Shizhe Shengcun (Survival of the Fittest): The Origin and Adaptation of Social Darwinist Concepts in Modern China

By

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ABSTRACT

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_Shizhe shengcun_ was the best-known Chinese phrase associated with Darwinism and Social Darwinism during the twentieth century. It has remained in use to this day, and continues to be accepted as the best translation of the “survival of the fittest.” Variation in use of the term _shizhe shengcun_ reflects the rise and fall of social Darwinist ideas in China. By tracing a thread in the development of social Darwinist terminology in modern China, this study illuminates the intellectual lineage of Chinese social Darwinist thought.

Two modes of thought in Chinese philosophy have been identified as relevant to the reception of Darwinist concepts, namely the materialistic worldview of Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) and the primitive theory of evolution expounded much earlier by Zhuangzi (370-287 BC). These two modes of thought contributed to a conceptual framework for the reception of Darwinist and social Darwinist ideas in China. In the last a few decades of the nineteenth century, Darwinist and social Darwinist terms began to be translated into Chinese. As this thesis points out, an essay composed by Zhong Tianwei in 1889 was
the first work in Chinese to convey identifiable social Darwinist terms, and Yan Fu’s book *Tianyan Lun* (1898) was the first to express social Darwinist ideas in detail. The thesis argues that Zhong and Yan both introduced terms associated with evolution while placing them within the framework of Chinese philosophy.

Through discussion of the emergence and acceptance of *shizhe shengcun* and other terms, this study constructs a new explanation of the introduction and changing usage of social Darwinist concepts in China. There has as yet been no comprehensive study of how Chinese intellectuals introduced and understood the key terms and concepts associated with Darwinism and how their work led to the coalescence of a conceptual system associated with Social Darwinism. In further discussion, the thesis presents a case study of the approach to *suzhi jiaoyu*, a concept based on Herbert Spencer’s educational principles. The case study illustrates the application of social Darwinist ideas in contemporary China.
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Chapter One

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Does Social Darwinism exist in China? In what form does it exist, if so, and how has it taken shape? This study addresses these central questions. The questions are particularly intriguing because of the lack of focused historical research on Social Darwinism in China. Although many articles have discussed the topic, mostly in Chinese, no monographs have so far been devoted to Social Darwinism in either Chinese or English. Developing from initial questions about the early reception of Darwinism by Chinese scholars, my study aims to contribute to understanding a neglected aspect of Chinese intellectual history since the late nineteenth century.

Shizhe shengcun (适者生存) was the best-known phrase associated with Darwinism and Social Darwinism in China during the twentieth century. The phrase was devised by Yan Fu (1854-1921), a highly influential author and translator, as a translation of the principle “survival of the fittest.” In the early twentieth century, shizhe shengcun often appeared immediately following other terms, particularly yousheng liebai (优胜劣败 the superior win, and the inferior are defeated), or wujing tianze (物竞 struggle for existence; 天择 natural selection). Appearing after yousheng liebai, shizhe shengcun clearly expressed a social Darwinist principle. Following wujing tianze, shizhe shengcun
indicated a principle of Darwinism. Through Yan Fu’s translation work and his promotion of reformist ideas, these terms and the concepts they represented had enormous influence on the thinking of several generations of Chinese intellectuals. By the late twentieth century, *yousheng liebai* became an obsolete term and *wujing* and *tianze* had been succeeded by more precise translations, which were *shengcun jingzheng* (生存竞争 struggle for existence), and *ziran xuanze* (自然选择 natural selection). In contrast, *shizhe shengcun* has remained in use to this day, and continues to be accepted as the best translation of the “survival of the fittest.”

Despite continuity in the meaning of *shizhe shengcun*, the popularity of the phrase has varied over time. It found greater favour at certain points during the twentieth century than at others. This variation in use of the term *shizhe shengcun* reflects the rise and fall of social Darwinist ideas in China. Thus, I have adopted *shizhe shengcun* as the title of this dissertation to provide an indication of the scope of my research and discussion. Through discussion of the emergence and acceptance of such phrases as *shizhe shengcun*, my aim in this study is to build a new explanation to the development of social Darwinist ideas in China. The Chinese authors and theories discussed in Chapter Two through Five are well-known in China. Most have been discussed in depth. However, these figures and their theories have not previously been discussed in connection to their contributions to the synthesis of a set of concepts associated with Social Darwinism.

Beginning with a re-examination of certain aspects of traditional Chinese ideology. I identified two sources of the reception of Darwinist and social Darwinist ideas in Chinese philosophy, namely Wang Fuzhi’s materialistic worldview and Zhuangzi’s primitive theory of evolution. During the last few decades of nineteenth century,
Darwinist and social Darwinist concepts began to be translated into Chinese. I point out that Zhong Tianwei’s essay in 1889 was the first to convey distinguishable social Darwinist terms, and that Yan Fu’s book *Tianyan Lun* (1898) was the first to express detailed social Darwinist ideas. Through the comparison and analysis of their texts, I argue that Zhong and Yan were both introducing concepts of evolution within the framework of Chinese philosophy.

By studying Yan Fu’s book and essays, I discovered that although Yan greatly admired Herbert Spencer’s synthetic philosophy, he accepted Spencer’s social Darwinist ideas only with reservations. Benjamin Schwartz’s statement that Yan Fu’s “commentaries abound in panegyrics of Spencer” did not precisely describe the features of Yan’s works.\(^1\) I argue that Yan’s critiques to the social Darwinist ideas were much more based on Confucian ethics than an “evolutionary ethic.”\(^2\) Furthermore, I suggest that Sun Yat-sen’s criticism of Social Darwinism was based closely on Yan Fu’s commentaries rather than part of a general trend of condemning Social Darwinism in the aftermath of the First World War.

Compared to criticisms by Yan Fu and Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong’s critique of Social Darwinism was not based on a Confucian worldview. Mao based his critique on materialist dialectics as a theoretical foundation rather than on traditional Chinese thought. I consider Mao Zedong’s critique to be the main reason for Chinese intellectuals’ silence on social Darwinist ideas from the 1950s through the 1980s. Even after Mao’s death in 1976, the influence of his negative comments was still formidable in

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\(^2\) Schwartz, 100.
China. Yet channels existed for the expression and development of social Darwinist ideas in contemporary China. My discussion of suzhi jiaoyu, a concept based on Herbert Spencer’s educational principles presents a case study illuminating application of certain forms of social Darwinist thinking in China since the 1980s.

As the first doctoral dissertation either in English or Chinese on the reception of Social Darwinism in China, this study examines how several social Darwinist concepts emerged, came into general use, evolved in Chinese-language discourse. The thesis thus traces a thread in the development of social Darwinist ideas in modern China; and constructs an intellectual lineage of Chinese social Darwinist thought. To reach these goals, I approach my theme by examining four aspects in turn.

First, I examine traditional Chinese thought to uncover foundations for the development of social Darwinist ideas in China. In Chapter Two, I analyze two well-known traditions of Chinese thinking related to evolutionary processes. The chapter aims to answer these questions: What comparable concepts were influential in China before the arrival of Social Darwinism? What theories were similar to the modern understanding of evolution? And how did these ideas shape the reception of social Darwinist ideas in China?

The ideas of two influential Chinese philosophers are discussed in Chapter Two, which focuses on the materialistic thought of Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), and the thought of Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou, 370-287 BC), whose Huasheng shuo (化生说) presented a theory of heterogenesis, or radical evolutionary theory. Wang Fuzhi was well-known as the founder of Wei-Qi lun (惟器论), a theory which elevated Qi (concrete things) to an
unprecedented status, thus establishing a materialistic worldview in Confucianism. On the basis of this materialism, Wang called for far-reaching reforms in China. Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng shuo* features the idea that all living beings, including humans, develop from a single tiny organism, called *ji* (幾). Zhuangzi also declared that many species of animals and plants can transform themselves into other species. The existence and authority of these two thinkers’ ideas prepared a foundation for the rise to dominance of certain social Darwinist concepts in China during the twentieth century.

Next, I investigated the emergence of social Darwinist concepts in China. Chapter Three is an investigation into the first introduction of social Darwinist ideas in Chinese text. The chapter has two parts. The first part includes reports and analyses of the social and intellectual circumstances before 1889, when the first Chinese essay introducing the theories of Darwin and Spencer was composed. The second part includes discussions on the contents of that essay, and its influence in the formation of social Darwinist ideas in China. In Chapter Three, I intend to tackle these questions: What was the earliest Chinese intellectual response to Spencer and his theories? What conditions and choices influenced the formation of their views? And in what way did their views influence the dissemination of Social Darwinism in China?

According to extant materials, Zhong Tianwei (1840-1900) was the first writer in Chinese to introduce the ideas of Darwin and Spencer in detail. In an award-winning essay, Zhong provided an introduction which combined Darwinist and social Darwinist ideas in a Confucian context. Zhong described Spencer as a philosopher who “expanded
on Darwin’s theories.” Thanks to Zhong’s discussion, a distinctive appearance of social Darwinist ideas emerged in China, combining concepts drawn from Darwinism, Confucianism, and Social Darwinism. During the first half of the twentieth century, this appearance of combined concepts in Chinese language continued to shape the work of Yan Fu and other intellectuals. For a better understanding of Zhong’s ideas and their connections to conditions in Chinese society in the late nineteenth century, the first half of this chapter presents the establishment of the Gezhi Shuyuan (格致书院 the Shanghai Polytechnic) and the flourishing of the Kaoke (考课 China Prize Essay Contest) venture hosted by Wang Tao (1828-1897).

Chapter Four examines the rise and fall of certain social Darwinist concepts in twentieth-century China. It focuses on the ideas expressed by a few leading intellectuals and political figures, tracing their connections to the development of social Darwinist thought. Through analysis of arguments and discussion presented by Yan Fu, Sun Yat-sen, and Mao Zedong, the chapter tackles questions including: Who was the most influential Chinese intellectual transmitting social Darwinist ideas? What were the connections between his interpretation and Zhong Tianwei’s? What differences can be distinguished between Spencer’s theories and Chinese interpretations? And why was Social Darwinism criticized by certain Chinese political leaders?

Through discussion of the arguments presented by Yan Fu in Tianyan Lun, Chapter Four reveals the development of a distinctively Chinese conception of Social Darwinism, a form clearly marked with Confucian features. Yan Fu’s conception is

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labeled using the title of his work *Tianyan Lun* (1898), a book based on translation of Thomas Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays* (1894). *Tianyan Lun* is considered to be the first book to introduce Social Darwinism in Chinese. It is significant that despite Thomas Huxley’s intention to present a critique of Social Darwinism in this book, Yan Fu did not translate Huxley’s words precisely or fully. In fact, *Tianyan Lun* consists largely of Yan’s own commentary on Huxley’s discussion, in which Yan expressed concurrence with Spencer’s arguments.

Chapter Four continues by discussing the attitudes of Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) and Mao Zedong (1893-1976) toward Social Darwinism. Sun rejected a Spencerian principle known in Chinese as *ruorou qiangshi* (弱肉强食 the weak are meat for the strong), and advocated a strengthening of Confucian ethics to support the Republic of China. Sun also encouraged using of the Japanese-style term *jinhua* (进化), instead of Yan Fu’s term *tianyan* (天演). Mao Zedong’s critique of Social Darwinism was based on the philosophy of materialist dialectics. He declared that the social Darwinist conception of gradual evolution was incompatible with the goals of Marxist revolution. Therefore, under Mao’s leadership, *Tianyan Lun* and other social Darwinist ideas declined in China.

Finally, this study seeks to illuminate how social Darwinist ideas have been applied in contemporary China. Chapter Five is an exploration of the origin and development of *suzhi jiaoyu* (素质教育 roughly “education to promote essential qualities”), which has been an explicit goal of national education strategy since the 1980s. The chapter seeks to define the meaning of *suzhi*, a concept lacking equivalents in English, and proceeds by tracing the connections between *suzhi jiaoyu* and social
Darwinist ideas. In doing so, it addresses the intriguing question: Why has the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) endorsed a concept with such obvious social Darwinist connotations?

After reviewing the evolving usage of the term suzhi, Chapter Five follows the growing prevalence of the term in official documents and academic circles. Through a comparison of materials from various periods, the ideas of Yan Fu and Herbert Spencer on education are identified as the prototypes of suzhi jiaoyu. Later, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) and Mao Zedong also expressed ideas on education that expanded the definition of suzhi jiaoyu. As a case study of social Darwinist thought from the second half of twentieth century, this examination reveals a distinct signal in the practice of suzhi jiaoyu. Despite clarification of the term in a manner considered appropriate for inclusion in socialist development strategy, and to serve the promotion of socialist ethics in popular conduct, conceptions of suzhi jiaoyu are found to contain a significant endowment of social Darwinist thought.

Key Concepts and Biographical Sketches

The following section introduces the key concepts and persons featured in this study.

Wang Fuzhi’s Wei-Qi Lun (惟器論 Qi-ism)

Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) was a Confucian scholar who experienced violent change during the transition period between the Ming and Qing dynastic regimes. In order to eliminate aspects of Neo-Confucian thought that he viewed as promoting passivity and to have led to the collapse of the Ming government, Wang Fuzhi re-interpreted the
Confucian classics with an emphasis on materialism. In a departure from earlier Confucian ideas endorsing the dominant status of Dao (道 the Way), Wang elevated the concept of Qi (器 concrete things) to a position of unprecedented importance. He proposed that everything in the world, including the Dao, is reliant on the existence of Qi. His ideas on the Dao-Qi relationship remain well-known as Wei-Qi lun (惟器論). To simplify matters, I created a term “Qi-ism” to refer to Wang Fuzhi’s theory. In “Qi-ism,” “Qi” refers to concrete things, and “-ism” is the suffix.

Thanks to the contribution of Qi-ism to Chinese philosophy, Wang Fuzhi was considered as the “greatest materialist of the Ming and Qing periods” by Marxist philosophers Feng Youlan (1895-1990) and Zhang Dainian (1909-2004).

**Zhuangzi’s Huasheng Shuo (化生说)**

During the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC), the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou, 370-287 BC) developed a primitive evolutionary theory known as Huasheng shuo (化生说 the theory of heterogenesis, or radical evolutionary theory). Zhuangzi stated that many species of animals and plants can transform themselves into other species; also, all living beings, including humans, originate in ji (幾), a kind of tiny organism, and will return to ji in form, either after death or after many generations. In Chinese, the word huasheng is composed of two characters—hua (化 transform, change into), and sheng (生 life, living things).

*Huasheng shuo* was very influential in the development of evolutionary ideas in modern China. When the English word “evolution” arrived China, it was translated as
jinhuā (进化),⁴ which literally means “advanced hua,” or “developed hua.” Through the character hua (化), connections were made between Western evolutionary theory and the traditional Daoist idea.

**Zhong Tianwei (钟天纬)**

Zhong Tianwei (1840-1900) worked as a translator at the Shandong Arsenal (山东机械局) and the Jiangnan Arsenal (General Bureau of Machine Manufacture of Jiangnan, 江南机器制造总局) in Shanghai. Although Zhong is not a well-known figure in modern Chinese history, he made important contributions to the introduction of Western learning. His essays circulated mainly through two series of compilations, called *Huangchao Jingshiwen Bian* (皇朝经世文编)⁵ and *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* (格致书院课艺),⁶ and were also included in a few anthologies. His connection to Social Darwinism is that he was the first Chinese writer to introduce Herbert Spencer’s thought in detail. Zhong’s introduction first appeared in an award-winning essay in the Spring 1889 Prize Essay Contest at the Gezhi Shuyuan (格致书院 Shanghai Polytechnic), and was then included in both *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* and *Huangchao Jingshiwen Sanbian*. In this widely circulated essay, Zhong introduced the theories of both Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer.

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⁴ In Chinese, the character jin (进) means to advance, move forward.
⁵ *Huangchao Jingshiwen Bian* was a popular series of collections of jingshi (经世 statecraft) essays in the late Qing period. Related collections were *Huangchao Jingshiwen Bubian* (皇朝经世文补编), *Huangchao Jingshiwen Xubian* (皇朝经世文续编), *Huangchao Jingshiwen Sanbian* (皇朝经世文三编), *Huangchao Jingshiwen Tongbian* (皇朝经世文统编), and *Huangchao Jingshiwen Shibian* (皇朝经世文四编).
⁶ *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* was a series of compilations of essays winning award at the Gezhi Shuyuan. The series was edited by Wang Tao (王韬, 1828-1897).
Yan Fu’s *Tianyan Lun* (天演论)

Yan Fu (1854-1921) was modern China’s most influential translator. He translated many important Western works, including Thomas H. Huxley’s (1825-1895) *Evolution and Ethics*, Adam Smith’s (1723-1790) *The Wealth of Nations*, Herbert Spencer’s (1820-1903) *The Study of Sociology*, and John S. Mill’s (1806-1873) *On Liberty*.

The phrase *Tianyan Lun* is both a title and a term. As a title, it refers to the book *Tianyan Lun* (1898), the most popular of Yan Fu’s works. As noted above, *Tianyan Lun* was not a complete or precise translation of Huxley’s book *Evolution and Ethics*. The comments that Yan provided on Huxley’s points after each passage of translation were grounded in Confucianism and informed by the ideas of Herbert Spencer. For Yan, *Tianyan Lun* was a means of building an evolutionary theory of his own. Yan’s theory, combined Darwinism, Social Darwinism, and Confucianism. As a term, therefore, *Tianyan Lun* refers to Yan Fu’s theory of evolution.

