detachment from politics and portrayed him as an active political actor. For Gan, the *social role* of the Straussian philosopher is more important. Therefore, Gan interpreted Strauss’s political philosophy as a defense of the active, political life rather than the contemplative, philosophic life. In the face of the tension between the philosopher the political society, Gan chose to be on the side of the latter. By so interpreting, Strauss even became a defender of political particularism.

If, according to Gan, every “closed society” has the right to preserve its special conventions against the claim of philosophical examination, then we can legitimately ask: Does China, one of the closed societies Gan mentions, have the right to preserve its traditional social conventions? According to Gan, the answer is yes. Xie Maosong, a friend of Gan, reports that Gan did borrow particularism from Leo Strauss. After accepting Strauss’s intellectual influence, Gan was no longer a partisan of the “openness” of modern society. In his opinion, “opening up,” the fundamental policy of contemporary China, should not merely mean participating in the capitalist world order

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<sup>113</sup> Leo Strauss, “Restatement on Xenophone’s Hiero,” *WPP*, 119-20. “Liberal Education and Responsibility,” *LAM*, 13-15.

without reflection, but rather that Chinese intellectuals should be open to the counter-modernity theories among the Western philosophical circles -- such as Leo Strauss.<sup>114</sup> He did not thoroughly reject modernization, but he did reject the common opinion that modernization equaled Westernization.<sup>115</sup> Distinct from his claims in the 1980s, he now increasingly emphasized the “Chinese character” rather than the common character of modernity.

In an interview in 2003, Gan worried that Chinese intellectuals still believed that the Chinese tradition was a great barrier to modernization. In Gan’s understanding, the central task for China to undertake in the twenty-first century was a revival of its traditional “national character” rather than an acceptance of a Westernized way of life. Losing a “national character,” he argued, was terrible. In this interview, Gan harshly criticized Turkish Kemalism because the latter was precisely a representative of the “self-castrating modernization,” i.e., modernization that did not preserve the traditional Turkish culture. The result was that Turkish people had lost their “national identity” and had become a third-rate country under the shadow of Western civilization. In order to avoid this fate, the “Chinese people must realize that traditional Chinese civilization is the most important resource for the development of modern China. Whether China

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<sup>114</sup> Xie Maosong (謝茂松), “Cong zhexue dao zhengzhi (1)” 從哲學到政治 (“From Philosophy to Politics (I): The Debate about ‘the Ancients and Moderns, the Chinese and the Western’ and Political Maturity”), *History of Political Thought* 政治思想史, March 2011, 72.

<sup>115</sup> Gan Yang, “Cong minzu guojia zouxiang wenming guojia” 從“民族-國家”走向“文明-國家” (“From ‘Nation-State’ to ‘Civilization-State’”), *21<sup>st</sup> Century Economic Report* 二十一世紀經濟報道, December 29, 2003, Page 1.

will be successful in the twenty-first century is to a great degree dependent on whether Chinese people are capable of consciously putting modern China into the river of its traditional civilization.”<sup>116</sup> As can be seen, Gan had abandoned his more Westernized early thoughts and preferred traditional China to Western modernization doctrines. Like “the Socrates who defended justice and piety,” Gan tried his best to defend the traditional Chinese way of life in order to resist the “persecution” of the manic modern intellectuals who attempted to replace the Chinese character with universal modernization.

During the 1980s, Gan was the editor-in-chief of the book series: “Culture: China and the World.” In 2007, after becoming a Straussian and a promoter of traditional Chinese culture, Gan created a new series: “Culture: China and the World (New Series),” publishing books that gave preference to the “Chinese character.” In the preface to the series, he told the readers that the purpose of his present task was “reconsidering China, reconsidering the West, reconsidering the Ancient and reconsidering the Modern.”<sup>117</sup> According to Gan, a powerful yet questionable fashion of the Chinese academy was to follow Western academic fashion. This fashion though means a spiritual subjection to the dominance of the West. Hence, Gan appealed to the emergence of a mature and independent Chinese academy. “The sign of the maturity of Chinese thought, academy and culture can be found in the formation of an independent stance

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> Gan Yang, *Tong san tong 通三統 (Synthesizing Three Traditions)*, Beijing, SDX Press, 2007, iv.

representing the autonomy of Chinese civilization. This stance can lead Chinese intellectuals to study, analyze and judge various Western theories according to our own perspectives. They will stop following the Western fashion.”<sup>118</sup>

Gan’s endorsement of cultural particularism was further expressed in his criticism of West-centralism, i.e., the doctrine claiming that Western modernization is a universal path for the whole world. Distinct from some Western liberals who asserted West-centralism reflected the arrogance and prejudice of the West, Gan did not regard the West-oriented perspective as absolutely a shortcoming. “There isn’t any mistake for the Westerners to hold West-centralism. Otherwise should we ask them to hold Sino-centralism?”<sup>119</sup> What Gan found problematic is that Chinese intellectuals accept and endorse West-centralism and use this pure Western perspective to judge China. Therefore, if it is legitimate for the Westerners to hold West-centralism, it is also legitimate for the Chinese to develop a symmetrical Sino-centralism.