During the twentieth century, *Tianyan Lun* the book and *Tianyan Lun* the theory were both extremely influential in Chinese intellectual history.

*Jinhua* (进化)

In contemporary China, *jinhua lun* is the accepted translation of “theory of evolution,” and refers exclusively to Darwin’s theory of evolution. In the first half of the twentieth century, however, its root word *jinhua* possessed a much wider range of meanings.
Jinhua was not a set phrase in Chinese until the nineteenth century. It was then identified as a loan word from Japanese, created by the Japanese politician Katō Hiroyuki (1836-1916) as a translation of “evolution.” The first appearance of jinhua in China was an essay published in Shiwu Bao (Current Affairs Newspaper) in 1897. In his book Tianyan Lun, Yan Fu used the term jinhua to indicate the progress of human society. Early in the twentieth century, the Japanese jinhua supplanted Yan Fu’s term tianyan as the standard translation of “evolution.” Despite this shift, jinhua continued to bear the meaning that Yan Fu had associated with it, namely human social progress. Moreover, thanks to its root word hua (化), the term jinhua continued to be associated with the Daoist theory Huasheng shuo throughout the twentieth century.

Yongsu Jinhua Lun (庸俗进化论)

Yongsu jinhua lun (庸俗进化论 vulgar evolutionism) is often used in Chinese as an equivalent of the term “Social Darwinism.” The phrase was well-known, having appeared in Mao Zedong’s important essay On Contradiction (矛盾论) in 1937. Based on the philosophy of dialectical materialism, which proposed “discontinuity, disharmony” and “abrupt leaps” in the progress of human society, Mao criticized the idea of “a gradual, continuous” process of evolution, declaring the idea to be unsuitable given communist revolutionary goals. In the 1950s, Mao launched a massive campaign to criticize yongsu jinhua lun. In this campaign, many social Darwinists and social reformers were criticized, including Herbert Spencer, John Dewey (1859-1952), Lester F.

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Ward (1841-1913), Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932), and Hu Shi (1891-1962). Yongsu jinhua lun is now an obsolete term in Chinese.

**Suzhi Jiaoyu (素质教育)**

*Suzhi (素质)* is a modern word composed of two ancient Chinese characters. The character *su* (素) has the meaning of “white,” and “natural,” and *zhi* (质) means “body,” and “plain.” Early in the twentieth century, *suzhi* was widely used to mean “innate characteristics,” and “accomplishment.”

Beginning in 1982, the word *suzhi* has appeared in the *People’s Daily* (人民日报) and official documents of the CCP (Chinese Communist Party) with calls for improving the quality of the Chinese population, or national quality. In the mid-1980s, a basic goal was set for reform of the Chinese educational system: to raise the overall *suzhi* of the Chinese people. As a compound, *suzhi jiaoyu* (suzhi education) has appeared in Chinese publications since 1987. Soon afterward, many writers and speakers across China were engaged in discussion of *suzhi jiaoyu*, which was identified as a goal in national educational policies.

The origin of ideas about *suzhi jiaoyu* appears to lie in Yan Fu’s views on education, along with the book *Yiye Yaolan* (肄业要览), which was a translation of Herbert Spencer’s book *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (1861). Cai Yuanpei

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(1868-1940) and Mao Zedong also contributed thoughts on education to formation of the concept of suzhi jiaoyu. In addition, suzhi jiaoyu was the echo of the social Darwinist ideas of Spencer, Yan Fu, and others. Despite Mao’s critique, the concept of evolutionary gradualism re-emerged after his death.

**Literature Review**

Scholarship in intellectual history has not yet seriously addressed the topic of Social Darwinism in China. Among English-language sources, the only work specific to China among numerous articles and books on Social Darwinism and Darwinism in other contexts is James Pusey’s *China and Charles Darwin* (1983). Pusey analyzed the thought of several important Chinese intellectuals and analyzed how they reacted to and adapted Darwin’s ideas. He also discussed the connections between Confucianism, nationalism, and Marxism and Darwin’s thought. However, Pusey’s questions in *China and Charles Darwin* did not include the interpretation of social Darwinist ideas. His key argument was that Darwin helped to inspire an intellectual renaissance in China, during which traditional ideas and ancient authority were challenged. The challenges to established norms, according to Pusey, justified and legitimized revolutions in twentieth century China, and also created an “ideological vacuum” in which Marxism became dominant. Although Social Darwinism and Yan Fu’s *Tianyan Lun* are mentioned in Pusey’s book, however, his arguments on Yan Fu did not advance beyond points made by Benjamin Schwartz in his book *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West*

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Published more than half a century ago, *In Search of Wealth and Power* is still the best monograph in English on Yan Fu’s works and thought. Schwartz’s translation and analysis of the texts of *Tianyan Lun* was very helpful in my discussion in Chapter Four. However, Schwartz did not aim to examine Yan Fu’s contribution to the formation of social Darwinist ideas in China. Compared to Pusey’s work, the limited number of English-language articles that have been published on Social Darwinism and China have presented incomplete information and unconvincing points. Two examples of such work are Ron Unz’s “How Social Darwinism Made Modern China” (2013), and Xiaosui Xiao’s “China Encounters Darwinism: A Case of Intercultural Rhetoric” (1995).

Before I began to explore the case of China, several English works on evolutionary ideas helped me understand the main features of Darwinism and Social Darwinism. Peter J. Bowler’s *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (2009) provides a panoramic view of the origin and development of evolutionary theory, including Darwinism, in the Western world. A leading historian of science, Bowler not only discussed the history of evolutionary biology in the book, but also tackled philosophical issues and theoretical problems related to evolutionism. Although Bowler did not mention any theories in China, his discussion of ancient ideas on evolution inspired me to discover early evolutionary theories in China’s long history. Furthermore, Bowler’s discussion on the relationships between evolution and society and culture, and on modern

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debates about evolution, helped me to develop a comprehensive perspective on the concepts, ideas and events linked to Social Darwinism in China.\textsuperscript{14}

Meanwhile, another of Bowler’s books, \textit{The Non-Darwinian Revolution: Reinterpreting a Historical Myth}, together with a few other works on the application of Darwinism in human society, helped me in devising a scholarly approach to issues related to Social Darwinism.\textsuperscript{15} Among these works are John Beckstrom’s \textit{Darwinism Applied: Evolutionary Paths to Social Goals}, and Alexander Rosenberg’s \textit{Darwinism in Philosophy, Social Science and Policy}.\textsuperscript{16} A book by John Dewey (1859-1952) was also helpful to me, both because of its influence on the Chinese scholar Hu Shi (1891-1962), and its insightful views on Darwinism and philosophy.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, many scholarly articles on Darwinism and Social Darwinism in different periods helped me build a theoretical foundation for my study. The authors of these pertinent articles include D. Collin Wells, James Allen Rogers, Jack Jones, Donald C. Bellomy, Greta Jones, John Angus Campbell, and Merryl Wyn Davies.\textsuperscript{18}

On the topic of Social Darwinism, the following five monographs were crucial for expanding my understanding of the reception of and debates on social Darwinist ideas in different societies, and also helped me to identify the distinctive characteristics of the case of China. These books are Robert Bannister’s *Social Darwinism: Science and Myth in Anglo-American Social Thought* (1979), Linda Clark’s *Social Darwinism in France* (1984), Mike Hawkins’s *Social Darwinism in European and American Thought, 1860-1945* (1997), Richard Hofstader’s *Social Darwinism in American Thought, 1860-1915* (1945), and Greta Jones’s *Social Darwinism and English Thought: the Interaction between Biological and Social Theory* (1980).\(^{19}\) Although I did not quote them all in my discussion, these distinguished works proved helpful as I planned the methodology of my research and the structure of this dissertation.

In addition to the works cited above, Paul Crook’s essays collected in *Darwin’s Coat-Tails: Essays on Social Darwinism* (2007) helped me to form a full understanding of Social Darwinism.\(^{20}\) Also, several books and articles on key figures related to evolutionary ideas, which include D. P. Crook’s *Benjamin Kidd: Portrait of a Social Darwinist* (1984), Mark Francis’s *Herbert Spencer and the Invention of Modern Life* (2007), Paul White’s *Thomas Huxley: Making the “Man of Science”* (2003), and James D. Teller’s “Huxley on the Aims of Education” (1944), provided me with precise


vocabulary in discussing these philosophers’ influence in China.\textsuperscript{21} Also worth mentioning, M. W. Taylor’s \textit{Men Versus the State: Herbert Spencer and Late Victorian Individualism} (1992), and Robert M. Young’s \textit{Darwin’s Metaphor: Nature’s Place in Victorian Culture} (1985), offered good reference discussions on evolutionary thought during the Victorian period, which was roughly contemporaneous with the late Qing context in part of my study.\textsuperscript{22}

A few books with interdisciplinary scope also helped to broaden my horizons. Lydia H. Liu’s \textit{Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937} (1995) is a paradigmatic linguistic analysis of modern Chinese literature and culture in the academic discourse system of Western world.\textsuperscript{23} Although I did not intend to approach Social Darwinism from the perspective of cultural or cross-cultural studies, Lydia Liu’s study on language and translation was illuminating to my research. Ruth Rogaski’s \textit{Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China} (2004), and Andrew D. Morris’s \textit{Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China} (2004), exemplify fresh approaches to Chinese history through the synthesis of studies in ideas, language, politics, and certain special fields, such as hygiene, or physical culture.\textsuperscript{24} Although I handle my topic more

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broadly than Rogaski and Morris do in these works, their historiography influenced my
discussion on suzhi education in Chapter Five.

In Chinese-language sources, evolutionary theory (jinhua lun) and evolutionism
(jinhua zhiyi) are more popular terms than Darwinism or Social Darwinism, and have
been much discussed by many scholars in the fields of Chinese philosophy, intellectual
history and political history. In Wang Zhongjiang’s Chinese-language book The Rise of
Evolutionism in China: A New Omnipotent World View (2010), in twentieth-century
China, evolutionary theory was transformed into a Chinese evolutionist approach to
cosmology, ideology and values, and is also closely related to the rise of modern Chinese
nationalism and liberalism.25 In contrast with Wang Zhongjiang’s broad overview from
the angle of philosophical history, Wu Pi’s book On Theories of Evolution and
Radicalism in China, 1859-1924 (2005) placed greater emphasis on political history. Wu
argued that the concept “paradigm” can be applied in discussion of different evolutionary
ideas in Chinese political history, distinguishing among radicalism, reformism and
conciliationism, and concluded that there are three major views of evolution in China.26
Wang Zhongjiang and Wu Pi’s books have been valuable in helping me to establish a
clear view of the links between evolutionary theory and certain Chinese political theories;
however, questions regarding the reception and transformation of evolutionary theory in
China were not addressed in either book.

25 Wang Zhongjiang (王中江), 进化主义在中国的兴起: 一个新的全能式世界观 (The Rise of
Zeng Leshan was the first Chinese scholar to offer a sophisticated and complete examination of the spread of evolutionary theory after the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). His book *The Merging of Chinese and Western Philosophy: The Diffusion of Evolutionary Theory in Modern China* (1991; in Chinese) appraised the positive and progressive effects of the domination of evolutionary theory in modern China. A shortcoming of his work, however, is that Zeng was overly influenced by Mao Zedong’s critique of Social Darwinism, and based all his arguments in the dialectical materialist framework.\(^\text{27}\)

In addition to the monographs mentioned above, dozens of articles on Social Darwinism have been published in China during the past several decades. Well-known Chinese scholars, including Xu Jilin, Wang Daohuan, and Ouyang Zhesheng, have contributed points and arguments to the study of Social Darwinism and its influence in China. These works will be discussed in the following sections together with related works in English. (Please note that for the convenience of readers, I have translated the titles of works published in Chinese.)

**Wang Fuzhi and the Philosophical History**

A distinguished Confucian scholar, Wang Fuzhi has been studied thoroughly in the field of Chinese philosophy. Many monographs and articles on Wang’s thought have published during the past century and a half. However, the connections between Wang’s thought and the origin of social Darwinist ideas have not been discussed in any of these

scholarly works. Nevertheless, other scholars’ interpretations of Wang’s philosophy have provided the foundation of my research. In this regard, the works of several outstanding Chinese scholars, some belonging to the school of New Confucianism, helped me to grasp the essence of Wang Fuzhi’s thought. Early on, Liang Qichao and Qian Mu precisely summarized Wang’s status and contributions to Chinese intellectual history, which were included in their popular works *Qingdai Xueshu Gailun* (Intellectual trends in the Qing period, 1921), and *Zhongguo jin sanbainian xueshushi* (An Academic History of China of the past Three Hundred Years, 1957). A later new Confucianist, Tang Junyi, illustrated the deep roots of Wang’s thought in Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism in his marvelous series *On the Origin of Chinese Philosophies* (1966-1975), which include four books—*An Introduction* (导论篇, 1966), *On Nature* (原性篇, 1968), *On Dao* (原道篇, 1973), and *On Doctrines* (原教篇, 1975). Although Tang did not link any of Wang Fuzhi’s or Zhuangzi’s ideas to modern evolutionary theory, his illustration in the *On Doctrines* helped me to understand Wang Fuzhi’s attitude to certain Daoist ideas, including Zhuangzi’s Huasheng theory. Zeng Zhaoxu’s book *Wang Chuanshan Zhexue* (Wang Fuzhi’s Philosophy, 1983) also expanded my understanding of Wang’s commentaries on Zhuangzi’s text.

In contrast to philosophers based in Taiwan, work by Zhang Dainian and Feng Youlan offers a materialistic approach to Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy, an approach that is

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convincing in explaining the Dao-Qi relationship in Wang’s theory.\textsuperscript{31} In addition to the works cited above, dozens of Chinese articles have provided detailed discussion on the publication of Wang Fuzhi’s works, his Dao-Qi theory, and his influence on twentieth-century Chinese revolutionary thought. Many of these articles were published in the journal \textit{Chuanshan Xuebao (Chuanshan Xuekan from 1990, both titles meaning “Wang Fuzhi Studies”)}, a publication founded in 1915 to popularize Wang’s thought.

For research on the thought of Wang Fuzhi, anthologies of his works are essential sources. The \textit{Chuanshan Quanshu (Complete Collection of Wang Fuzhi}, 16 volumes, 1996) is the most complete collection of Wang’s works published to date. The collection also contains a large set of memoirs and comments by Wang’s relatives and friends.\textsuperscript{32} Meanwhile, a few biographies of Wang Fuzhi, which include \textit{Wang Fuzhi Pingzhuan (A Critical Biography of Wang Fuzhi}, 2002), and \textit{Kuangshi Daru: Wang Fuzhi (An Unrivaled Confucianist: Wang Fuzhi}, 2001), provide vivid details about Wang’s life and the development of his thought.\textsuperscript{33} The English-language sources on Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy are limited. Alison Black’s \textit{Man and Nature in the Philosophical Thought of Wang Fu-chih} (1989) is almost the only available monograph.\textsuperscript{34} Unfortunately, Black’s approach to Wang’s thought was


through the exploration of metaphysics and morality, which is a little far from my study. In the book *Provincial Patriots: The Hunanese and Modern China* (2007), Stephen Platt made an interesting exploration of the shared characteristics of the residents of Hunan province. Platt considered Wang Fuzhi as the “archetype of the modern Hunanese character,” and made strong links between Wang’s thought and the reforms and revolutions occurred in Hunan.\(^{35}\) Although Platt did not focus on Wang’s philosophical ideas, his book offered useful sources on Wang’s life and the Hunanese whom he influenced.

As a guide to translation of the Chinese philosophical terms in English, an essential reference work is Wing-Tsit Chan’s *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1963). In addition, through the English version of the book *Key Concepts in Chinese Philosophy* (2002), Zhang Dainian and his translator also contributed to improved definitions of understanding of Chinese philosophical terms and concepts in English.\(^{36}\)

**Zhuangzi and the History of Science**

Among the voluminous research and commentary on Zhuangzi’s work, publications by Chen Guying are both popular and precise. *The Modern Commentary and Modern Translation of Zhuangzi’s Works* (1983) is a good reference guide to understanding Zhuangzi’s essays. In contrast to the rich research on Zhuangzi’s philosophy, discussion of his evolutionary thought is rare. Only a few articles have

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explored this topic. Although first published a century ago, Hu Shi’s Chinese-language essay “The evolutionary theory of Pre-Qin scholars” (1917) remains significant in the discussion of Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng shuo*. During the past few decades, Zhao Yunxian’s article “Heterogenesis and Ancient China’s Ideas of Life” (1995) analyzed the phenomena mentioned in *Huasheng shuo* and their validity from the perspective of modern biology.\(^{37}\)

In the English-speaking world, Joseph Needham’s *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2: *History of Scientific Thought* (1956) laid a foundation for further discussion in English of ancient Chinese thought, including *Huasheng shuo* in English. The translation of Zhuangzi’s well-known paragraph included in the volume, which was translated by Hu Shi and edited by Needham, facilitated my discussion of *Huasheng shuo*.\(^{38}\)

Meanwhile, scholarship on the history of science in China remains underdeveloped. So far, only a few scholars have examined the subject in depth. Wang Zichun and Zhang Binglun are two pioneers in research on the propagation of biological Darwinism in China. In his book *China and Charles Darwin*, Pusey’s information on the translation and introduction of Darwinist theory in nineteenth-century China is almost entirely based on articles by Wang and Zhang. In addition, a younger scholar named Lu Jichuan has also made important contributions to understanding the propagation of

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Darwinism in twentieth-century China. Works by these three Chinese historians of science not only illuminate Darwinism’s emergence and development in China, but also list the important archival sources related to the reception of Darwinism and Social Darwinism in China before 1949. Their most significant papers were published around 1980, including “The Dissemination of Darwinism in China” (1978), “The Dissemination and Influence of Darwinism in China” (1982), and “The Conflicts between Darwinism and Creationism in China” (1982).  

Although hundreds of discussions on Darwinism and Social Darwinism have been published in China since 1980, very few are closely relevant to my study. However, Li Peishan argued that to propagate Spencer’s thought was the primary object of Yan Fu’s Tianyan Lun in her article “Social Darwinism and Darwin’s evolutionary theory in China” (1991). Zhang Mingguo’s paper “Process, traits and reasons for the dissemination of evolutionary theory in modern Chinese society” (1996) tackled the same issue in a useful overview. His contribution was to point out a bypassing in the transmission of Darwinism through the translation of Japanese books, and to highlight how primitive Chinese evolutionary ideas were the ideological foundation for Darwinism in China.

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Wang Yangzong is a leading scholar of the history of science in China whose research reveals the contents of many scientific periodicals and translations published in late Qing China that have been previously unknown. As well as publishing dozens of articles, Wang has also edited a two-volume work *The Dissemination of Modern Science in China: A Collection of Documents and Materials* (2009) to present his findings. Wang’s interest was concentrated in the dissemination of Western science in China, especially on the translation of Western scientific works. Although he did not discuss Social Darwinism separately, I was nonetheless able to identify various relevant materials from the late Qing period thanks to Wang’s meticulous work.

Like Wang Yangzong’s study of scientific publications, a PhD thesis on “The Dissemination of Darwinism in China, 1873-1937” (2012) has been completed by a young scholar named Li Nan, based on exploration and analysis of scientific periodicals. Li Nan’s thesis focuses on the diffusion of biological theory in China, but without discussion of its relationship to social thought or revolutionary ideology. Li also briefly discussed Ma Junwu, the first Chinese translator of Darwin’s book, in a very general way. Although Li’s work is rather weak in methodology, nonetheless it has contributed to my understanding of certain scientific periodicals through which evolutionary theory was diffused in China.

In addition to research carried out by Chinese scholars, the work of Benjamin Elman on the history of science in China has also made important contributions. Elman’s

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research has convincingly established links between the history of science and cultural history in China. He is also a specialist on the history of education and the civil service examination system of the Qing period. His book On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900 (2005) provides a vivid image of the reception of Western science in China and its relationship first with Jesuit missionaries and later with Protestant missionaries. Elman’s discussion in this book on the Shanghai Polytechnic institution (Gezhi Shuyuan) and its “Extra Theme” contest have helped me to develop the arguments presented in Chapter Three.43

Although they do not quite fall within the history of science domain, a few works on the history of the Shanghai Polytechnic provided valuable material to my study. These works include two essays in English, by Knight Biggerstaff (1956) and David Wright (1996) and one book in Chinese, the Shanghai Gezhi Shuyuan Zhilue (A Brief History of the Shanghai Polytechnic), by Wang Ermin (1980).44

**Chinese Intellectual History**

It is in the field of Chinese intellectual history that the topic of Social Darwinism in China has been most intensively discussed. As noted above, Benjamin Schwartz’s book In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu [Yan Fu] and the West (1964) was significant in the study of Yan Fu’s thought. Schwartz’s arguments and comments on

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Tianyan Lun set the tone for most later discussion of the book. In addition, Paul Cohen’s book Between Tradition and Modernity: Wang Tao and Reform in Late Ch’ing China (1974) also contributes to understanding Chinese intellectuals’ demands for change in the late nineteenth century. Although a little dated, Hao Chang and several other scholars’ works published in the 1960s and 1970s presented fundamental knowledge and historiography that are useful for further discussion on Chinese intellectual history in English.

As an original and foundational work in the propagation of Social Darwinism in China, Yan Fu’s Tianyan Lun has received a great deal of attention, even more than a century after its publication. In contrast to Schwartz’s view of Tianyan Lun as “an exposition of Spencer’s essential views as against Huxley,” Ouyang Zhesheng argued that Yan Fu did show some preference for Spencer’s thought in Tianyan Lun, but this preference was only a supplement to Huxley’s idea, not in opposition to Huxley. Ouyang’s close reading and textual analysis in his article “Tianyan Lun in Modern Chinese Intellectual History” (2006) provided good support for his point. In a discussion combining science and culture, Wang Daohuan, a scholar in Taiwan, argued in “Rereading Tianyan Lun” (2012) that the publication of Tianyan Lun was the starting point for all modern Chinese intellectual history, and that the evolutionary ideas

transmitted in it are all focused on the core concept of “selection”, echoing the ideal of “selecting the wise and able” in traditional Chinese political thought. Xiao Xiaosui, a Hong Kong-based scholar in communication studies, made a distinctive analysis of the rhetoric of *Tianyan Lun*. In his article “China Encounters Darwinism: A Case of Intercultural Rhetoric” (1995), Xiao pointed out that the notions of “reception” and “assimilation” of foreign ideas can be very misleading because of the existence of rhetorical translation. In the case of *Tianyan Lun*, to discuss Chinese responses to Huxley is in fact to discuss responses to Yan Fu’s rhetorical recreation of Huxley. These three Chinese scholars’ articles directly influenced my argument in Chapter Four.47

A few recent Chinese publications by scholars outside mainland China have demonstrated a trend toward the investigation of vocabulary. In “What is Tianyan? The Meaning and Significance of Yan Fu’s *Theory of Natural Evolution*” (2014), Max K. W. Huang elaborated on the cultural background, terminological origins, and historical significance of Yan Fu’s theory of *tianyan*. In “The Rise and fall of the terms ‘tianyan’ and ‘jinhua’ in late Qing Period” (2006), Jiang Yinghao offered an evaluation of the importance of certain concepts by comparing the frequency of the appearances of key words in publications. In *A Study on the Exchange between Japanese and Chinese Modern Vocabulary* (2010), Shen Guowei not only analyzed a few key terms in Yan Fu’s work, but also uncovered their connections to corresponding terms in Japanese.48

In contrast to the voluminous research that has been conducted on Yan Fu, there are very few studies of Zhong Tianwei. Xue Yuliang composed a biography of Zhong (2011), including only a brief discussion of Zhong’s award-winning essay presented to the Shanghai Polytechnic. Regarding Zhong Tianwei’s contribution to the introduction of Herbert Spencer’s theory, no Chinese work has offered more detail than Elman included in On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900 (2005).

In my discussion of how Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong responded to Social Darwinism, quotations are drawn directly from anthologies of their works. Among the large numbers of publications on Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong, only a few relate to my discussion of their views in Chapter Four. On Sun’s theory of shengyuan, for instance, the Japanese scholar Mariko Takegami recently illuminated its origin and cultural background. On certain terms in Marxism, A Dictionary of Marxist Thought (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1991) edited by Tom Bottomore provides useful succinct explanations. Earlier works by Maurice Meisner and Arif Dirlik also helped me to gather knowledge on several important Chinese Marxists, and their contributions to the building
of revolutionary ideas in China.\textsuperscript{51} Furthermore, a collection of interdisciplinary research works on Marxism and China expanded the scope of my inquiry.\textsuperscript{52}

**Suzhi Jiaoyu and Online Sources**

Several scholars writing in English have demonstrated interest in *suzhi* and *suzhi jiaoyu*. An article by Andrew Kipnis, titled “Suzhi: A Keyword Approach” (2006) offered a comprehensive view of the concept *suzhi*. Kipnis discussed the etymology of *suzhi* and the sociopolitical context of usage of the term. However, he connected *suzhi* and social Darwinist ideas in China only through brief introductions to other scholarly works.\textsuperscript{53} In another article on suzhi, Kipnis made connections between suzhi discourse and Neoliberalism in China, which illuminated my exploration of the government policies in Chapter Five.\textsuperscript{54} Meanwhile, Yan Hairong and Ann Anagnost’s arguments in their articles helped me to figure out the importance of suzhi education from the angle of politics.\textsuperscript{55} Tamara Jacka also published a paper on the concept of suzhi, which however did not provide information unavailable in Chinese sources.\textsuperscript{56}

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Andrew D. Morris did not refer to suzhi education in his book *Marrow of the Nation: A History of Sport and Physical Culture in Republican China* (2004). However, Morris’s approaches to the Chinese physical culture provided valuable references for my discussion on the physical education, which is an essential aspect of suzhi education.\(^{57}\) Meanwhile, two important works on Chinese intellectual history contributed to my writing of Chapter Five, namely *China’s Response to the West: A Documentary Survey 1839-1923* (1965), and *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (1984). Although neither of the works mentioned the concept of suzhi, their profound commentaries on reforms in education during the late Qing period and the Republic of China helped to expand my perspective.\(^{58}\)

Although tens of thousands of articles discussing suzhi jiaoyu have been published in China since the 1980s, very few link the concept of suzhi to Social Darwinism. Nonetheless, several offer useful points on the translation, connotations, and application of the concept suzhi. Liu Shaozhong and Liao Fengrong’s paper “Translating ‘suzhi jiaoyu’ into English: an email survey” (2002), and Zhang Guorong’s “A commentary on the English version of ‘suzhi jiaoyu’” (2005) sorted through more than a dozen translations of the term suzhi, and made comments on these translations. “A Critical Reflection on the Thought of ‘Despising Knowledge’ in Chinese basic Education” (2004) by Wang Cesan is a particularly valuable article that has been widely read. Wang made critical points on certain misunderstandings of suzhi jiaoyu and the

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potential negative influence of such misconceptions in the implementation of national policy. Similar reflections are also found in Chen Xiaobin’s “Thoughts on several questions on suzhi jiaoyu” (1994) Huang Fuquan’s “The negative effects of suzhi jiaoyu and their origin” (1996), and Fu Lujian’s “Reflection on the Policy and Practice of Quality Education in China” (2001).  

Because suzhi jiaoyu has been a goal of China’s national education policy, numerous documents have been published and designated as required reading for teachers and educational administrators. Thanks to the Internet, most documents issued by the government of China and the Chinese Communist Party are accessible in electronic form. To access documents linked to suzhi jiaoyu, I chose several official websites, including Xinhua Net.  

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60 These websites are Xinhua Net (新华网 http://www.xinhuanet.com/), Website of the Ministry of Education of the PRC (中华人民共和国教育部网站 http://www.moe.gov.cn/), Database of the National Congresses of the CCP (中国共产党历次全国代表大会数据库 http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64162/64168/index.html), and Website of the National People’s Congress of the PRC (全国人大网 http://www.npc.gov.cn/). In the parts other than Chapter Five, as well as Wikipedia (https://www.wikipedia.org/), I also accessed documents through the online sources: Chinese Text Project (中国哲学书电子化计划 http://ctext.org/), Online Database of Shen Bao (大成申报数据库 http://shenbao.dachengdata.com/tuijian/showTuijianList.action), The Bureau of Local Chronicles of Shanghai City (上海市地方志办公室 http://www.shtong.gov.cn/), and Darwin Online (http://darwin-online.org.uk/).
Chapter Two

Chinese Roots: Wang Fuzhi’s Materialistic Thought, and Zhuangzi’s Evolutionary Theory

It has been widely accepted that Yan Fu was the first person to introduce Social Darwinism into China. According to Bai Yuntao’s work, Yan Fu’s essay *Yuanqiang* (1895) was the first Chinese essay to discuss Social Darwinism, and Yan’s influential book *Tianyan Lun* in 1898 caused social Darwinist ideas to become popular in China.¹ Research on the Shanghai Polytechnic, one of the first schools in China to teach Western science, has brought new materials to light which support an earlier date for the introduction of Herbert Spencer’s theory to China. In an award-winning essay for the China Prize Essay Contest of 1889 (Spring extra topic), a contest regularly hosted by the Shanghai Polytechnic between 1886 and 1894, Zhong Tianwei (1840-1900) wrote in detail about Darwin and Spencer and their theories.² Although Zhong is not nearly as well-known as Yan Fu, more of his contributions to the spread of Western knowledge in China have been discovered in recent years.³ Thus, it is possible that Chinese intellectuals

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were discussing Social Darwinism almost a decade before Yan Fu’s book, *Tianyan Lun*,
was published in 1898.

Upon a close reading of Zhong’s essay and Yan’s book, and an analysis of their
connections to traditional Chinese ideology, I propose that the date when social Darwinist
concepts first emerged in China can be moved to 1865, when the philosophy of a famous
Confucianist, Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692), began to revive. The extant materials show that
Charles Darwin’s name first reached China in 1873 by way of the newspaper *Shen Bao*,
while the first Chinese translation of Herbert Spencer’s book was published in 1882. However, certain ideas and concepts that had developed in China earlier seemed to
readers to be similar to the newly introduced Western concepts. Moreover, the
development of these local ideas even created suitable circumstances for the arrival of
Social Darwinism. Therefore, the vision of a distinctive Chinese social Darwinist
ideology can be brought forward. Although in the few decades after 1898, when Yan Fu’s
book *Tianyan Lun* was published, new terms on Social Darwinism were all translated
from English (some through Japanese), the influence of Chinese thought remained strong
in the spread of Darwinist and Spencerian ideas. In contrast to the situation in the
English-speaking world, the acceptance of Social Darwinism in China was greatly
affected by Chinese philosophies and Confucian morality. Therefore, the term “Social

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4 Wang Fuzhi was an eminent Confucian scholar living through the end of Ming period and the beginning
of Qing period. He achieved renown as a prominent thinker and philosopher. Wang was honoured as one of
“Three Great Thinkers” in the early Qing period. The others were Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) and Huang
Zongxi (1610-1695).
5 Zhang Binglun (张秉伦), and Lu Jichuan (卢继传), “进化论在中国的传播和影响,” (“The dissemination
and influence of Darwinism in China,”) *The Chinese Journal for the History of Science and Technology*,
6 Han Cheng-hua (韩承桦), “斯宾塞到中国——一个翻译史的讨论,” (“Herbert Spencer Came to China:
Darwinism” is generally not an accurate term with respect to Chinese intellectual history. Thus, I propose to use the phrase “Confucian Darwinism” for a more precise expression of this transformed theory. James Pusey referred to a kind of “Confucian Darwinism” in his book *China and Charles Darwin*. As Pusey wrote,

“We have seen that Darwin was Sinicized in all directions. We have seen Taoist Darwinism and Confucian Darwinism and Legalist Darwinism and even Buddhist Darwinism. And the Darwinism of many Chinese was actually a synthesis of all those Darwinisms.”

Considering the dominance of Confucianism in China, and for a convenient expression, I prefer “Confucian Darwinism” as a name for the synthesized Chinese Darwinism, or “Darwinisms.” Because Darwinism and Social Darwinism were always mixed in the Chinese context, the term “Confucian Darwinism” also denotes “Social Darwinism in a Chinese form.”

In this chapter, I propose that Confucian Darwinism has two major roots in Chinese ideology. It is rooted in Wang Fuzhi’s school of thought, which promoted Qi (concrete things) to an unprecedented status; thus a “materialistic” worldview was established by Wang. It is also rooted in Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng shuo*, which denies the “fixity of biological species,” and is pervaded by the idea of cyclical transformations among species. In the field of Chinese intellectual history, there is consensus that the revival of Wang Fuzhi’s thought was a significant event that fostered nationalism in twentieth-century China and helped it thrive. Although many scholars agree that Wang Fuzhi’s school of thought made considerable contributions to the Revolution of 1911, few

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have mentioned the links between Wang’s ideas and Social Darwinism. Zhuangzi’s 
*Huasheng shuo* was analyzed in Joseph Needham’s magisterial *Science and Civilisation in China*; it was also praised highly in Hu Shi’s (1891-1962) articles. However, the *Huasheng shuo’s* connection to Confucianism was not explored, and its contribution to the reception of Western evolutionary ideas is not mentioned in either work. In this chapter, these two intellectual sources of Chinese Social Darwinism will be examined in detail.

**The Publication of Wang Fuzhi’s Complete Works**

The systematic publication of Wang Fuzhi’s books can traced back to 1842, when 150 volumes of his works⁸ were edited by Deng Xianhe (1777-1851).⁹ Unfortunately, this series did not attract much attention because of its limited print run. What is even more unfortunate, its wooden printing plates were destroyed in the Xiangtan battle of 1854 between the Xiang and the Taiping armies.¹⁰ In 1862, Zeng Guofan (1811-1872) and his younger brother Zeng Guoquan (1824-1890) began to subsidize the publication of a new series of Wang’s complete works.¹¹ In November 1865, 288 volumes of Wang Fuzhi’s books were published under the title, *Chuanshan Yishu (The Remaining Works of Wang Fuzhi, or Wang Fuzhi’s Surviving Books).* Zeng Guofan himself even proofread a

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⁹ Deng Xianhe was a famous scholar living in Hunan province. He devoted himself to the publication of academic works in his local area. The publication of Wang Fuzhi’s books was one of his achievements.  
¹¹ Ibid.
considerable number of Wang’s writings during the war against the Taiping army.\textsuperscript{12} As recorded in a preface to \textit{Chuanshan Yishu}, his work included, at a minimum, the editing of 117 volumes, and the correction of 170 errors.\textsuperscript{13} Thanks to the efforts of the Zeng brothers, this series was a huge success in the late nineteenth century, and contributed a great deal to the revival of Wang Fuzhi’s philosophy. Before the publication of another series, \textit{Chuanshan Quanshu} (the complete works of Wang Fuzhi) in the 1990s, it was the most complete and reliable source for the study of Wang’s work. Thus, it was known as \textit{Zeng Keben} (“the Zeng edition”), in honour of the contributions made by Zeng Guofan and his brother.