In 2006, cooperating with Liu, Gan created a book series named “The Source and Course of the Western Academy.” In the co-authored preface to the series, “Re-reading the West,” Gan and Liu asked the Chinese intellectuals to cultivate a “healthy reading attitude” toward the West. Why healthy? Gan and Liu argued, not exaggeratedly speaking, that there was a “morbid psychology” among Chinese intellectuals when reading Western thought: they regarded China as the “nidus,” and the West as the

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid, p. vi.

<sup>119</sup> Gan Yang, “Chongxin renshi zhongguo” 重新認識中國 (“Reconsidering China”), *Tong San Tong*, 19.

“pharmacy.” Their aim was to collect prescriptions which could cure Chinese diseases, and to import “truth” from the West with which to criticize the Chinese “fault”. This kind of “morbid attitude” created morbid Chinese intellectuals, and then created various morbid opinions and thoughts, which, on the one side, flattered Western academy as a catholicon, and on the other side, devalued and distorted Chinese civilization as a demon. This morbid reading habit was one of the real niduses of modern China.<sup>120</sup> In contrast, a “healthy reading attitude” will radically reject the certainty that the Western academy can provide any ultimate solutions for Chinese problems. Instead, it will pay attention to how Westerners resolve their own problems.<sup>121</sup> A “healthy reading attitude” will also be skeptical about the Western thoughts and institutions, and be especially vigilant about the fads among Western academicians, because healthy Chinese readers have adequate reasons to believe that the Western academy is retrogressing: the frequent appearance of new terminologies, new doctrines and new “isms” can reflect nothing but the intellectual “bubblization.”<sup>122</sup> Though Gan and Liu did not directly mention Leo Strauss and the revival of ancient philosophy in this preface, it is not difficult to see that Strauss himself, or at least their idea of him, is standing behind them.

So far we can see that Gan and Liu share a similar intellectual trajectory. In the 1980s, both of them did not believe the legitimacy of Chinese tradition in the modern world.

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<sup>120</sup> Gan Yang & Liu Xiaofeng, “Zongxu: chongxin yuedu xifang” 總序：重新閱讀西方 (“General Preface: Re-reading the West”), Karl Loewith, *From Hegel to Nietzsche* (Chinese Version), Beijing, SDX Press, 2006, i.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, ii.

Both of them argued from different perspectives that China should absorb Western culture in order to transform its own culture. In the 1990s, both of them accepted new ideas from the West. Finally, during the first decade of the twenty-first century, both of them became Straussians and promoted the special value of Chinese culture. Specifically, the most important similarity between them is their common attitude toward modernity, whether before or after encountering Strauss. In the early years, both of them regarded modernity and modernization as “fact” and “necessary tendency” which could not be altered by personal choices or value preferences. However, after encountering Strauss, as Strauss criticized the separation between fact and value and the Hegelian conception of history as a dialectical progress, they became more confident that it was dependent on their choice whether Chinese should or should not accept modernization.

Besides those similarities, they also applied Strauss’s thought in different ways. Since Liu stressed the philosopher’s detachment from politics, he himself as a model retreated from the public discussion and attempted to follow Strauss in order to advance a new understanding of the Chinese intellectual history. He was also more concerned about the cultivation of his and his followers’ “classical mentalities.” In contrast, since Gan emphasized philosopher’s role of defending the particular political society, he, identified himself as a conservative, liked to step into the political sphere and participate the ideological debates in China. We will analyze their political stances in the next chapter.

## 5. The Political Implications of Chinese Straussians

Leo Strauss continually attracts more and more students and young scholars in Mainland China. However, unlike in the United States, Chinese Straussians have not become members of the government, nor have they given any practical political advice. But as “political philosophers,” they inevitably hold political stances, even though they repeatedly stress their interests in great books and claim that “the only political stance of Strauss is to be cautious on your own political stance.”<sup>123</sup>

### 5.1 Are Chinese Straussians Nationalists?

As Chinese Straussians, especially Liu and Gan, claim that there should be a revival of ancient Chinese thought, we have to ask: are they cultural or political nationalists? Actually, “there has not been a unified Straussian school in China.”<sup>124</sup> Therefore, we have to analyze their political stances one by one. I will argue that they are not typical nationalists, but all share nationalist tendency in different degrees.

Xu Jian (徐戡), a graduate student in philosophy at Die Universitaet Frankfurt and a Chinese Straussian, is a moderate scholar who articulated his anti-nationalist stance by developing Strauss’s thoughts in “German nihilism.” As Strauss said,

If nihilism is the rejection of the principles of civilization as such, and if

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<sup>123</sup> Han Chao (韓潮), “Tianren zhiji, gujin zhibian, zhongxi zhihui,” 天人之際·古今之變·中西之會 (“The Meeting between the Heaven and the Human, the Change from the Ancient to the Modern, the Encounter between the East and the West: the Significance of Strauss’s Coming from the West”), Xu Jian ed, *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue* (*Quarrels between the Ancients and the Moderns and the Self-consciousness of a Civilization: Leo Strauss in the Chinese Context*), 282.

<sup>124</sup> Xu Jian, “Gaogui de jingsai” 高貴的競賽 (“A Noble Competition”), *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue*, 7-9.

civilization is based on recognition of the fact that the subject of civilization is man as man, every interpretation of science and morals in terms of races, or of nations, or of cultures, is strictly speaking nihilistic... The nationalist interpretation of science or philosophy implies that we cannot really learn anything worthwhile from people who do not belong to our nation or our culture.<sup>125</sup>

Strauss also made a distinction between civilization and culture. Every people, whether civilized or barbarous, has its particular culture, but on the contrary, civilization provides a universal moral standard.<sup>126</sup> Following this distinction, Xu argues, even if we should cherish our own tradition, China should identify itself as a civilization rather than a culture. For this reason, he further argues that modern intellectuals should not blindly criticize Enlightenment universalism, because this criticism may lead to even worse relativism. Hence he implies that China should participate in the dialogue between different peoples and advance its own conception of the world order as a “harmony but not sameness” (和而不同), as a qualified diversity based on common principles, and as a world promoting the virtue of moderation.<sup>127</sup> Those conceptions are supported by ancient Chinese thinkers, and are consistent with Strauss’s idea of “the unity of oneness and variety,”<sup>128</sup> that each closed society may partly open itself in order

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<sup>125</sup> Leo Strauss, GN, *Interpretation*, 26 (1999), 366.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid*, 365.

<sup>127</sup> Xu Jian, “Gaogui de jingsai” (“A Noble Competition”), *Gujin zhizheng yu wenming zijue*, 7-9.

<sup>128</sup> Leo Strauss, “Liberal Education and Responsibility,” *LAM*, 24.

to learn from other societies.<sup>129</sup>

Liu Xiaofeng, the intellectual companion of Xu, generally agrees with this stance. However, unlike Xu who shows a minimum sympathy toward modern Enlightenment, Liu nowhere expresses any positive support for universal Enlightenment values, such as individual liberty, democracy and human rights. He strictly complies with Strauss's distinction between the ancients and the moderns, and regards the modern values as nihilistic.

In an essay published in 2005, Liu even mocked Chinese liberals in a very satirical tone. He pointed out that "individual rights" as a modern value were incompatible with the Chinese tradition which emphasized the superiority of family over individual. He declared that he was the defender of this tradition, because by promoting the family ethics, modern Chinese people will live a better life; moreover, family ethics can also help China maintain a large population, which will exercise political pressure upon contemporary world politics. On the contrary, if Chinese people change its traditional conventions and become modern individualists, family ethics will collapse, and Chinese race might also be extinct.<sup>130</sup> Therefore, Liu concluded, the spread of liberalism in China

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<sup>129</sup> Also see Susan Shell, "To Spare the Vanquished and Crush the Arrogant," *Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 187-88.

<sup>130</sup> It is very hard to understand why the collapse of family ethics will lead to the extinction of Chinese race. Liu did not give us a reasonable logic on this statement. However, in modern Chinese history, there was a constant fear among Chinese leaders that Chinese race might be gradually extinct in the face of Western imperialism. Sun Yat-sen, the founding father of Republic of China, was afraid that Chinese people might be incapable of resisting Western and Japanese imperialism in the long run because the growth rate of Chinese population, according to his view, was much lower than imperialist countries. Like Liu, Sun also claimed that in order to get rid of Western imperialism, China should admire its own tradition, especially family

might be a Western “conspiracy,” an “apocalyptic conspiracy.”<sup>131</sup> The intellectuals promoting modern “universal values” would stain national history. In “Strauss and China,” Liu even stressed that the spread of Strauss and ancient political philosophy would revive traditional Chinese morality and overthrow the “political superiority” of modern “universal values.”<sup>132</sup> Those words have a strong Schmittian color.

Liu’s defense of the Chinese tradition is strongly connected with his rejection of modernity. Therefore, if we try to understand Liu as the way he understands himself, we may not conclude in haste that Liu is a nationalist because the mainstream theories generally regard nationalism as a modern phenomenon. In addition, Liu also does not believe that Chinese culture is the best and that we Chinese need not to learn anything else from other cultures. Liu frequently claims that in order to understand modern China, people must first understand the West.<sup>133</sup> He is also an imitator of the philosophic spirit of Plato, Maimonides, Al-Farabi and Strauss. In the Chinese context, he calls for a simultaneous return to both the ancient Chinese and ancient Western traditions.<sup>134</sup> Using

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ethics. Mao also argued that only by increasing the population could China resist American imperialism. This is why during his rule, such a great amount of population was produced and why during Deng’s period, China must control its population and implement the notorious “one-child policy.” Interestingly, however, Mao’s promotion of increasing the Chinese population was in companion with an unprecedented assault of traditional family ethics. He used the theoretical weapon of “class analysis” to destroy all kinds of provincial family identity.

<sup>131</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Zhishi fenzi de maobu (2000)” 知識份子的貓步 (“Intellectuals’ Cat Walk (2000)”), accessed March 19, <http://reading.cersp.com/DeepRead/Learning/200511/87.html>.

<sup>132</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Shitelaosi yu zhongguo” 施特勞斯與中國 (“Strauss and China: the Meeting of Classical Mentalities”), *Intellectual Battlefield* 思想戰線, 35 (2009), 65.