Zeng Guofan was one of the most influential officials of late Qing China, and was a leader in the early stages of the Self-Strengthening Movement. During decades of fighting with rebel forces, including the Taiping army in southern China (1851-1864), and the Nian army in northern China (1851-1868), Zeng was in urgent need of Western weaponry and other technology. Around 1854, he began to purchase cannon from foreign merchants in Guangdong province.\textsuperscript{14} Shortly afterwards, the Xiang army (\textit{Xiang Jun})\textsuperscript{15} with their “foreign cannons” became a trump card for Zeng. In July 1864, the Xiang army occupied Nanjing, seat of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (\textit{Taiping Tianguo}), bringing about the final defeat of the Taiping rebellion.

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\textsuperscript{15} Xiang is an abbreviated name of Hunan province. The Xiang army was composed mainly by the people born in Hunan province.
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Meanwhile, Zeng was also obsessed with traditional Chinese ideology. His brilliant career began with his success in the Imperial examinations (*keju*). In 1838, he was ranked forty-second in the palace exam (or court exam, *dianshi*), and was then promoted to the rank of third in an extra court test (*chaokao*). Finally, he was chosen as runner-up by the Daoguang emperor, and received the position of *shujishi* (a three-year internship in the Imperial Academy), which was a very promising start for a junior official. Generally, anyone who succeeded in the Imperial examinations was expert in Confucianism, as well as a master of writing eight-legged essays (*ba gu wen*). Therefore, it is reasonable to suppose that Zeng was interested in Wang Fuzhi’s thought, which followed certain Confucian principles, while voicing the strongest desire to reform them.

It is interesting that Zeng’s hometown—Xiangxiang county, was only fifty miles from Wang Fuzhi’s hometown—Hengyang county. Sympathy towards someone from his native district might also have led Zeng to favour Wang’s work.

During his lifetime, Wang Fuzhi composed numerous works, but only one anthology of his poetry was printed in 1643, and was subsequently destroyed in war. Later, through the efforts of his second son, Wang Yu (1656-1730), about 60 volumes of Wang’s writings were printed under the title, *The Collected Works of Master Wang Fuzhi* (*Wang Chuanshan Xiansheng Shuji*). However, this series included only a tenth of Wang Fuzhi’s work. Wang Fuzhi did not leave much property to his children. His son,

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17 Ibid.
18 An essay form required in the Imperial examinations, typically composed in eight parts.
19 Xiao Shafu, and Xu Sumin, 628.
Wang Yu earned his living as a Confucian teacher. Thus, the expenses of the publication of the *Collected Works* were met mainly through donations from Wang Yu’s students.\(^{21}\) There is no record of the number of printed copies, but based on Wang Yu’s essay, the number must have been limited.\(^{22}\) In the 1840s, Deng Xianhe (1777-1851), a principal editor of Wang’s complete works, lamented, “It is a pity that Wang Fuzhi’s books did not circulate well, thus many of today’s young men have not heard his name.”\(^{23}\) This situation did not change much until 1865, when the new series, *Chuanshan Yishu*, was issued under Zeng Guofan’s supervision (the *Zeng Keben*).

Zeng Guofan’s prestige was crucial to the spread of Wang Fuzhi’s works. Zeng’s efforts to promote Wang were far more effective than those of Wang’s descendants during the previous two centuries. Following the publication of *Chuanshan Yishu* in 1865, Zeng sent numerous copies to his influential friends, including high-ranking officials and successful merchants. He also authorized the publication of several offprints for the benefit of readers with a limited budget.\(^{24}\) Within a few decades, Wang Fuzhi’s name was well-known in China. His ideas inspired many Chinese reformers and revolutionaries, including Yan Fu (1854-1921), Tan Sitong (1865-1898), Liang Qichao (1873-1929), and Mao Zedong (1893-1976).


\(^{22}\) Liu Yangyang, 66.

\(^{23}\) Deng Xianhe, “The catalogue of Chuanshan’s works,” in *Chuanshan Quanshu*, vol. 16, 411.

The Demand for Change: Wang Fuzhi’s Revised Confucianism

After the collapse of the Ming empire, Wang Fuzhi spent a few years fighting against the Manchu invaders. His efforts were in vain. He then devoted himself to advancing new interpretations of Confucian classics, as a way of offering practical ideas about statecraft (jingshi, 经世). Having experienced the failure of the Ming government, he concluded that it was essential to reform the orthodox ideology of his time. He argued that Neo-Confucianism, the school of thought which had dominated China between the eleventh and seventeenth century, had been responsible for weakening the power of the Chinese imperial government.

From 1675 onward, Wang Fuzhi dwelt in a straw house (caotang) on Chuanshan mountain. Most of his works were written there. Today, the house is preserved as a memorial to Wang Fuzhi, and is known by the name Xiangxi Caotang. In Wang’s day, he received the nickname “Chuanshan”, or the more respectful “Chuanshan xiansheng” (“Mr. Chuanshan”) in reference to his residence. Within Chinese academic circles, he was referred to as “Chuanshan” more frequently than by his given name. Almost every series of his complete works has a title which includes the epithet Chuanshan, such as Chuanshan Yishu, and Chuanshan Quanshu. An interesting rhyming couplet, which Wang Fuzhi composed to motivate himself, is still on exhibit in the refurbished Xiangxi Caotang. Through Chinese characters were engraved on wooden boards, Wang’s strong

25 Wang Fuzhi was a government official in the South Ming regime (1644-1662) around 1650, and the Qing government sought his arrest for many years.
26 In Chinese, chuanshan means a mountain with a boat-like shape.
27 Xiangxi Caotang means a straw house located in western Hunan province.
28 The edition under Zeng Guofan’s supervision used the same title as the previous edition.
29 This edition was published by Yuelu Publishing House (Changsha, Hunan) in 1996.
30 Located in Hengyang county, Hunan. Renovations were carried out by Hengyang County in 1981.
desire to find answers for China can still be felt today. Although their complex meaning is difficult to translate precisely into English, the following translation is an approximation of the sentiments that it expressed.

The six Chinese classics require me to open up a new way of knowledge—
As a seven-foot-tall man, I would prefer to be buried alive so as to follow Heaven’s commands.\(^{31}\)

This couplet has been widely accepted as a portrait capturing Wang Fuzhi’s spirit. On a certain level, Wang did build a new path of interpretation of the Confucian classics. To eliminate the passive influence of Neo-Confucianism, and also to construct a reformed ideology, he made pragmatic interpretations of classic works composed during the pre-Qin period.\(^{32}\) According to Tang Junyi (1909-1978), a leading New Confucianist in the twentieth century,\(^{33}\) Wang Fuzhi refuted many of the philosophical ideas of Wang Yangming (1472-1529), who was a leading proponent of Neo-Confucianism during the Ming period. Wang Yangming’s theory was called xinxue (心学), which literally means the philosophy of the mind. In Wang Fuzhi’s interpretation, the philosophy of xinxue was too subjective, a problem contributing to a trend towards the neglect of the physical world during the Ming period.\(^{34}\) To keep up with the rapidly changing world, Wang re-interpreted the Confucian classics in a somewhat “materialistic” way. In the opinion of

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\(^{31}\) This couplet in Chinese was “liujing zewo kai shengmian, qichi congqian qi huomai.” (六经责我开生面, 七尺从天乞活埋)

\(^{32}\) Mainly the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC), and the Warring States period (476-221 BC).

\(^{33}\) “New Confucianism is an intellectual movement of Confucianism that began in the early 20th century in Republican China, and further developed in post-Mao era contemporary China.” (from Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Confucianism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Confucianism))

Marxist philosophers, including Feng Youlan (1895-1990) and Zhang Dainian (1909-2004), Wang Fuzhi was the “greatest materialist of the Ming and Qing periods.”

In contrast to the Confucians of the xinxue school, Wang Fuzhi promoted the concept of Qi (concrete things) to a position of unprecedented importance. He proposed that everything in this world relies on the existence of Qi. Before Wang, most Confucians supported theories in which Dao (the Way) is dominant. In the classic Book of Changes (Zhou Yi), the definitions of Dao and Qi are “that which is antecedent to the material form exists, we say, as an ideal method (Dao), and that which is subsequent to the material form exists, we say, as a definite thing (Qi).” During the Han period (202 BC-220), the concept of Dao was awarded the highest significance. In a suggestion to the emperor Wu of Han (157-87 BC), the courtier Dong Zhongshu (179-104 BC) proposed that “the principal status of Dao came from the Heaven, if the Heaven is constant, the Dao should not be changed any bit.” This point was abridged into the catchphrase “no change in Heaven, no change in the Dao”, which became a strongly-held belief in China for the next two thousand years. As a Confucian experiencing violent change under a

36 The translation of Qi here follows Wing-Tsit Chan. According to contemporary philosopher Zhang Dainian, the translation of Qi is “the vessel”. As a Chinese philosophical term, Qi also has the meanings of an instrument, an implement, or could be extended to mean matter, substance, or material entity. See Wing-Tsit Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963) 784.
37 Another important concept in Chinese philosophy also pronounced qi, means vital force (气). For convenience, I am using qi for this concept through my dissertation. Meanwhile, Qi is only used for the concept of concrete thing (器).
conquering force, Wang Fuzhi accepted the orthodox definitions for *Dao* and *Qi*, but disagreed regarding the relationship between the two. According to his theories, *Dao* and *Qi* are still a pair of opposite concepts: one is metaphysical, and the other is concrete. However, he did not award *Dao* the principal position. Rather, he considered *Qi* to be primary, because he saw *Qi* as the origin and the foundation of the *Dao*. These ideas on the *Dao-Qi* relationship are well-known as the “sole *Qi* theory”. To simplify matters, I have devised the term “Qi-ism” for this theory, in which “*Qi*” refers to concrete things, and “-ism” is the suffix.

Wang Fuzhi’s thoughts on Qi-ism are scattered throughout several of his books. In *Supplementary Commentary on the Book of Changes* (*Zhouyi Waizhuan*), certain essential points of Qi-ism are made clear.

The world consists only of concrete things (*Qi*). The Way (*Dao*) is the Way of concrete things, but concrete things may not be called concrete things of the Way. People generally are capable of saying that without its Way there cannot be the concrete thing. However, if there is the concrete thing, there need be no worry about there not being its Way. ... Few people are capable of saying that without a concrete thing there cannot be its Way, but it is certainly true. ... Sages of antiquity could manage concrete things but could not manage the Way. What is meant by the Way is the management of concrete things.

Instead of commenting on the Confucian classic, the *Book of Changes*, Wang Fuzhi advanced his own theory about the relationship between *Dao* and *Qi*. Wang’s phrases in Chinese appear gentle and elegant, but within them lies a certain spirit of rebellion against Confucian orthodoxy. The existence of this world is built on concrete things (*Qi*),

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41 In Chinese, it is “Wei-Qi lun” (惟器论).
42 Wing-Tsit Chan, 694-5.
and all abstract ideas are dependent on the existence of concrete things. Wang used an abundance of examples to illustrate his ideas: for instance, he explained that in the prehistoric era, there was no Way to bow and yield to a throne, because no thrones existed at that time.\(^{43}\) In the epoch of Yao and Shun, there was no Way to pity the suffering people and punish the sinful rulers, because Yao and Shun were good rulers, and people were not suffering under their rule.\(^{44}\) In the Han and Tang periods, there was no Way that is the same as today’s Way, nor is it possible that the Way of today will be the same as the future Way.\(^{45}\) Furthermore, Wang argued that before the invention of bows and arrows, there was no Way of archery. Before chariots and horses were employed, there was no Way of Driving Chariots.\(^{46}\) An example related to morality was that if there were no sons and daughters, the Way of Father would not exist; if there were no younger brothers, the Way of the Elder Brother would not exist.\(^{47}\) In Wang’s theory, the bows and arrows, chariots and horses, and even the sons and brothers are all included in the category of \(Qi\). Last of all, Wang concluded that all concrete things—the \(Qi\)—are the prerequisites of \(Dao\). He also lamented that most people did not understand this idea, and had no intention of accepting it.\(^{48}\)

In the view of Marxist philosophers, such as Zhang Dainian, Wang Fuzhi’s Qi-ism is a milestone in the development of Confucianism. The emergence of Wang’s inventive ideas gave Chinese intellectuals the opportunity to examine this world from a

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\(^{43}\) The Chinese word here is “shanrang.” (禅让) And part of the translation here are from Wing-Tsit Chan.

\(^{44}\) Yao (尧) and Shun (舜) were two Kings in ancient China (around 2200 BC). Yao demised his crown to Shun, and Shun demised his crown to Yu. There were no blood relationships between Yao, Shun, and Yu.

\(^{45}\) Chuan Shan Quanshu, vol. 1, 1028.

\(^{46}\) Ibid.

\(^{47}\) Ibid.

\(^{48}\) Ibid.
more objective point of view. The acceptance of this view even destabilized the foundations of religious beliefs that had long existed in China. Arguing from his theories of Qi-ism, Wang criticized several popular Buddhist and Daoist concepts, such as *kōng* (空 emptiness), *xū* (虚 vacuity), and *ji* (寂 tranquility). During the Ming period, these ideas had thoroughly permeated Chinese intellectual circles. Wang Fuzhi argued that the pervasiveness of these concepts in China had very negative effects. He even blamed them for the collapse of the Ming empire. He argued that in creative writing the use of these religious concepts could be helpful in producing certain aesthetic feelings, while the dominance of such passive ideas in the ruling elite could lead to disaster. For China to have a promising future, Wang proposed that Confucianism should be the source of practical principles for governance. Thus, he promoted the concept of *Qi*, and stressed the importance of the physical world. Meanwhile, he refuted the passive ideas popularized by certain religions, such as the concepts of *xū*, *ji*, and *kōng* in Buddhism and Daoism. He believed that without concrete things, moral concepts and spiritual ideas would have no chance to exist. For example, the concept of vacuity (*xū*) actually referred to the lack of substance, while the concept of tranquility (*ji*) meant that some physical surroundings are tranquil. Without the existence of concrete things, the concepts *xū* and *ji* would not exist.49

As well as critiquing the metaphysical ideas of the *xinxue* school, Wang Fuzhi approached pragmatic principles within the Confucian framework. As a result, his school of thought was favoured by leading officials of the Self-Strengthening movement (1861-49).

1895), including Zeng Guofan and Li Hongzhang (1823-1901). Wang’s emphasis on concrete things (Qi) provided justification for learning about Western technology. Based on his revision of the Dao-Qi relationship, Wang advanced the idea that changes in government must be made in accordance with changes in the physical world. He wrote that “in the physical world, orthodox principles are always changing with the flow of time.”\(^5^0\) Such concepts became a reliable source for nineteenth-century reformists who were searching for theoretical support. Tan Sitong (1865-1898) and Liang Qichao (1873-1929) were the most distinguished of the reformers inspired by Wang Fuzhi’s school of thought. Even in the twentieth century, many revolutionaries learned a great deal from Wang’s ideas. The success of Mao Zedong was an exemplary case. Chapter 4 includes further discussion of links between Wang’s thought and the revolutions of twentieth-century China.

Lastly, it is important to note that Wang Fuzhi’s attainment of the status of Confucian saint in 1914 symbolized the complete success of his school of thought. Since the publication of *Chuanshan Yishu* in 1865, many members of the social elites of Hunan province had advocated sainthood for Wang Fuzhi. Unfortunately, their efforts were unsuccessful under the Manchu emperors. After the Qing collapse, Liu Renxi (1844-1919), whose native place (Liuyang county) was about 150 miles away from Wang Fuzhi’s home, submitted petitions to President Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) and Vice President Li Yuanhong (1864-1928) in 1913 and 1914. Liu’s petitions laid out several potential benefits of declaring Wang Fuzhi a saint and worshiping him in Confucian

temples. He expected such benefits to include the improvement of popular morality and the enhancement of efficiency in government. In contrast to the previous Manchu rulers, the leaders of the Republic of China responded warmly to Liu’s petitions. Not only was Wang Fuzhi’s sainthood sanctioned, but a society for studying his school of thought was established at the same time. In the city of Changsha, a building was dedicated to the “Chuanshan Society” (Chuanshan Xueshe, Society for the study of Wang Fuzhi), and Liu Renxi was appointed as the society’s first president. Moreover, President Yuan Shikai and Vice President Li composed epigrams glorifying Wang Fuzhi’s achievements. Yuan praised Wang as “a bridge for the transfer of culture from Confucius’s hometown.” Li acclaimed Wang for “regulating companionships, and expounding the Dao.” The two epigrams were engraved on wooden plaques which were then hung in the ancestral hall of Chuanshan Xueshe, and can still be seen today in the refurbished Chuanshan Xueshe at Changsha. By coincidence, the building dedicated to the Chuanshan Xueshe had formerly been used to commemorate Zeng Guofan, and was borrowed afterward by Mao Zedong (1893-1976) to set up the Hunan Self-Study University (August 1921-November 1923). Thus a single building was used to promote reformist and revolutionary ideas over many generations. What is even more fascinating is that these ideas shared a common ideological lineage.