<sup>133</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, “Yetan ershiyi shiji jingshen” 也談“二十一世紀精神” (“On the Spirit of the Twenty-first Century”), *Zhe yidairen de pa he ai*, 320.

<sup>134</sup> After encountering Strauss, he made a bibliography for students who wanted to cultivate their “classical mentalities,” and listed Chinese classics, Greek-Roman classics, and even Biblical classics with Straussian

an improper but illuminating analogy: Like Lenin's idea of the worldwide communist revolution (politically), Liu wants a worldwide Straussian reaction (intellectually), in which the Chinese and the Westerners can respectively return to their ancient roots and open a deep dialogue to share their common understanding of philosophy and politics, like what has been shown in Chapter III.

Compared to Liu, Gan's active defense of the particularist "closed society" makes him more nationalistic. However, like Xu Jian, he also conceives of China as a civilization. He then argues that the building of a "nation-state" is not a universal tendency because nationalization is essentially a Western concept. In his opinion, China should transform itself into a "civilization-state" in the twenty-first century and step out of the parochial nationalism.<sup>135</sup>

However, Gan's idea of "civilization" is different from Xu's. Xu follows Strauss and makes a distinction between civilization and culture, and clearly defines civilization as universal and culture as particular. In comparison, Gan regards civilization and nation as opposing concepts, but interestingly, he ambiguously defines civilization as "national character," a concept similar to Mill's.<sup>136</sup> This makes his stance more nationalistic. In his

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interpretive secondary materials. [Liu Xiaofeng, "Gudian shumu sanshi zhong" 古典書目三十種 ("A Bibliography of Thirty Classics"), *Chongqi gudian shixue* 重啟古典詩學 (*Reviving the Ancient Poetics*), Beijing, Huaxia Press, 2010, pp. 307-319.] Cooperated with Leopold Leeb (雷立柏), an Austrian scholar in classical studies teaching at Renmin University, Liu has settled a "Class of Classical Studies" and offered courses on Greek, Latin and classical Chinese (文言文).

<sup>135</sup> Gan Yang, "Cong minzu guojia zouxiang wenming guojia" ("From 'Nation-State' to 'Civilization-State'"), *21<sup>st</sup> Century Economic Report*, December 29, 2003, Page 1.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.* Gan borrows his understanding of civilization from Levenson's *Confucian China and its Modern Fate*, but he does not clearly explain what Levenson means by civilization. In my personal understanding, Gan

lectures on Chinese liberal education, Gan says that the Chinese universities must be “firmly rooted in the deepest tradition of Chinese civilization”<sup>137</sup> in order to cultivate “cultural elites” who will be conscious that all Chinese people share a great and elegant “common past.”<sup>138</sup> Gan implies that his proposal is an imitation of the American conservatives because the latter regards American liberal education not only as a spread of knowledge but also as a consolidation of their own identity.<sup>139</sup> By emphasizing the Chinese national character, he even says that the Western Studies in China should be directed by Chinese perspectives. For example, instead of merely regurgitating the Western research, Chinese scholars should have the confidence that they can draw their “own” conclusions about ancient Greece.<sup>140</sup> This might be contrary to Strauss’s teaching, because the latter persuaded us to understand someone as he/she understood him/herself.

Among the active Straussians, Zhang Zhiyang<sup>141</sup> is the most nationalistic. Zhang is

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regards premodern China as a civilization because Chinese people regarded “all under the Heaven” as one family. This is a quasi-cosmopolitan ideal. This definition of civilization is similar to Xu’s because it emphasizes the universalistic dimension of civilization. However, he then says that Chinese civilization equals to Chinese “national character” (國性, Guoxing, nationality, nation-ness), and then extensively develops this idea and defends the Chinese tradition. But obviously, this concept is more particularistic.

<sup>137</sup> Gan Yang, “Daxue de wenhua zhi gen” 大學的文化之根 (“The Cultural Root of the University”), *Tong San Tong*, 86.

<sup>138</sup> Gan Yang, “Hafo xiaozhang yu hafo hongpishu,” 哈佛校長與哈佛紅皮書 (“The Harvard President and the Harvard Red Book”), *Tong San Tong*, 104.

<sup>139</sup> Gan Yang, “Woguo daxue de tongshi jiaoyu zhilu” 我國大學的通識教育之路 (“The Way of Liberal Education in China”), 135-37.

<sup>140</sup> Gan Yang, Liu Xiaofeng, Zhang Zhilin, He Ming, “Xifang gudianxue zai zhongguo” 西方古典學在中國 (“Western Classical Studies in China (I)”), *Open Time* 開放時代, 01 (2009), 9.