Despite the continuity, the founding of Chuanshan Society in 1914 took place almost two decades after the end of the Self-Strengthening Movement, and half a century

52 This phrase in Chinese is “zoulu jinliang” (邹鲁津梁).
53 This phrase in Chinese is “zhengyi mingdao” (正谊明道). See Liang Shaohui, 82.
54 Changsha (长沙) is the capital of Hunan province.
after the publication of *Chuanshan Yishu*. It is interesting that Darwinism was introduced into China in the 1870s, and Social Darwinism in the 1890s. The dissemination of these Western ideas took place within the same time span as the revival and spread of Wang Fuzhi’s school of thought. After Wang’s reputation was elevated by the title of Confucian saint, his school of thought became very well-known, attracting many followers. Not only was the teaching of traditional Chinese ideology changed by Wang’s influence, but his work also cultivated new soil in which ideas from the West, including Darwinism, Social Darwinism, and Marxism could take root.

The Daoist View of Evolution: Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng Shuo*

At the end of the Ming period (1368-1644), knowledge and ideas similar to Western science were accumulated in China. A systematic explanation of the universe was developed within the Confucian framework. Theories on the evolution of the cosmos, the circulation of different substances, and the metamorphosis of living beings all reflected pre-modern Chinese understanding of the world. A synthesis of Confucian, Daoist, and Buddhist traditions was inherited by innovative Confucian thinkers such as Wang Fuzhi.

Although developed without the help of modern instruments, certain ideas advanced by the Daoists bear some resemblance to modern counterparts. For example, during the Spring and Autumn period (770-476 BC), the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi (Zhuang Zhou, 370-287 BC) developed ideas about *huasheng* in several essays. It is known as the *Huasheng shuo* (the theory of heterogenesis, or the radical evolutionary theory), and states that many species of animals and plants can change or transform
themselves into other species. According to *Huasheng shuo*, all living beings, including human beings, come from *ji* (幾), a kind of tiny organism, and will return to the form of *ji* after death or after many generations. Today, these statements look much like a rough approach to aspects of evolutionary theory which recognize “a common ancestor” for all of life on earth.

In Chinese, the word *huasheng* is composed of two characters—*hua* and *sheng*. *Hua* (化) means “transform,” or “change into,” *sheng* (生) means “life, and living things.” The combined term *huasheng* means “lives emerge through the transformation of living beings or materials.” In China, the concept of *hua* was so influential that when the English word “evolution” arrived in the late nineteenth century, it was translated as *jinhua* (进化), which literally means “an advanced *hua*,” or “a developed *hua*.” From the early twentieth century to the present, the concept “*jinhua* theory” has been equated with Darwinism in China. The use of *jin* (“advanced”) in the translated term ignores the possibility of degeneration through natural selection, and thus fostered the rise of Social Darwinism in China in the twentieth century. In recent decades, the neutral term, *yanhua* has been proposed as a more precise translation of “evolution.” However, the term *jinhua* continues to be widely used in China today.

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55 In Chinese, it is *Huasheng shuo* (化生说).
57 In Chinese, *jin* (进) means advance, move forward.
58 In Chinese, it is “*jinhua* lun,” (进化论) which is the translation of “evolutionary theory.”
59 In Chinese, *yanhua* (演化) is a word focused on the concept *hua*. It has no hints of motion forward or backward.
Records of phenomena that demonstrate the transformation between species were first made two thousand years ago in the Confucian classic, *Xia Xiaozheng* (夏小正). Such records also appeared in the earliest Chinese almanac. One such example reads: “In the fifth month of a lunar calendar year, *jiu* changed into eagles.” Zhuangzi’s creative narrative in the essay *Zhile* (“Ultimate Happiness”) is considered the model or the classical text of the *Huasheng shuo*. A paragraph from this essay is quoted below.

Because of Hu Shi’s translation, and Joseph Needham’s (1900-1995) editorial work on this passage, it is now possible to examine these ancient words in English. Even in Chinese, these words are full of obscurities and mystery.

All species (*chung*³) contain (certain) germs (*chi*⁴). These germs, when in water, become *chüeh*. In a place bordering upon water and land they become (lichens or algae, like what we call the) ‘clothes of frogs and oysters’. On the bank they become *linghsi*. Reaching fertile soil the *linghsi* become *wutsu*. The roots of this give rise to the *chhishao*; the leaves become *hu-tieh*, or *hsü*. The *hu-tieh* later changes into an insect, born in the chimney-corner, which has the appearance of newly formed skin. Its name is *chhü-to*. After a thousand days the *chhü-to* becomes a bird called *kan-yü-ku*; the saliva of which becomes the *ssu*-
The ssu-mi\textsuperscript{74} becomes a wine-fly (shih-hsi\textsuperscript{75}), and from this in turn comes the i-lu.\textsuperscript{76} The huang-kuang\textsuperscript{77} are produced from the chiu-yu.\textsuperscript{78} Mosquitoes (mou-nei) are produced from rotting huan.\textsuperscript{79} Yang-hsi,\textsuperscript{80} paired with the pu-hsün-ju-chu,\textsuperscript{81} produces the chhing-ning,\textsuperscript{82} which produces the chhéng,\textsuperscript{83} which (ultimately) produces the horse, which (ultimately) produces man. Man again goes back into the germs.\textsuperscript{84} All things come from the germs and return to the germs.

From the perspective of modern biology, there are many misconceptions in Zhuangzi’s paragraph. Joseph Needham pointed out that the Daoists were familiar with certain phenomena, such as “insect metamorphosis,” but did not accurately understand other phenomena, such as insects emerging from rotting corpses and vegetables.\textsuperscript{85} In Europe, similar mistakes, such as the idea of “spontaneous generation,” were made before to the emergence of modern biology.\textsuperscript{86} In hindsight, some of the phenomena in Zhuangzi’s descriptions may be explained as parasitism, or symbiosis in modern terms.

A major obstacle to understanding Zhuangzi’s paragraph on Huasheng is that many of the species it mentions cannot be identified. The Chinese language has changed significantly and as the names of many animals and plants have changed over time, former names have been lost from collective memory. During Wang Fuzhi’s lifetime, scholars were confused about the creatures that Zhuangzi’s paragraph referred to. For

\begin{footnotes}
\item[74] Ditto.
\item[75] Ditto.
\item[76] Ditto.
\item[77] Ditto.
\item[78] Ditto.
\item[79] Ditto.
\item[80] Ditto.
\item[81] An insect parasitic on bamboos?
\item[82] If written with the ‘insect’ radical (Rad. 142), as they are not in the text, chhing means dragonfly and ning cicada. What insects Chuang Tzu had in mind cannot be determined.
\item[83] Later meant the leopard, cf. R 352.
\item[84] Reading chi (幾) for cni (橉).
\item[85] Joseph Needham, 79.
\item[86] Ibid.
\end{footnotes}
example, disputes on whether “chhéng” referred to a leopard, or a kind of insect continued for centuries. In response to this confusion, Wang Fuzhi quoted the following points from Fang Yizhi (1611-1671).87

“We should believe that the things like chhing-ning produces chhéng, and horse produces man really happened in history.”
“We cannot judge Zhuangzi’s style only by what we can see, or what we can hear.”
“We have no need to worry about whether the chhéng was a leopard or an insect.”88

In a popular commentary on Zhuangzi’s works, the Taiwan-based scholar Chen Guying (Chen Ku-yi, 1935-) used “leopard” in the annotation, but employed “red insect” in the vernacular translation.89 In any case, the whole lineage from chhing-ning to human is full of mysteries. Is it possible that Zhuangzi had proof of the changes he described? Or, was Zhuangzi’s interpretation of natural phenomena far removed from preceding explanations? Hu Shi and others have argued that Zhuangzi’s paragraph is impenetrable because certain words are missing from the surviving text of his writing.90 On these grounds, it is difficult to distinguish the scientific points from fanciful or superstitious ideas in Huasheng shuo.

Despite the ambiguity of his intriguing paragraph, Zhuangzi made his key point very clear: all species are linked together by their capacity for change. This idea inspired

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87 Fang Yizhi (Fang I-chih) was a famous Chinese scholar of late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. His book Wuli Xiaoshi (The laws and principles of matters and the world they make, 1643) was an important collection of knowledge on natural science.
88 Chuanshan Quanshu, vol. 13, 289.
many fictional characters, such as the Monkey King (Sun Wukong) who can transform himself into seventy-two different animals and objects, and long-lived vixens who were transformed into beautiful women. Although these fictitious figures are not directly connected with the concept of evolution, their popularity strengthened the idea that trans-species transformation is possible.

In his well-known argument, Hu Shi (1891-1962) contended that Zhuangzi’s theory is based on scientific foundation, and deserves to be called “Zhuangzi’s evolutionary theory.” Hu supported his position by arguing that according to Zhuangzi’s theory, all species are linked in a family tree, from “the lowest microorganisms” to “the highest human being;” furthermore, the process of transformation between species was very similar to the modern idea of evolution. Hu Shi also quoted this well-known sentence from another essay by Zhuangzi: “Everything in the universe comes from a tiny seed, and they succeed one another in different forms.” Hu argued that this sentence offers the same essential idea as that of Darwin’s book On the Origin of Species. Albeit with far less confidence than Hu Shi, Joseph Needham likewise concluded that the Daoists had developed something very close to “a statement of a theory of evolution.” Despite the many mistakes it contained, the

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91 See Wu Cheng’en (吴承恩), 西游记 (Journey to the West, sixteenth century).
92 See Pu Songlin (蒲松龄), 聊斋志异 (Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio, seventeenth century).
93 Hu Shi, 30.
94 Hu Shi, 32.
95 Hu Shi, 30. Also see Zhuangzi (庄子), “寓言” (“Yuyan”). This sentence in Chinese is “万物皆种也，以不同形相禅.”
96 Hu Shi, 31.
97 Needham, 78.
Huasheng shuo, in Needham’s words, had “firmly denied the fixity of biological species.”

Neither Needham nor Hu Shi paid much attention to the relationships between different species in Zhuangzi’s theory. The family tree below (figure 2.1) illustrates the relationships described in Zhuangzi’s paragraph discussed above. The transformations mentioned in the Huasheng shuo are included, except for a few of those between insects.

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98 Needham, 78-79.
99 The changes not included in figure 1 are the ones between insects that were described in these two sentences: “The ssu-mi becomes a wine-fly (shih-hsi), and from this in turn comes the i-lu. The huang-kuang are produced from the chiu-yu. Mosquitoes (mou-nei) are produced from rotting huan.”
The following sketch by Darwin (figure 2.2) can contribute to a better understanding of the differences between Huasheng shuo and evolutionary theory.
The handwritten text on Darwin’s sketch (figure 2) reads as follows:

I think

Case must be that one generation then should be as many living as now. To do this & to have many species in same genus (as is) requires extinction.

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100 Darwin Online. http://darwin-online.org.uk/content/frameset?itemID=CUL-DAR121- &pageseq=38&viewtype=side.
Thus between A & B immense gap of relation. C & B the finest gradation, B & D rather greater distinction. Thus genera would be formed. —bearing relation

It is obvious that Zhuangzi did not delve deeply into the reasons behind these phenomena, and did not conduct scientific research as Darwin did. However, the structure of Zhuangzi’s tree of life is similar in appearance to Darwin’s. In both diagrams, a few branches come from a single point, which shows that both Zhuangzi and Darwin believed that there was one ancestor for several different species. In addition, Zhuangzi proposed *ji* as the starting point of all living beings in the world, while Darwin’s theory proposed the existence of a “universal common ancestor”. A major difference between Zhuangzi’s theory and Darwin’s is that Zhuangzi believed that all life, including human life, ultimately leads back to *ji*, but Darwin’s view lacked similar precision. Interestingly, Zhuangzi’s idea is similar to the one in modern biology that the human body is composed of microorganisms.

As a key concept in *Huasheng shuo*, *ji* (幾), was the cause of many debates in China. In Hu Shi’s research, *ji* means “minute things.” This interpretation can be traced back to the ancient Chinese dictionary *Shuowen Jiezi* (*Explaining Graphs and Analyzing Characters*). Hu also provided etymological evidence that the Chinese character *ji* is derived from the image of tiny eggs. Furthermore, in the dialect of Hu Shi’s

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101 Charles Darwin, *Notebook B: Transmutation* (1837-8), 36. (*Darwin Online*)
102 In Needham’s masterpiece, *Science and Civilisation in China*, *ji* is spelled as *chi* (as quoted in Zhuangzi’s paragraph above).
103 *Shuowen Jiezi* was edited by Xu Shen (許慎, ca. 58-147), a scholar living in the Han period. According to *Wikipedia*, “Although not the first comprehensive Chinese character dictionary (the *Erya* predates it), it was still the first one to analyze the structure of the characters and to give the rationale behind them.” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shuowen_Jiezi)
hometown of Huizhou, certain insect eggs were still called ji, such as can ji (“silkworm eggs”). Therefore, Hu Shi concluded that the ji in Zhuangzi’s paragraph could refer to “seeds” or “germs.” Needham adopted Hu’s translation of ji as “germs,” but defined ji as “the smallest imaginable particles of living matter.” It is interesting that the concept ji has been favoured not only by Daoists. In the Confucian classic—Book of Changes (I Ching, or Zhou Yi), ji was defined as “subtle signs for future events;” thus auspicious prophecies could be based upon them. By holding ji, the gentleman (junzi, 君子) would have an opportunity to direct a developing trend in a positive direction. Thus, in Confucianism, a biological concept like ji in Daoism, functioned as a philosophical concept, assuming an ethical connotation.

For many centuries, Confucians did not take the Huasheng shuo seriously. It was not taken as a scientific theory, but a Daoist fantasy particular to Zhuangzi. Thus, no further research developed in the direction of the transformation between different species. In the Commentary on Zhuangzi’s Essays, Wang Fuzhi concentrated on the relationship between life (mostly human life) and the universe, a topic which was commonly discussed by Confucian scholars. No interest in any other species can be found in Wang’s works. His interpretations mostly focused on human understanding of the laws of Heaven. However, ideas similar to the Huasheng shuo appear in Wang Fuzhi’s other works. Fang Yizhi (Fang I-chih, 1677-1671) was a unique Confucian

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104 In Hu Shi’s time, Huizhou was a prefecture-level region in southern Anhui province, well known as the native place of successful scholars and businessmen.
105 Hu Shi, 31.
106 Needham, 80.
107 The original words in Zhou Yi were “幾者，动之微，吉之先见者也.” See “系辞下,” (“Xi Ci II, or The Great Treatise II,”) in 周易 (Zhou Yi, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2006), 390.
109 Ibid.
scholar who made explorations in certain scientific knowledge in the seventeenth century. However, Fang’s comments to Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng shuo* did not infuse any justification of it in the sense of scientific research.