<sup>141</sup> Zhang Zhiyang (張志揚) is Professor of Philosophy at Hainan University in Haikou, specializing in German philosophy and political philosophy. He was persecuted in the Cultural Revolution. But in prison, he learned German and German philosophy all by himself. Twelve years older than Liu, he was Liu’s

an old friend of Liu and maintained a good relationship with Liu's cultural Christian circle in the late twentieth century, but now he is also influenced by Strauss's critique of modernity. In his article, he specifically calls upon his readers to remember the role of Western imperialism in modern Chinese history, and argues strongly that Chinese modernity is actually forcefully imposed by the West. Zhang then criticizes Westernized Chinese intellectuals by saying that they forget this tragic history. He uses a metaphor to emphasize their forgetfulness: The West as a powerful but ruthless man raped China as a foreign woman and produced modern Chinese intellectuals as their child. But ridiculously, after this crime, the woman belonged to this man, and the child even regarded him as a benefactor. Therefore, Zhang argues that China should reject the modern Western criterion and revitalize its own values in order to resist Western assimilation.<sup>142</sup> Zhang is the Straussian who most combines anti-modernity with anti-imperialism. As anti-imperialism belongs to left-wing nationalism in the Leninist and Maoist tradition, Zhang can be regarded as a nationalistic Straussian in the Chinese context.

## **5.2 Are Chinese Straussians Liberal Democrats?**

Chinese Straussians are not unqualified supporters of liberalism as a political theory and liberal democracy as a political institution. This stance does not radically deviate

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"spiritual instructor" in the 1980s. In the twenty-first century, Zhang was also influenced by Liu's interest in Strauss, and turned to focus on political philosophy.

<sup>142</sup> Zhang Zhiyang, "zhongguoren wenti yu youtairen wenti" "中國人問題"與"猶太人問題" (The Chinese Problem and the Jewish Problem), *Zhongguoren wenti yu youtairen wenti* "中國人問題"與"猶太人問題" (*The Chinese Problem and the Jewish Problem*), Beijing, SDX Press, 2011, 2-5.

from Strauss's original intention. However, context plays a crucial role. As a Jewish émigré persecuted by Nazi Germany and protected by the United States, Strauss showed a "qualified embrace" of liberal democracy even though he criticized the moral basis of liberalism.<sup>143</sup> In addition, in order to appease the "Straussophobia"<sup>144</sup> among the American liberal circles, American Straussians<sup>145</sup> have to defend their teacher by arguing that Strauss is not as dangerous as Shadia Drury thinks, or that his political attitude is more complicated than she thinks. Just as Catherine and Michael Zuckert have pointed out, though Strauss thought that "America is modern" (proposition 1) and "modernity is bad" (proposition 2), he also claimed that "America is good" (proposition 3).<sup>146</sup>

There is plenty of evidence demonstrating Strauss's friendship with American liberal democracy.<sup>147</sup> The most famous statement is in "Liberal Education and

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<sup>143</sup> William Galston, "Leo Strauss's Qualified Embrace of Liberal Democracy," *Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 193-214.

<sup>144</sup> Peter Minowitz, *Straussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers*. Lanham, Lexington Books, 2009.

<sup>145</sup> By "American Straussians," I mean those Straussian scholars in American (and also Canadian) universities and colleges, such as those who wrote chapters of *History of Political Philosophy*, instead of those who entered the federal government and promoted the Iraq War.

<sup>146</sup> Catherine & Michael Zuckert, *The Truth about Leo Strauss: Political Philosophy & American Democracy*. Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2006, 75-78.

<sup>147</sup> Not all Straussians believe that Strauss had a sincere loyalty to America because one should not forget that Strauss may use exoteric writing to prevent persecution. For example, Steven Smith argues that Strauss's statement on his loyalty to America in the beginning of his *Natural Right and History* and *Thoughts on Machiavelli* might just be his masks. In contrast, he expressed his true intention through interpreting Locke's liberal theory as an aimless hedonism in *NRH*. As Strauss regarded Locke's philosophy as the basis of the American regime, Smith argues, his true attitude toward America was also negative. William Galston disagrees with Smith's conclusion, and argues that even if Smith is right, there are also many other ways to demonstrate that Strauss had positive views of America. In this thesis, I will not arbitrate who of these two Straussians is right. I just argue that, even if Smith's analysis is true, at least Strauss consciously used masks to endorse liberal democracy as an American *nomos*. In China, however, as China is not a liberal democracy, Chinese Straussians do not need those masks to hide their criticisms of liberalism. For Smith's argument, see Steven Smith, "Strauss's America," *Reading Leo Strauss: Politics, Philosophy, Judaism*, Chicago, the University

Responsibility,” where Strauss said,

We are not permitted to be flatterers of democracy precisely because we are friends and allies of democracy. While we are not permitted to remain silent on the dangers to which democracy exposes itself as well as human excellence, we cannot forget the obvious fact that by giving freedom to all, democracy also gives freedom to those who care for human excellence.<sup>148</sup>

Hence Strauss, as one of “those who care for human excellence,” clearly expressed his appreciation to America as his second homeland. Furthermore, he even regarded modern liberal democracy as an embodiment of premodern thoughts even though it was a product of the first wave of modernity. “The theoretical crisis does not necessarily lead to a practical crisis, for the superiority of liberal democracy to communism, Stalinist or post-Stalinist, is obvious enough. And above all, liberal democracy... derives powerful support from a way of thinking which cannot be called modern at all: the premodern thought of our western tradition.”<sup>149</sup> This premodern feature of liberal democracy can be regarded as Aristotelian: “[M]odern democracy would have to be described with a view to its intention from Aristotle’s point of view as a mixture of democracy and aristocracy.”<sup>150</sup>

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of Chicago Press, 2006, 156-183. For Galston’s response, see William Galston, “Leo Strauss’s Qualified Embrace of Liberal Democracy,” *Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 193-214.

<sup>148</sup> Leo Strauss, “Liberal Education and Responsibility,” *LAM*, 24.

<sup>149</sup> Leo Strauss, “Three Waves of Modernity,” Hilail Gildin ed. *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays by Leo Strauss*, Detroit, Wayne State University Press, 1989, 98.

<sup>150</sup> Leo Strauss, *CM*, 35.

Not only the American constitution, but also the English regime accepts the ancient heritage, especially “the prudence to conceive of the modern ideals as a reasonable adaptation of the old and eternal ideal of decency, of rule of law, and of that liberty which is not license, to changed circumstances.” Therefore, “while the English originated the modern ideal -- the pre-modern ideal, the classical ideal of humanity, was no where better preserved than in Oxford and Cambridge.”<sup>151</sup> In a letter to Karl Loewith, he was also delighted to find that “A man like Churchill proves that the possibility of *megalopsychia* exists today exactly as it did in the fifth century B.C.”<sup>152</sup> Those are signs of Strauss’s “Anglophilia.”<sup>153</sup> Therefore, Strauss asserted that “Wisdom requires unhesitating loyalty to a decent constitution, and even to the cause of constitutionalism.”<sup>154</sup> “Liberal or constitutional democracy comes closer to what the classics demanded than any alternative that is viable in our age.”<sup>155</sup>

What we should pay special attention to is that although Strauss made a clear distinction between ancient and modern and exhibited his preference of ancient to modern, he still thought that liberal democracy or modern constitutionalism was essentially a beneficial mixture of modern and premodern elements, and that a corrupt philosophical basis might not necessarily lead to a failure in practice. This balanced and moderate view toward liberal democracy made Strauss and Straussians “unhesitating”

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<sup>151</sup> Leo Strauss, GN, 372.

<sup>152</sup> “Letter to Loewith, August 20, 1946,” CCM, 111.

<sup>153</sup> Steven Smith, “Leo Strauss: The Outlines of the Life,” *Cambridge Companion to Leo Strauss*, 22.

<sup>154</sup> Leo Strauss, “Liberal Education and Responsibility,” LAM, 24.

<sup>155</sup> Leo Strauss, “Restatement on Xenophon’s Hiero,” OT, 194.

defenders of American constitution. In contrast, in China, liberal democracy is not an established political institution, nor do the government leaders pursue it. Liberalism is still an ideal among the liberal intellectuals who constantly encourage the government to take political reforms. Because their unfriendly attitude toward the Communist Party, their freedom of expression is not legally protected, and the Party is always searching for potential supporters among the intellectual circles who can defend the non-liberal policies of the government. In this context, the Chinese Straussians as critics of liberal democracy are more reluctant to soften their uncompromising anti-liberal stances.

Chinese Straussians are wholehearted supporters of elitism. In order to cultivate noble men, they are moved by Strauss's thoughts on liberal education. For Strauss, liberal education may actually cultivate two different types of man, one is philosophers who tend to fly away from politics and enjoy a contemplative life, the other is noble gentlemen who may play active role in the moral-political sphere.<sup>156</sup> Ding Yun,<sup>157</sup> one of the earliest translators of Strauss, stresses the political role of education. In his opinion, academy and politics are essentially interconnected fields. In ancient China, sages use the academy to cultivate their virtue in order to govern the country. Academicians should not refuse to rule. According to Ding, Chinese universities must cultivate intellectual elites who, on the one hand, know what noble values China should pursue,

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<sup>156</sup> Leo Strauss, "Liberal Education and Responsibility," *LAM*, 13-15.

<sup>157</sup> Ding Yun (丁耘) is Professor of Philosophy at Fudan University in Shanghai, specializing in Greek philosophy, German philosophy, with special emphasis on metaphysics and political philosophy.

and on the other hand, have the will and wisdom to infuse these values in real politics.<sup>158</sup>

Ding does not say what the noble values should be, but unlike Strauss, he does not show his defense of liberal democracy, or of a constitutionalism with Chinese character.

Like Ding, Gan also underlines the political function of liberal education. As has been shown, Gan asks Chinese universities to cultivate “cultural elites” who will be confident in the Chinese tradition. The need for cultural elites is a response to a political fact -- China is rising, so its elites must tell the West how they will influence world history.<sup>159</sup> Then, what is Gan’s answer to this question? He states that, in the political realm, China should synthesize three traditions, i.e. liberalism (represented by Deng Xiaoping), socialism (represented by Mao Tse-Tung), and conservatism (represented by Confucius). But those three isms are not equal but hierarchical: socialism and conservatism should be higher than liberalism, because socialism will prevent liberalism from degenerating into capitalist oligarchy, and conservatism will prevent liberalism from eroding the independence of Chinese civilization. In addition, socialism is even higher than conservatism. Inheriting an anti-imperialist tradition, Chinese socialism is at present the best socio-political institution protecting traditional Chinese values.<sup>160</sup> Therefore, as Gan places liberalism on the lowest level of the hierarchy, it is very hard

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<sup>158</sup> Ding Yun, “Zhexue yanjiu yu gujin zhongxi wenti” 哲學研究與古今中西問題 (“Philosophical Studies and the Issue of Ancient, Modern, East and West: My Fudan Experience”), accessed March 19, 2014, <http://www.douban.com/group/topic/23054678/>.