Just as Zhuangzi denied the “fixity of biological species”, Wang negated the constancy of human nature and character (性 xing). While still following Confucian principles to focus on the logic (理 li) of life, and the mandate of Heaven (tian ming, 天命), Wang theorized that xing is not a fixed thing, but always in the process of change. He recognized the existence of the mandate of Heaven, and accepted its influence on humans. However, he argued that a person’s reception of the mandate of Heaven could occur not only at the moment of birth, but at any time in life. This argument is consistent with Wang’s Qi-ism statements: concrete things (Qi) are always changing, thus the mandate of Heaven would also change accordingly. Therefore, xing could change from day to day, according to changes in the environment and in the mandate of Heaven. Wang also proposed that even if someone’s character has formed, there is still a chance to change it, regardless of whether that person is a child or an adult. Qian Mu (1895-1990), a distinguished New Confucianist, later offered a modern interpretation of Wang’s theory, arguing that Wang was discussing human survival under the law of

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111 In Chinese, xing has the meanings both of human nature and personal character.
112 *Chuanshan Quanshu*, vol. 2, 299.
113 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
natural selection, and identifying *xing* as a physiological condition that humans need to adapt to their environment.\footnote{Qian Mu (钱穆), *中国近三百年学术史* (An Academic History of China during the past Three Hundred Years, Beijing: The Commercial Press, 1997), 110.}

In conclusion, the spread of Wang Fuzhi’s ideas, together with the *Huasheng shuo*’s long history, laid foundations for the arrival of Social Darwinism in China. Wang’s emphasis on concrete things (*Qi*) offered a new approach to the physical universe for Chinese intellectuals. If *Qi* changes, the *Dao* must change to adapt to it. Therefore, change in people’s minds and in human society would naturally result after a certain amount of time had elapsed. Consequently, social Darwinist concepts like the “struggle for existence,” and the “survival of the fittest” would be of no surprise to adherents of Qi-ism. Meanwhile, Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng shuo* offered an ample vocabulary for expression of the Chinese version of primitive evolutionary theory. Whether or not they were correct, Daoist conceptions of the transformation between species influenced the Chinese understanding of “evolution.” Therefore, Wang Fuzhi’s *xing* theory also sowed the seeds of eugenics in China. As Chapter 5 will demonstrate, the belief that people’s character could be changed justified China’s experiment in *suzhi* education (“quality education”) during the late twentieth century.
Chapter Three

Learning from the West: Shanghai Polytechnic and the Emergence of Social Darwinist Concepts

Knowledge from the West was spreading rapidly in China during the period of revival of Wang Fuzhi’s school of thought. Early in the Self-Strengthening Movement (1861-1895), a number of western-style academies were founded in China. The new academies established curricula teaching European languages along with instruction in science and technology. According to research by Wang Di, there were 769 modern schools in the Qing empire in 1903. By 1911, this number had reached 52,500.¹ Yet despite competition from Western ideas, traditional Chinese ideology was still strong and lively during the second half of the nineteenth century. Many reformist officials in the Qing government, including Zeng Guofan (1811-1872), Li Hongzhang (1823-1901), and Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909), believed that in the process of modernization, Chinese learning should be followed as the essence, and Western learning as the practical application (中学为体, 西学为用).² To uphold this principle, they sought to achieve modernization without discarding their traditions. However, the defeat of the Beiyang Fleet in the First Sino-

Japanese War (1894-1895) is generally considered a sign of the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement. Thereafter, Chinese intellectuals began to reject the “essence-application” (ti-yong, 体用) doctrine. However, the opposite view, advocating complete acceptance of Western knowledge, Western ideology and Western political systems, did not gain more supporters at the end of nineteenth century than the ti-yong principle. The failure of the Hundred Days’ Reform (11 June-21 September 1898) illustrates the formidable obstacles to western thought which existed within the Qing government. Yet in contrast, the tremendous success of Yan Fu’s book on Social Darwinism demonstrates that certain ideas from the West were very welcome in China at this time. Unlike the frustrated reforms of Chinese political and military systems, the combination of scientific ideas from the West and philosophical models from traditional China was influential in China from the 1890s onward. A well-known example of this is how social Darwinist concepts gained its reputation through creative interpretations by Chinese intellectuals, who combined these concepts with Confucian and Daoist ideas. In this and the next chapter, I will explore the ways in which Chinese ideology made it possible for certain social Darwinist concepts to flourish in China. During the process through which these two ideologies conflicted and merged with one another, one significant institution—the Shanghai Polytechnic—not only provided the first few texts on these concepts, but also offered an arena for the competition between and combination of Confucianism and Social Darwinism. Through the efforts of the intellectuals who were attracted to them, these novel concepts became meaningful to the Chinese audience.
The Shanghai Polytechnic

The Shanghai Polytechnic (*Gezhi Shuyuan*, 格致书院) was one of the first schools to teach Western science in China. During the 1870s and 1880s, it was considered as a model and was copied in several other Chinese cities, including Xiamen and Ningbo.3 Its full name in English is “the Chinese Polytechnic Institution and Reading Room.” In scholarly papers, it was referred to as either “the Shanghai Polytechnic Institution,” “the Shanghai Polytechnic,” or “the Polytechnic.”4 Unlike its English name, its Chinese name, *Gezhi Shuyuan* (“Academy for the Extension of Learning”), faithfully adhered to the traditions of the imperial education system, in that *Shuyuan* (academy) was the term used for private schools in pre-modern times. Origins of this term can be traced back to the Five Dynasties (907-979), when the first *shuyuan* was built on Lushan Mountain in Jiangxi province.5 Although widely used to translate the word “science” in the 1870s and 1880s, the term *gezhi* has as many connections to Chinese tradition as the word *shuyuan*. *Gezhi* is a condensed form of the phrase “*ge wu zhi*” (“the perfection of knowledge lies in the investigation of things,” 格物致知)6 from “the Great Learning,” a well-known chapter in the ancient *Classic of Rites* (*Liji*, 礼记). This phrase was the focus of a series of philosophical debates in history. Philosophers from different eras proposed distinct

4 Knight Biggerstaff, “Shanghai Polytechnic Institution and Reading Room: An Attempt to Introduce Western Science and Technology to the Chinese,” *Pacific Historical Review*, no. 2 (1956): 131.
interpretations. In the Han period, Zheng Xuan (127-200) explained the verb *ge* (in the phrase “*ge wu*”) as “to come,” not “to investigate.” In the Song period, Cheng Yi (1033-1107) advanced the idea that *ge* means “to arrive at” and *ge wu* means “fully comprehending principles.” During the Ming period, Wang Yangming (1472-1529), a leader of the School of Mind, interpreted *ge wu* as a way of rectifying one’s mind, and considered “the investigation of things” as a matter of humanity’s interior cultivation. In the early years of the Qing period, Wang Fuzhi (1619-1692) refuted this idealistic view, arguing that “the investigation of things” and “the perfection of knowledge” were two separate things. In recent history, the debate continued until dialectical materialism became dominant in China. Thus, the many connections between the name *Gezhi Shuyuan* and Confucianism was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it could help the Chinese to understand Western science because of its resemblance to their own philosophy (or epistemology). On the other hand, however, it could blur the differences between the two systems of thought.

The merging of two distinct sets of ideas and the conflicts between them can be traced to the process of the founding of Shanghai Polytechnic. In 1874, Walter Henry Medhurst (麦华陀, 1822–1885) proposed the establishment of a new institution “to extend the knowledge of the Chinese in regard to Foreign countries and topics generally.” The institution would also serve two essential functions: it would exhibit

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7 Zhang Dainian, 453.
8 Ibid.
9 Zhang Dainian, 455.
10 Zhang Dainian, 457.
11 Medhurst was the British consul in Shanghai from 1868 to 1877.
items related to science, and would offer lectures on scientific knowledge.\(^\text{13}\) The *North China Daily News* published Medhurst’s proposal on March 5, 1874.\(^\text{14}\) A few weeks later, a management committee was elected, including four non-Chinese members—Walter Henry Medhurst, Francis Blackwell Forbes (1839-1908), Alexander Wylie (偉烈亞力, 1815-1887), John Fryer (傅兰雅, 1839-1928), and one Chinese member, Tang Tingshu (唐廷枢, 1832-1892).\(^\text{15}\) Medhurst was the British consul in Shanghai from 1868 to 1877. Forbes was an American botanist who had been in China collecting plant specimens since the 1850s; he was also a successful merchant in Shanghai. Wylie and Fryer were both well-known missionaries in China, whose significant contributions included translation of Western works into Chinese. Tang Tingshu was a prominent figure in the Self-Strengthening Movement. In his lifetime, Tang was successful in several careers, including that of translator, comprador, and businessman. One of his achievements was the composition of a textbook for Cantonese speakers learning English (*Yingyu Jiquan*, 1862).

In April 1874, two additional Chinese members—Xu Shou (1818-1884) and Wang Ronghe (dates unknown) joined the management committee. Xu was a translator at the Jiangnan Arsenal in Shanghai (the General Bureau of Machine Manufacture of Jiangnan, 江南机器制造总局). He was known for having made two major contributions to the establishment of chemistry as an academic subject in China. Xu translated dozens

\(^\text{13}\) See Article 9 “The rooms [are] to be supplied with maps, philosophical [that is, scientific] instruments of various kinds, and any models of steam engines, locomotives, telegraphic apparatus & c., that can be procured.” and Article 12 “Lectures on scientific subjects of practical value or general topics [are] to be delivered in the Chinese language, now and then, as the Committee may arrange.” (Wright, 8.)
\(^\text{14}\) Wright, 8.
\(^\text{15}\) Wang Ermin, 6-7.
of books on chemistry from English to Chinese; he also established a set of Chinese naming conventions for chemical elements. Consequently, Xu commanded considerable respect as the “father of chemistry in China”; the naming conventions he established remain in use today. Wang Ronghe was an official at the Jianghaiguan Dao (the former government bureau of the Shanghai Customs, 江海关道); he also engaged in translation work. It was fortunate that, with the exception of Forbes, the committee members were all experienced in translating between English and Chinese. Furthermore, the titles and official positions held by the members also proved useful to the growth of the new institution.

After two years of preparation, the Shanghai Polytechnic was launched at a grand opening ceremony on June 22, 1876. About two hundred officials and businessmen, including both Chinese and westerners, visited the institution that day. According to a report in the *Chinese Scientific Magazine* (*Gezhi Huibian*, 格致汇编), the exhibits featured on opening day included “large celestial globes, astronomical instruments, meterological instruments, telegraphs and wires;” and “a big thermometer, crucibles, chemistry apparatus;” along with “a small iron steam engine, several new style sandglasses.”¹⁶ In addition, some machine-made household commodities, such as “needles, fish-hooks, gold and silver buttons” were displayed; maps and photos were also exhibited.¹⁷

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¹⁶ The *Chinese Scientific Magazine* was a leading periodical transmitting Western science in nineteenth-century China. It was founded and edited by John Fryer, and was published between 1876-1878, 1880-1882, and 1890-1892.

¹⁷ *Chinese Scientific Magazine*, vol. 6, 11. see Wang Ermin, 22-23.
After the opening ceremony, the Shanghai Polytechnic, disappointingly did not attract as many visitors as the committee members wished. Partly due to a shortage of funds, the “spacious museum of steel and glass” promised in a widely circulated advertisement was not completed. In addition, the fantastic scientific artefacts from Europe that were promised failed to arrive. In an editorial by Knight Biggerstaff published in the *North-China Herald* on March 15, 1877, the Shanghai Polytechnic was compared unfavourably with the Hong Kong Museum. While the latter was described as “crowded with Chinese visitors,” the former was described as “practically deserted.” Biggerstaff added that the “empty halls” and “incipient decay” of the Shanghai Polytechnic could even be sensed by “passing strangers.” Biggerstaff concluded that the Polytechnic’s failures were the result of “disappointingly few” exhibits, and the lack of “great curiosity among the Chinese” as to the advancements in machinery at that time. Meanwhile, the success of the Hong Kong Museum proved that collections of specimens were “much more meaningful” to the Chinese public.

Although the subject is different from natural history as developed in the west, the study of creatures and the natural world certainly existed in China. As described in the previous chapter, two thousand years before the Qing period, Daoists were already examining many species and the ways that they changed. From that time onward, although not in the scope of Confucians’ research, knowledge of nature accumulated gradually in China. For instance, the *Commentary on the Waterways Classic (Shui Jing*...
Zhu, 水经注), compiled by Li Daoyuan (ca. 466-527) during the Northern Wei period, is a record of early geographical understanding of China’s 1,252 rivers. The *Compendium of Materia Medica* (*Bencao Gangmu*, 本草纲目), written by Li Shizhen (1518-1593) during the Ming period, listed 1,892 medicinal entries including plants, animals, and minerals. Even after the arrival of Western science, these impressive works remained influential. For example, Hu Shih (1891-1962), a leader in the New Culture Movement, spent many of his later years studying the *Commentary on the Waterways Classic*.

### Location, and the Shanghai International Settlement

When describing the “failure” of the Shanghai Polytechnic, a problem that Biggerstaff did not mention was its location at the northern crossing of what is now Beihai Road and North Guangxi Road in Shanghai. Before 1863, this was within the boundaries of the British concession; thereafter, the location fell within the borders of the Shanghai International Settlement (上海公共租界). During the last few decades of the nineteenth century, it was located within the jurisdiction of the Shanghai Municipal Council (上海工部局). According to the *Land Regulations and By-Laws for the Foreign Settlements of Shanghai* (hereafter, referred to as the *Land Regulations*), there were no restrictions on the passage rights of the Chinese in this area. However, from the standpoint of local

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24 The British and American concessions were united as the Shanghai International Settlement in October 1863 and administered by the Shanghai Municipal Council (工部局).

officials within the Qing government, the purpose of the concessions and settlements was to segregate foreigner residents from the Chinese population. In the earliest version of *Land Regulations* (1845), one article stated that foreigners were forbidden to sublease houses in the settlement to Chinese.\(^{26}\) However, eight years later, in September 1853, the Small Sword Society Uprising broke out. The rebels occupied Shanghai county, a situation which led to thousands of Chinese refugees flooding into the settlements. Shortly after, the restriction preventing foreigners from subleasing to Chinese was canceled in the revised version of *Land Regulations* (1854).\(^{27}\) However, in February 1855, Lan Weiwen (?-1857), governor of the Shanghai region, announced that the approval of the local government and foreign consuls was required in order to sublease to Chinese tenants; consequently, taxes were levied on their rents.\(^{28}\) Thereafter, the Chinese population increased rapidly in the Shanghai International Settlement. In a census by the Shanghai Municipal Council in 1876, there were 95,662 Chinese residents in the settlement.\(^{29}\) Meanwhile, British residents numbered 892, and there were 181 Americans.\(^{30}\)

\(^{26}\) 上海土地章程 (*Land Regulations*, 1845), accessed August 12, 2017.  
[http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node4530/node22831/node60831/userobject1ai53076.html](http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node4530/node22831/node60831/userobject1ai53076.html).  
[http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63965/node64503/node64511/userobject1ai58047.html](http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63965/node64503/node64511/userobject1ai58047.html).  
[http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63871/node64463/userobject1ai57955.html](http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63871/node64463/userobject1ai57955.html).  
[http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63871/node64465/userobject1ai57962.html](http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63871/node64465/userobject1ai57962.html).  
[http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63874/node64465/userobject1ai57961.html](http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node63852/node63874/node64465/userobject1ai57961.html).
The Chinese population of the Shanghai International Settlement grew in a way that was unlike that of other regions of China. According to research by Wu Zhenyi, the Chinese community in the settlement can be divided into three major groups: merchants, compradors, and workers.\(^{31}\) The livelihoods of Chinese residents in the International Settlement were closely connected to business with foreigners. It is reasonable to assume that the Chinese merchants and compradors who worked in the Settlement had plenty of opportunities to see Western machinery and technology and therefore had no need to visit the Shanghai Polytechnic to view its “disappointingly few” exhibits. Furthermore, members of the working class who may have wished to visit Shanghai Polytechnic on occasion to see something novel, were unfortunately refused admission by the institution’s managers. According to a provision in the Shanghai Polytechnic’s regulations, all Chinese officials, merchants, and gentry were welcome but workers, servants, and lower-class Chinese, were not allowed to enter.\(^{32}\) It appears that the managers of Shanghai Polytechnic ignored the particular demography of the residents of the Shanghai International Settlement. Therefore, it is understandable that visitors and students at the institution were few.

**The China Prize Essay Contest**

In 1885, Wang Tao (1828-1897), the newly appointed curator (*shanzhang, 山长*)\(^{33}\) conceived a way to create publicity for the Shanghai Polytechnic. He decided to hold a “China Prize Essay Contest” (or the Chinese Prize Essay scheme, *kaoke*, 考课). Essay

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\(^{32}\) Wang Ermin, 95.

\(^{33}\) Before working for Shanghai Polytechnic, Wang Tao was a well-known translator and journalist.
contests were not new to China. Throughout the Qing period, the Kaoke, a traditional essay competition, flourished in Chinese academies.\footnote{In Chinese, kaoke was combined by two characters—kao and ke. Kao means examinations, tests. Ke means courses, lessons.} In most cases, contest topics were similar to the topics of imperial examinations, and the style required was the eight-legged essay (stereotyped writings, baguwen, 八股文). As in essay contests in the modern world, all essays submitted to the kaoke scheme were graded, and those receiving the highest marks won awards.\footnote{Wang Ermin, 53.} During the late Qing period, kaoke were held quarterly in many academies. Award-winning essays were occasionally compiled and printed. Wang Tao admitted that, indeed, the idea of essay contest came from another Shanghai academy—the Qiuzhi Shuyuan\footnote{Qiuzhi Shuyuan (求志书院) was founded in 1876. The essay contest scheme dates from its beginning. See Liu Ming (刘明), “《格致书院课艺》研究” (“The Study of Gezhi shuyuan keyi”, Master’s thesis, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 2015), 24.}. In “Proposed Rules for Essay Contests at the Shanghai Polytechnic” (格致书院拟以艺文考试章程, hereafter referred to as the Rules), published in Shen Bao (Shun Pao, also Shanghai News, 申报)\footnote{Shen Bao was founded by Ernest Major (1841–1908) in 1872. It was one of the earliest modern Chinese newspapers, and the most influential newspaper in China before 1949.} on Feb 13, 1886, it was declared that four separate contests would be held, one per season. Although the traditional Chinese essay style was required, the essay topics would focus mainly on Western knowledge and foreign affairs (yangwu, 洋务).\footnote{Liu Ming, 26.}

What was unique to the essay contest under Wang Tao’s supervision was its close connection to modern media. After publication of the Rules in 1886, almost all information about the contest was released through Shen Bao. For each contest, not only the topics, but the lists of award-winners’ names, were also published in Shen Bao.
Before taking the position of curator, Wang Tao had acquired ample experience in journalism. After working for thirteen years as a co-translator at the London Missionary Society Press (墨海书馆) in Shanghai, Wang Tao became a newspaper writer in Hong Kong in the 1870s. In 1874, he founded the Universal Circulating Herald (循环日报, hereafter referred to as the Herald) in Hong Kong, and used printing machines purchased from the Ying Hua College (or Anglo-Chinese College, 英华书院). The Herald was the first modern Chinese-language newspaper, and Wang Tao has been honoured as China’s first journalist. He served as the Herald’s editor-in-chief for a decade. During this period, the Herald published more than eight hundred political commentary pieces composed by Wang. Most of his arguments advocated industrialization and reform of the Chinese political system. In three essays published in 1875, he introduced the slogan “self-strengthening through reform” (bianfa ziqiang, 变法自强), two decades ahead of Kang Youwei’s proposal for radical reform in the Qing government. Wang advocated a complete transformation of Chinese society, arguing that it should be based on modern Western learning. He believed that reforms were urgently required in four sectors: the imperial examinations, the military system, education, and the legal system.

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39 Wang Tao worked as a co-translator with several missionaries, including Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857, 麦都思) and James Legge (1815-1897, 理雅各). The London Missionary Society Press was the first modern publishing house in Shanghai. It was founded by English missionaries Walter Henry Medhurst, William Charles Milne (1815-1863, 美魏茶), William Muirhead (1822-1900, 穆维廉) and Joseph Edkins (1823-1905, 艾约瑟). The press operated between 1843 and 1863.


At the Shanghai Polytechnic, Wang Tao seized the opportunity to make reforms in education. First of all, the traditional *kaoke* scheme was changed from an internal competition into a public contest. Intellectuals from all over China responded warmly to this change. Wherever *Shen Bao* was sold, people had the chance to participate in the contest. According to Knight Biggerstaff, the contest met with “an unexpectedly enthusiastic response.” In the first two years, the number of participants reached 81 in a single quarter.42 From 1886 to 1894, Shanghai Polytechnic awarded a total of 418 first prizes, 683 second prizes, and 989 third prizes.43 Many of these award-winners lived in provinces close to Shanghai, such as Jiangsu and Zhejiang; several winners were from Guangdong and Anhui; a few others lived in Hunan, Fujian and several northern provinces.44 According to the *Rules* published in *Shen Bao* in 1886, regardless of where a contestant lived, the essay must be drafted and mailed to the Shanghai Polytechnic within sixty days. Considering the inefficiency of the Chinese postal service, then in its infancy, the sixty-day limitation was an obstacle for intellectuals living further away from Shanghai, such as in the northwest, northeast, and southwest China. It is likely no coincidence that there were no prize winners in those regions.45 The marriage of modern media and essay contests was a great success. As Biggerstaff concluded, “the contests aroused surprisingly widespread interest in Western science and technology among the intellectual elite of China.”46

42 Biggerstaff, 142.
43 Liu Ming, 26.
44 Liu Ming, 37-38.
46 Biggerstaff, 149.
A cause contributing to the success of the contests might have been a provision in the *Rules* that contestants were permitted to use pseudonyms to enter the contest; real names would not be revealed unless authorized by the contestants themselves.\(^{47}\) This dispelled the reluctance of intellectuals to depart openly from orthodox Confucianism. Research over the past few decades has shown that several names on the award lists were probably pseudonyms.\(^{48}\) The *Rules* also declared that the contests were open to all, even to those who were not government officials, advisors working for ranking officials (*muliao*, 幕僚), or persons who had reached a certain level in the imperial examination system; all were qualified contestants. The only criterion for grading was the quality of the essays.\(^{49}\) This rule created an appearance of fair play. However, in practice, it inadvertently allowed multiple submissions and the use of ghostwriters in the contests.

In addition to making use of modern media, Wang Tao also persuaded high-ranking officials to contribute to the contests. For the quarterly contests, he invited several distinguished officials to draft the topics and to grade the essays. For example, Sheng Xuanhuai (1844-1916)\(^ {50} \) was invited six times; Xue Fucheng (1838-1894)\(^ {51} \)

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\(^{47}\) *Shen Bao*, February 13, 1886. See Liu Ming, 23.
\(^{49}\) Ibid.
\(^{50}\) Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣怀) was a leader of the Self-Strengthening Movement. He served as Minister of Transportation in the Qing government, and founded Beiyang University (1895), the Imperial Bank of China (1897), and other modern institutions.
\(^{51}\) Xue Fucheng (薛福成) was a Qing diplomat, serving as Ambassador to Great Britain, France, Belgium and Italy between 1889 and 1894.
participated three times, and Zheng Guanying (1842-1922) was involved twice. Committee member John Fryer also officiated twice.

Beginning in 1889, Wang Tao added “Extra Themes” (teke, 特课) to each year’s contests: there was an Extra Theme at the springtime contest, and another in the autumn. To show their special areas of expertise, the northern and southern superintendents of trade (北洋大臣, 南洋大臣) were invited to host these two “Extra Themes.” Thus Li Hongzhang (1823-1901) hosted the Spring Extra Theme from 1889 to 1894. Zeng Guoquan (1824-1890), younger brother of Zeng Guofan, hosted the Autumn Extra Theme in 1889. Other southern superintendents of trade who lent their prestige to the Autumn Extra Theme from 1891 to 1893 were Shen Bingcheng (沈秉成, 1823-1895) and Liu Kunyi (刘坤一, 1830-1902). Generally these officials applauded the idea of strengthening China through modernization and political reforms. Consequently, the essay topics they chose tended to be connected to Western knowledge and foreign affairs. Meanwhile, the award-winning essays consistently demonstrated an exceptional grasp of Western knowledge, and a profound awareness of reforms in China. From the essay topics and the award-winning essays, it is easy to find views similar to those of advocates of the Self-Strengthening Movement. A particular detail also reveals connections between the essay contest and that official movement: in addition to being asked to volunteer their time to formulate essay topics and grade essays, government officials were asked to

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52 Zheng Guanying (郑观应) was a reformer whose Words of Warning to a Prosperous Age (盛世危言 Shengshi weiyan, 1893) was widely read.
53 Wang Ermin, 54-55.
55 Liu Ming, 48-49.
provide financial contributions which would be used as awards. Generally, these contributions were drawn from public funds.

In short, the essay contests were a great success, highly praised by both Chinese and western scholars. Biggerstaff commended them as “the most successful undertaking” of the Shanghai Polytechnic. Wang Ermin (1927- ), a leading scholar in modern Chinese intellectual history, considers the contests as one of “three major achievements” of the Polytechnic. In Wang’s view, the other two achievements were the publication of *Gezhi Huiban (The Chinese Scientific Magazine*, later *The Chinese Scientific and Industrial Magazine*, 格致汇编), and the opening of classes on Western science.

Considering that *Gezhi Huiban* was directed by John Fryer himself and not by the Polytechnic, and that the science classes were only offered for a short period of time to a small number of students, the essay contests were, in fact, the principal achievement of Shanghai Polytechnic.

Beginning in 1886, Wang Tao selected award-winning essays for inclusion in a yearly anthology together with his own annotations and commentary. Entitled *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* (格致书院课艺), the anthology was published regularly until 1894. Due to the end of the Self-Strengthening Movement and Wang Tao’s death, no additional essays were compiled after 1894.
Darwin and Spencer in the Award-winning Essays

As a result of Wang Tao’s industrious work, between 1886 and 1994 forty-eight contests were held, and 2,090 essays were awarded (first prize to third prize).\(^{61}\) The Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi (1886-1893) includes a total of 296 essays that were authored by 86 contestants.\(^{62}\) In the list of award-winners’ names, several names appear repeatedly. For example, Yang Yuhui appeared fourteen times; Wang Zuocai and another two winners appeared six times; Yin Zhiluo and another two winners five times; Zhong Tianwei and another two winners appeared four times. As mentioned above, contestants were permitted to use pseudonyms (see the Regulation); thus, some award winners’ identities might have been false. In fact, in the Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi, there is no record of the identity of fifteen contestants.\(^{63}\) Even where records of contestants’ names and specific titles do exist, there is no guarantee of their accuracy.

In recent decades, Chinese scholars have suggested that several of the contestants’ names are pseudonyms. For example, by comparing the essays in the contests and other anthologies, Wang Yangzong came to the conclusion that “Wang Zuocai” and “Zhong Tianwei” were the same person.\(^{64}\) In addition, Xue Yuliang discovered that “Zhu Zhenjia”, “Shang Lin”, “Li Peixi”, and “Li Longguang” were all pseudonyms used by

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\(^{61}\) Liu Ming, 26-27.
\(^{62}\) Wang Ermin, 69.
\(^{63}\) Wang Ermin, 69-72.
\(^{64}\) Wang Yangzong (王扬宗), “一部瑕瑜互见的西学东渐史——评熊月之《西学东渐与晚清社会》,” (“A Review of Xiong Yuezhi’s The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning in the Late Qing Dynasty.”) Modern Chinese History Studies (近代史研究), no. 2 (1996): 301.
Zhong Tianwei. Finally, while Xiong Yuezhi believes that Wang Zuocai was a real person, Xiong argues that essays submitted in Wang Zuocai’s name were ghostwritten by Zhong Tianwei.

The scholar Zhong Tianwei (1840-1900) is an interesting figure. Like Wang Tao, Zhong had the experience of living in Europe and working as a translator. Between 1872 and 1875, Zhong studied at the Foreign Language School (上海广方言馆) attached to the Jiangnan Arsenal. During this period, Zhong’s English-language instructor was the American missionary Young J. Allen (1836-1907, 林乐知). After graduating from the language school, Zhong worked at the translation branch of the Shandong Arsenal (山东机械局). In 1880 and 1881, he visited Europe as part of the entourage of Ambassador Li Fengbao (1834-1887). When Zhong returned to China, he began to work as a translator at the Jiangnan Arsenal. Given his background and experience, Zhong Tianwei had the chance and capability to obtain information directly from English-language materials. Not only did Zhong excel in winning contests held by the Shanghai Polytechnic; his writing served to introduce the ideas of Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer to Chinese audiences.

Extant materials show that two award-winning essays collected in the Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi are the earliest descriptions of Darwinism and Social Darwinism in China. Although Darwin’s name was mentioned in a short report on Shen Bao in 1873, his

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65 Xue Yuliang, 55.
66 Xiong Yuezhi (熊月之), “对《西学东渐与晚清社会》书评的回应,” (“A Response to the review of The Eastward Dissemination of Western Learning in the Late Qing Dynasty,”) Modern Chinese History Studies (近代史研究), no. 5 (1996): 179.
67 Li Fengbao (李凤苞) was the ambassador to Germany between 1881 and 1884. Xue Yuliang, 28-29.
theories and achievements were not introduced in China before 1889. Before then, Chinese intellectuals were more interested in Herbert Spencer. In 1882, the first chapter of Spencer’s book *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (1860) was translated in pamphlet form by Yan Yongjing (1839-1898), a Chinese Christian priest. However, Yan Yongjing did not translate a single word of Spencer’s ideas on Social Darwinism. Due to the way that it appeared to conflict with religious beliefs, Darwinism was intentionally ignored by the missionaries who were introducing Western knowledge to China before the 1880s. Nevertheless, through increasing contact with the Western world, knowledge of Darwinism eventually came to China.

For the Extra Theme in Spring 1889, Li Hongzhang, the northern superintendent of trade (北洋大臣) devised an essay topic that focused on Western knowledge, and specified Darwin and Spencer by name. The question is translated here.

The question is about *gezhi* theory (the investigation of things, and the perfection of knowledge) from the classic *Great Learning*. Since the Confucian Zheng Xuan (127-200), there have been dozens of schools annotating that theory. However, are there any similarities to today’s Western knowledge? Science in the West began with Aristotle (384-322 BC) in Greece. When Francis Bacon (1561-1626) appeared, the old theories were changed, and science developed to a new level. When Charles Darwin and Herbert Spencer’s books became popular, science matured. Can you elaborate on the origins and growth of science?

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69 The title of this pamphlet was *Yiye Yaolan* (肄业要览). It was published in Shanghai by the American Presbyterian Mission Press.

70 Elman, 346.

71 Elman, 345.
The formulation of this essay question demonstrates that by the late 1880s, high-ranking Chinese officials like Li Hongzhang possessed basic knowledge of Western science. This also shows that in Li Hongzhang’s mind, Darwin and Spencer made contributions to science that surpassed those of Aristotle and Bacon. Not surprisingly, most contestants in Spring 1889 knew little about these Western scientists. Many of their papers include errors. For example, Jiang Tongyi’s essay, which won first place in Spring 1889’s Extra Theme contest, described Darwin as a master of geography, and Spencer as a master of mathematics. According to Elman’s research, “missionary translations” were Jiang’s major sources, and these sources were silent with respect to Darwin and Spencer. However, two other award-winning essays displayed extraordinary knowledge of Darwin and Spencer.

One essay submitted under Zhong Tianwei’s name was awarded the fourth place; another essay submitted under Wang Zuocai’s name, was awarded second place. As previously mentioned, certain scholars suspect that “Wang Zuocai” was a pseudonym used by Zhong Tianwei. However, Benjamin Elman did not indicate awareness of this issue. In On Their Own Terms: Science in China, 1550-1900, Elman described Wang

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73 Gezhi shuyuan keyi, vol. 1 (1889), 1.
74 Elman, 346.
Zuocai as a real person who “had studied at Shanghai Polytechnic.” \(^{75}\) In the discussion below, I will continue using the names recorded in *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* to refer to these essays. Zhong Tianwei’s discussion of Darwinism is quoted here.

In 1859, he (Charles Darwin) prepared his magnum opus “on the origin of the species of all things.” He also declared the “principle of the survival of the fittest” \([wanwu qiangcun ruomie zhi li, \text{lit.}, \text{“the principle that the strong survive and the weak perish”}]\) in Spencerian terms. All species of plants and animals undergo changes over time and have never remained unchanged. Those plants and animals that are not successful in adapting slowly perish. Those that successfully adapt survive for the long term. This is the natural principle of the heavenly way \([tiandao ziran zhi li, \text{i.e., close but not quite “natural selection”}]\). His theory, however, contradicted the teachings of Jesus, and thus scholars from every country refused to follow his words. At first, he was greatly attacked, but today those who honor him have gradually increased in number. Hence, science underwent a great change, and Darwin can be called a superior man who arises once in a thousand autumns. \(^{76}\)

(一千八百五十九年，特著一书，论万物分种类之根源，并论万物强存弱灭之理。其大旨谓凡植物动物之种类，时有变迁，并非缔造至今一成不变，其动植物之不合宜者，渐渐澌灭。其合宜者，得以永存。此为天道自然之理。但其说与耶稣之旨相反，故各国儒士均不服其言。初时辩驳蜂起，今则佩服者渐多，而格致学从此大为改变。此亦可谓千秋崛起之人也。) \(^{77}\)

Zhong Tianwei’s description of Darwinism clearly relied on Spencerian terminology. Zhong used the phrases, “the strong survive” \((qiangcun, \text{强存})\) and “the weak perish” \((ruomie, \text{弱灭})\) to explain the theory of natural selection. The point that living things are always in a state of change corresponds to aspects of Daoist philosophy based on *Huasheng shuo*. During the Qing period, Confucianists like Wang Fuzhi also recognized the variability of the human body and human nature (see Chapter 2). Zhong’s

\(^{75}\) Ibid.
\(^{76}\) Elman, 348.
statement that “those that successfully adapt survive for the long term” is actually a restatement of Spencer’s phrase “the survival of the fittest.” Meanwhile, the Chinese phrase *heyi* (合宜 adapt) in Zhong’s words, has a connotation of fitness in human society. Although Zhong also mentioned the principle of natural selection, he phrased it in a Confucian style as the “natural principle of the heavenly way” (*tiandao ziran zhili*, 天道自然之理). In Zhong’s discussion, the Darwinist concept of biology was thus clouded by Confucianism. Therefore, it is not surprising that almost a decade later, Yan Fu used Confucian-style phrases to translate Darwinian terms in his influential book *Tianyan Lun* (天演论). For example, Yan Fu translated “natural selection” as “heavenly selection” (*tianze*, 天择).78

Wang Tao’s comments provide more information about this paragraph.

Darwin said that all living beings reproduced a lot, and the righteous ones survived long. The “righteous” here means “adaptive”. There were no words as “the strong survive and the weak perish” in Darwin’s theory. It looks like the writer did not [do] enough research.

(达文谓众物繁生，义者常存。所谓义者，宜也。无强存弱灭之说。似欠考据。)79

In Chinese, the pronunciation of the character *yì* (righteous, 义) is similar in pronunciation to *yí* (adaptive, 宜); the only difference is in tone. It appears that a version with the translation of “righteous” was accessible prior to 1889. Unfortunately, to date, this version has not been found. It is striking that Wang Tao accurately observed that the

78 *Tianyan Lun* was a translation of T. H. Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics* (1893).
79 *Gezhi shuyuan keyi*, vol. 1 (1889), 16.
phrase “the strong survive and the weak perish” was not composed by Darwin. According to Elman, Christians in China “delayed communicating a new set of scientific ideas until the 1890s.” This set of ideas included Darwinism. Given that Wang Tao worked for thirteen years at the London Missionary Society Press, and was a co-translator with Walter Henry Medhurst (1796-1857) and Joseph Edkins (1823-1905) for decades, it is likely that Wang learned about Darwinism from missionaries. Therefore, it is intriguing to consider why none of Wang Tao’s own works (which include both translations and essays), offer any introduction to Darwinism. Throughout his work, from the series of articles “Gezhi Xinxue Tigang” (格致新学提纲), co-translated by Joseph Edkins and Wang Tao, to the book Origins of Western Learning (Xixue Yuanshi Kao, 西学原始考, 1890), edited by Wang Tao himself, it seems that Wang carefully avoided mention of Darwin’s theory.