<sup>159</sup> Xie Maosong, “Cong zhexue dao zhengzhi (2)” (“From Philosophy to Politics (II)”), *History of Political Thought*, June 2011, 32.

<sup>160</sup> Wu Ming (吳銘) & Gan Yang, “Gan Yang fangtan” 甘陽訪談 (“An Interview with Gan Yang: On China’s Soft Power”), accessed March 19, 2014, <http://finance.sina.com.cn/review/20051225/08522225968.shtml>.

for him to support political liberalization in China. Since he cares most about the independence of Chinese civilization, socialist institutions, rather than liberal democracy, is already enough for him to achieve this goal. Hence, if liberalism is the least valuable, and if, as he said, three traditions could be in conflict; then we can definitely conclude that liberalism in Gan's theory is the most vulnerable and easily sacrificed value.

Liu's attitude toward liberal democracy has been shown in his quasi-nationalistic defense of the traditional Chinese family ethics. His political stance is mainly based on his view of the relationship between the philosopher and the political society. In his view, and also Strauss's, the philosopher will, by his very nature, necessarily be in tension with *every* political society, be it Athens or Crete, China or America, because the philosopher will challenge the laws, conventions and gods in *every* place.<sup>161</sup> There wasn't, isn't, and won't be any regime on the earth that can protect the philosopher. Therefore, the central task for the philosopher is to retreat from the political sphere in order to protect both himself and the multitude. Hence, it can be implied that Liu's political stance is very conservative: the philosopher should not always criticize the government, but should maintain the existing conventions in a given political society.

For this reason, he calls all the politically active intellectuals, whether liberal or non-liberal, back to their study rooms: "We Chinese intellectuals as the social minority is facing a fatal and historical choice: either to learn Western Enlightenment and to corrupt

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<sup>161</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Ciwei de wenshun" ("The Moderation of the Hedgehog"), *Shitelaosi de lubiao*, 44.

ourselves, or to accept the Socratic-Platonic enlightenment and to cultivate our classical mentalities."<sup>162</sup> He implies that most Chinese intellectuals have been corrupted. However, what makes Liu happy is that China is temporarily not as modern as the West. The West has been modernized and has completed the building of an educational system aiming at producing the modern soul. Most Chinese intellectuals want to catch up with the Western world as soon as possible. But fortunately, according Liu, we are not at the final destination. "It is precisely because our educational system has not been in line with you [the West] that we must implement classical education as soon as possible."<sup>163</sup> Hence, "Strauss's classical political philosophy is more indispensable in China than in Europe-America."<sup>164</sup>

Liu may wish that once public intellectuals retreat from the political sphere and are baptized by ancient classics, Chinese modernization can be slowed down, leaving Chinese people an unenlightened but peaceful life admiring their traditional values. This future image is certainly not a liberal democracy, because the retreat of liberal intellectuals from politics implies that no one could promote political liberalization in China. This image may also frustrate the Westerners: "Once China advocates moral-political ideas which originate from its own old-style tradition, they [the modern Westerners] must fear and tremble, because they have no ideas about either ancient Chinese or ancient Western moral-political conceptions." As this revival of the Chinese

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<sup>162</sup> Liu Xiaofeng, "Shitelaosi yu zhongguo" ("Strauss and China"), *Shitelaosi de lubiao*, 348.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 348.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 341.

tradition challenges the corrupt modern Western ideas, the Westerners will necessarily regard China as a threat to themselves.<sup>165</sup>

Therefore, unlike Strauss who unhesitatingly supported a decent liberal constitutionalism, Chinese Straussians unhesitatingly express their negative attitudes toward liberal democracy. They also pay no attention to Strauss's idea that liberal democracy can be justified according to ancient, such as Aristotelian philosophy. On the contrary, strictly following Strauss's hermeneutic principle that ancient works should not be understood by modern criteria, they refuse to interpret Confucianism or Daoism as potential supporters of liberal democracy.<sup>166</sup> As there is no counterpart of Aristotle who had discussed principles of mixed constitution in ancient China, it is almost impossible for Chinese Straussians to defend liberal democracy from an ancient perspective.<sup>167</sup> Therefore, Chinese liberals have an instinctive fear of the Straussians' influence. Zhou Lian, a reasonable Chinese liberal, best expressed this worry: "In present-day China, unlike in the United States, being a critic of liberalism or democracy, or both, is not dangerous at all. On the contrary, in so doing the critic gains a reputation of being more thoughtful and profound than vulgar liberals."<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid, 355-356.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid, 351.

<sup>167</sup> Ancient Chinese political philosophy did not have the concept of "regime" or "polity," nor did they have classifications of regimes. Monarchy was the only regime dominating Chinese history.

<sup>168</sup> Zhou Lian, "The Most Fashionable and the Most Relevant: A Review of Contemporary Chinese Political Philosophy," *Diogenes*, 56 (2009), 130.

## 6. Inconclusive Conclusion

After examining the theories of Chinese Straussians, we can clearly see that Strauss triggered a nostalgic mentality among his Chinese disciples. Inspired by his revival of ancient political philosophy, Liu detects a parallel tension between philosophy and the political society in Chinese intellectual history, while Gan stands on the side of political theology and hastily defends the traditional Chinese conventions. But their final aim is the same: liberating China from the modern Western hegemony, and searching for the autonomy of Chinese civilization. This philosophical stance even makes them, and many other Straussians, quasi-nationalists and anti-liberals.

Therefore, Strauss seems to be of great significance in China. Ding Yun even predicts that, "After Straussian conservatism completes its historical mission, China will welcome a revival of Confucianism and Chinese political thought once more, putting the era of following Western academic heroes to an end. Deeper introductions and translations of the Western academy will be continuing, but Western academy will no longer be the instructor of Chinese academia. The self-consciousness of Chinese thought is the final destination, the real terminus, of Chinese intellectual history during the recent thirty years."<sup>169</sup> Therefore, According to Ding, Strauss is the last "Western academic hero." He is a bridge connecting the eras of following Western fashions and

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<sup>169</sup> Ding Yun, "Qimeng zhutixing yu sanshinian sixiangshi" 啟蒙主體性與三十年思想史 ("Enlightenment Subjectivity and the Intellectual History in Recent Thirty Years: a Survey around the Center of Li Zehou"), *Reading*, 11 (2008), 24.

reviving Chinese traditions.

However, there is a question to which Straussians have not offered an answer. Many famous modern philosophers, from Machiavelli to Rousseau until Nietzsche and Heidegger, have called people to return to the antiquity, why does only Strauss trigger this “ancient-mania” in China? Machiavelli’s and Rousseau’s revival of Roman republicanism might be less relevant to ancient China, but Heidegger, after reading *Tao-Te Ching*, advocated that Westerners should learn from Chinese wisdom. However, the Heidegger fever in China in the 1980s and 1990s did not lead to a corresponding revival of the Chinese tradition. A typical Straussian may endorse Strauss’s doctrine that all preceding philosophers, though claimed to be admirers of the ancients, actually facilitated the waves of modernity. He/she may also say that only the Straussian approach is capable of resisting modern nihilism. However, this is only an ex post facto explanation. If we return to the historical context, a 1980s intellectual, before knowing Strauss, might also regard Heidegger as the best philosopher capable of resisting nihilism.

Sociological reasons may help us understand why Strauss is powerful today. In the 1980s, as the trauma of the Maoist era was so intolerable, intellectuals focused on how to restrict the power of the government, and for this reason they were eager to learn from modern Western experience. The Tian’anmen incident in 1989 led many intellectuals to lose confidence in the government. However, in the 1990s and the twenty-first century,

it was precisely under the rule of the authoritarian Communist Party that China enjoyed huge success. In this background, an increasing number of intellectuals started to defend China's unconventional way of development, to investigate China's particular character, and to revive the traditional values. Some liberals even converted to non-liberals, including Liu and Gan. This might be the sociological explanation of Strauss's popularity in China.

Although Chinese Straussians have justifiable motivations to praise ancient wisdom, they still should be cautious. The Chinese Straussians have drawn a broad black and white contrast between antiquity and modernity. Strauss is to a large degree responsible for this picture, but the Straussians still ignore that in some places, Strauss showed a mixed attitude toward modern things. In "German Nihilism," Strauss actually defended the modern civilization exemplified by the Anglo way of life, i.e., a modern life mixed with the ancient wisdom and a "moderation not to throw out the baby with the bath."<sup>170</sup> Once Chinese Straussians become unqualified adherents of the ancient thought, whether Platonic or Confucian, they may become inflexible; they may be unable to accept even a minimum of modern wisdom; they may also ignore Socrates's humble words that the philosopher should always be conscious of his/her own ignorance. Ultimately, they may even forget Strauss's teaching, that

We cannot reasonably expect that a fresh understanding of classical political

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<sup>170</sup> Leo Strauss, GN, 372.

philosophy will supply us with recipes for today's use. For the relative success of modern political philosophy has brought into being a kind of society wholly unknown to the classics, a kind of society to which the classical principles as stated and elaborated by the classics are not immediately applicable. Only we today can possibly find a solution to the problems of today.<sup>171</sup>

This is an authentic representation of Aristotelian practical wisdom, which also corresponds to the ancient Chinese teaching on temporality: "Resting when it is the time to rest, and acting when it is the time to act. When one's movements and restings all take place at the proper time for them, his way (of proceeding) is brilliant and intelligent."<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Leo Strauss, *CM*, 11.

<sup>172</sup> "Gen," *Book of Changes* 周易·艮卦. Translated by James Legge, accessed March 19, 2013, <http://ctext.org/book-of-changes/gen>.

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