Because Zhong Tianwei worked at the translation branch of the Jiangnan Arsenal, he presumably had access to detailed information on Darwin’s thought. Although no records reveal precisely the source of Zhong’s knowledge, it is clear that the influence of local missionaries was weaker than in the case of Wang Tao. Records show that Wang Tao was baptized on August 26, 1854. In contrast, Zhong was not a Christian convert.

80 Elman, 320.
81 They were published in the Chinese Western Almanac (中西通书) separately in 1853 and 1858. see Liu Guangding (刘广定), 中国科学史论集 (A Collection of Essays on the history of science in China, Taipei: National Taiwan University Press, 2002), 97-98.
and thus would not have felt obligated to avoid discussion of Darwin’s theory for religious reasons. On the contrary, Zhong revealed the history of Christian resistance to Darwinism. He wrote that Darwin “was strongly attacked” at first, but that the ones who “honour him have gradually increased.” He also knew that because Darwinism “contradicted the teachings of Jesus,” many European scholars “refused to follow his words.”

The following paragraph shows that Zhong Tianwei’s knowledge of Spencer centered on Spencer’s philosophy.

As for Herbert Spencer, ... he was with Darwin for eleven years in his youth. His life work mainly expanded on Darwin’s theories, enabling people to grasp the principles of psychology. He claimed that only the external appearance of all things was knowable. The inner subtleties of all things were in fact unknowable. Comparing it to what Christianity has called God [shangdi] and what science calls an element [yuanzhi], although the human intellect does not have the power to know or measure them, yet the point is that without any doubt such things actually exist. Moreover, the changes that all things go through go back in origin to one thing. This one thing is the root, and all other things are its branches.

(至于施本思，名赫白德，生于英国豆倍地方，小于达文者十一年。生平所著之书，多推论达文所述之理，使人知生活之理，灵魂之理。其书流传颇广，其大旨将人学而确可知者，与确不可知者，晰分为二。其所谓确可知者，皆万物外见之粗质，而万物之精微，则确有不可知者在也。夫万物精微，本亦一物。而无形无体之可见，及其化成万物，皆已昭著于人之耳目。故格致家得诸见闻，而测知之至。若圣教中之所言上帝，格致学上所论原质，虽非人思力所能知能测，


85 Elman’s translation is incorrect here. Zhong Tianwei’s words were “xiao yu Dawen shiyi nian” (小于达文十一年), which meant Spencer was eleven years younger than Darwin.

86 Elman’s translation is again incorrect. The Chinese were “shiren zhi shenghuo zhili, linghun zhili” (使人知生活之理，灵魂之理), which meant letting people know the principles of life and soul.

87 Elman, 348-349.
Instead of praising the value of any particular Spencerian ideas, Zhong described Spencer’s achievements as an expansion on Darwin’s theories, and displayed no awareness of Spencer’s contribution to Social Darwinism. The paragraph is mainly about Spencer’s philosophy. However, Zhong’s discussion is not translation, but rather a paraphrasing of Spencer’s ideas. Except for his use of a few translated terms, such as gezhi jia (scientist) and shengjiao (Christianity), Zhong’s writings could be placed in a Confucian context without any loss of harmony. During the late Qing period, the rephrasing of western ideas using Chinese ideology aroused the interest among readers. However, it also gave rise to a tendency to misread those western ideas.

Compared to Zhong Tianwei’s essay, another essay submitted under Wang Zuocai’s name was vague on Darwin and Spencer, while its connection to traditional Chinese thought was stronger. Benjamin Elman did not quote much of Wang’s writing in his book, On Their Own Terms. The translation of the parts related to Darwin and Spencer are quoted below.

Darwin’s theory was that all living beings were clumsy when being created; along with the time passing, they became more and more dexterous. He also believed that animals were changed from plants, and human were changed from animals. Any organism without adaptation to the world will not survive long. Therefore, many kinds of ancient creatures cannot be found in today’s world.

It is clear that in Wang Zuocai’s account, creationism and Zhuangzi’s Huasheng theory (see Chapter Two) are intermingled. Like the previous essay submitted under Zhong Tianwei’s name, this passage grants that a creator of this world exists. The Chinese term used in Zhong’s essay is “dizao” (缔造 found, or build); in this paragraph it is “chuangzao” (创造 create). In both these verbs, an elliptical subject—the Creator—is certainly present. The passage also states, “animals were changed from plants, and human were changed from animals.” This is not a faithful translation of evolutionary theory, but a reinterpretation of Huasheng theory. Wang Tao’s discussion of this paragraph also illustrates the view of Chinese readers in general.

This is the same as Zhuangzi’s theory that “chhing-ning produces chhéng, and chhéng produces horse, and horse produces man.” It is not convincing. As to the idea “everyone struggles for life, but the righteous one survives,” I have to say it is marvelous.

Just as in his discussion of Zhong Tianwei’s essay, Wang Tao again phrased the “adaptive ones” as the “righteous ones.” However, the preference he gave to the principle of the “survival of the fittest” over the Daoist theory of transformation proved

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90 In the paragraph quoted above, this meaning was not translated by Elman.
that his views were much closer to Darwinism than to Daoism. It is unfortunate that in the annual compilation *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* (格致书院课艺), Wang Tao did not make any additional corrections to the mistakes made by contestants such as Zhong Tianwei and “Wang Zuocai”. Furthermore, Wang Tao did not write any detailed essays of his own on Darwinism. No records show that writers at the end of nineteenth century realized the negative effects of the trend of blending Western ideas and Chinese philosophy. Nor did any writers appear to resist the trend. The great success of Yan Fu’s *Tianyan Lun*, an epitome of the trend, will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Wang Zuocai discussed Spencer much more briefly than Zhong Tianwei did. Other than summarizing Spencer’s achievements as “promoting Darwin’s theory,” Wang did not present anything new in essay.

In conclusion, even though certain misconceptions are evident in the award-winning essays submitted to the contests run by the Shanghai Polytechnic, these essays were the first Chinese-language introductions of Darwinist and social Darwinist concepts. During the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century, many of the award-winning essays were widely read in China. Zhong Tianwei’s essays were first printed in the *Gezhi Shuyuan Keyi* anthologies, then published in many newspapers, and later collected in several influential anthologies, including *Huangchao Jingshiwen Sanbian* (皇朝经世文三编). Through these essays, Chinese intellectuals were deeply influenced, not only by the knowledge contained in them, but also by the ways of

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92 A total of 592 essays were collected in the *Huangchao Jingshiwen Sanbian* (80 volumes). The collection was edited by Chen Zhongyi (陈忠倚), published in 1898, and reprinted many times during the twentieth century.
thinking which they conveyed. However, an inclination to ignore Darwin’s biological
theory lurked in the words which appeared to be Confucian. This inclination developed to
a trend through Yan Fu’s book *Tianyan Lun*, and dominated the Chinese intellectual
circle in most of the twentieth century. Nevertheless, an ideological lineage can be drawn
from Zhong Tianwei’s essays to Yan Fu’s book, and to later Chinese scholars’
interpretations. Without a doubt, a favourable attitude towards the Spencerian idea of
evolution took root in modern China.
Chapter Four

Between Tianyan and Jinhua: The Transculturation of Social Darwinist Concepts in China

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, the Self-Strengthening Movement produced many achievements. Reforms were launched in the industrial, military, and educational sectors. However, China’s humiliating defeat in the First Sino-Japanese war (1894-1895) made the reforms seem inadequate. The defeat was received as evidence of the failure of the Self-Strengthening Movement launched in the 1860s. Meanwhile, what Benjamin Schwartz called “an almost traumatic change” was occurring in the Chinese intellectuals’ system of beliefs.¹ Nearly six years had passed since the publication of Zhong Tianwei’s essay on Western science, in which Darwinist ideas were illustrated in Spencerian terms. In the midst of these changes, Yan Fu (1854-1921), the influential translator of English texts, made a more powerful statement on evolutionary theory. Yan Fu translated many important Western works, including Evolution and Ethics by Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith (1723-1790), The Study of Sociology by Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), and On Liberty by John Stuart Mill.

(1806-1873). Although Yan’s translations were rendered in classical Chinese prose, their content was fresh to Chinese readers, and influenced generations of Chinese intellectuals.

**Yan Fu and His Essays**

Yan’s interest in Western learning can be traced back to his studies at the Fujian Arsenal Academy (福州船政学堂) between 1867 and 1871.² In 1877, the Qing government sent Yan Fu and eleven other students to the Royal Naval College, in Greenwich, England, to learn about Western warships.³ As a result of this trip, the future of these students as officials in the imperial Chinese navy was secured. However, Yan Fu had little interest in working with warships. During his two years of study in England, he immersed himself in Western social science instead.⁴ He also established a good relationship with Guo Songtao (1818-1891, 郭嵩焘), the Qing government’s first ambassador to Britain. When he returned to China in August 1879, Yan Fu was first employed as an English teacher at the Fujian Arsenal Academy. A few months later, he obtained a position at the Beiyang Naval Officers’ School (北洋水师学堂) in Tianjin.⁵ In 1890, he became President of the Beiyang Naval Officers’ School.⁶ It is no exaggeration to say that Yan Fu’s life was

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³ Ibid, 21.
⁵ Sun Yingxiang, 47, 49.
⁶ Sun Yingxiang, 64.
closely connected to the imperial Chinese navy. It is clear that the destruction of the Beiyang fleet in the First Sino-Japanese war had an emotional impact on Yan.

Beginning in 1895, Yan Fu published a series of essays in an influential Tianjin newspaper—Zhi Bao (直报). These essays include “On the Speed of World Change” (Lun shibian zhi ji, 论世变之亟), “On Strength” (Yuan qiang, 原强), “In Refutation of Han Yu” (Bi Han, 辟韩), and “On Our Salvation” (Jiuwang jue lun, 救亡决论). Yan strongly advocated Chinese political reform in these essays, drawing on Western ideas for theoretical support. He cited not only economic and political theory, but scientific and philosophical theories as well.

In his essay “On Strength” (1895), Yan Fu introduced Darwin and Spencer’s theories in far greater detail than Zhong Tianwei had done in his awarding-winning essays submitted to the Shanghai Polytechnic. In contrast to Zhong’s brief discussion, Yan provided a more accurate and persuasive introduction to Darwin and Spencer. The paragraph below is an excerpt from the second paragraph of “On Strength,” which focuses on Darwin’s book, On the Origin of Species (1859).

Darwin was a British scholar who focused on the study of animals and plants. ... The essence of his book was that all species in today’s world […] come from one root. ... In his book, two chapters are especially intriguing, ... one has the title “struggle for existence,” the other has the title “the survival of the fittest.” ... At first, species struggle with species; then as [men] gradually progress, there is a struggle between one social group and another. The weak invariably become the prey of the strong, the stupid invariably become subservient to the clever.

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8 This sentence and the next were translated by Schwartz.
As this paragraph shows, Yan Fu was familiar with certain chapter titles in the book *On the Origin of Species*, demonstrating he had seen the book at some point. It seems likely that he had read some chapters of Darwin’s work, or at least, a detailed introduction to the book. Based on a comparison between different versions of “On Strength,” it can be concluded that Yan had access to different editions of *On the Origin of Species*. When “On Strength” was first published in *Zhi Bao* in March 1895 (from March 4th to 9th, in a series), one of the chapters in Darwin’s book was mentioned as “yi yizhong” (遗宜种), which was a translation of “the survival of the fittest.” In 1901, when the essay was revised and compiled in the book “Houguan Yanshi Congke” (*A Collection of Yan Fu’s Works*), Darwin’s chapter title was changed to “tianze” (天择), which was a translation of “natural selection.” In Darwin’s book, “natural selection” was the title of Chapter Four from the first edition to the fourth edition (1859, 1860, 1861, and 1866). From the fifth edition onward (1869), however, the chapter title was “natural selection; or the survival of the fittest.” The phrase “the survival of the fittest” was created by Herbert Spencer, and first appeared in the book, *Principles of Biology* (1864). A few years later, Darwin accepted it as an equivalent to his own term “natural selection,” and finally employed it in a new edition of his book. From the

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9 *An Anthology of Yan Fu*, vol. 1, 5-6.
10 Ibid, 15.
11 The files of different editions were retrieved from the website “Darwin Online.” Accessed June 9, 2017. [http://darwin-online.org.uk/contents.html#origin](http://darwin-online.org.uk/contents.html#origin).
corresponding differences in Yan’s essays, when he refers to these terms and chapter titles, it can be deduced that in 1895, Yan referred to a later edition of *On the Origin of Species* than the one he consulted in 1901. This revision also shows that in 1901, Yan was aware of the changes in various editions of Darwin’s book. It is probable that by 1901, six years after his essay was first published, Yan had developed a better understanding of Darwinism.

Although clearly familiar with Darwinism, Yan Fu did not explain Darwin’s theory in its original way. Like Zhong Tianwei, who confused aspects of Darwin and Spencer’s theories, Yan also introduced Darwinism using Spencer’s phrases. Zhong used the phrase *qiangcun ruomie* (强存弱灭, “the strong survive and the weak perish”) to describe the principle “survival of the fittest.” Yan gave this Darwinian principle a perfect translation—*shizhe shengcun* (适者生存). Nonetheless, he then employed a Spencerian phrase—*yousheng liebai* (优胜劣败 the superior win, and the inferior are defeated) as a complement to the more appropriate translated principle.

When comparing struggles in the natural world, Yan paid more attention to struggles between “one social group and another.” His explanation of the principle “natural selection” was made in the context of Social Darwinism. He used the Chinese idiom “*ruorou qiangshi*” (弱肉强食) to explain the meaning of “the weak invariably become the prey of the strong.” During the Tang period (618-907), a famous Confucian, Han Yu (768-824), composed an evocative phrase, “*ruo zhi rou, qiang zhi shi*” (弱之肉,}

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13 Schwartz, 45.
强之食, “flesh of the weak, food for the strong”). After appearing in a popular essay, this phrase became a well-known idiom in the shortened form of “ruorou qiangshi.” Unburdened by any theoretical interpretation from modern biology and sociology, the idiom existed in China for more than a thousand years. When Social Darwinism arrived in China, the phrase was considered as a perfect description of the law of the jungle. Because of its deep roots in China, ruorou qiangshi seemed to sum up the spirit of Social Darwinism. Without knowledge of modern biology, or of Spencer’s philosophy, an ordinary Chinese person could easily grasp the Spencerian idea of brutal competition. It might even be said that an essential notion associated with Social Darwinism had been latent in idiomatic Chinese for over a millennium before Spencer was born.

It is significant that a moral judgement is implied by the idiom ruorou qiangshi. In the eyes of Confucians, the brutality of savage competition was grievous and intolerable. Hu Tianyou (1288-1368), a poet living in the Yuan period (1271-1368), bemoaned that “soldiers are suffering from violence; the weak are the prey of the strong, who follow the law of owls.” Liu Ji (1311-1375), a founding figure of the Ming government (1368-1644), lamented that “it is a misfortune to live in troubled times; the weak become the prey of the strong, yet government officials are unconcerned.” Overt censure of the phenomenon of ruorou qiangshi was common in Chinese literature. At the end of nineteenth century, when China became “the weak,” and the jungle law was restated within a modern “scientific” context, reinterpretation of the phrase ruorou qiangshi in social Darwinist terms was provocative for Chinese intellectuals. With

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15 Ibid.
16 Ibid.
growing anxiety regarding the survival of China, Yan Fu demonstrated a preference for Spencerian ideas rather than biological Darwinism. When introducing Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species* in his essay “On Strength,” immediately after explaining the meaning of *ruorou qiangshi*, Yan added that “the stupid invariably become subservient to the clever” (愚者当为智者役). His words reflected Chinese intellectuals’ anxieties about China’s future at a time when Western imperialism had become dominant in the world. Together with his readers, Yan Fu feared that China might fall under Western colonial domination. Through translation of Huxley’s *Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays*, which criticized the application of Darwin’s theory in human society, Yan Fu was able to express opposition to passive acceptance of China’s subordination as a result of weakness and ignorance.

**The Theory of Tianyan: A Confucian View of Evolution**

Between 1895 and 1898, Yan Fu concentrated on the translation of T. H. Huxley’s book *Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays* (1894), which was based on a discourse “delivered before the University of Oxford” in the annual Romanes Lecture of 1893. However, Yan Fu’s book in Chinese, which was published under the title *Tianyan Lun* (天演论), and first printed in 1898, was not a complete translation of Huxley’s book. Rather, Yan only produced an abridged translation of the first part, “evolution and ethics. prolegomena [1894]” and the second part, “evolution and ethics [1893]” of Huxley’s

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17 *An Anthology of Yan Fu*, vol. 1, 5.
book. In Benjamin Schwartz’s eyes, the book *Tianyan Lun* was “not so much a
translation as an abridged summation of the original.”\(^\text{19}\)

One of the earliest independent translators of Western books in China, Yan Fu
believed that *xin* (信, faithfulness), *da* (达, comprehensibility), and *ya* (雅, elegance)
were three criteria for a good translation.\(^\text{20}\) However, he admitted that conflicts among
them were inevitable. If a translator focused too much on the faithfulness of the
translation, the comprehensibility would be weakened. If elegance was achieved,
faithfulness could possibly be impaired. Therefore, he stated that his translations did not
adhere to the literal meaning of the original texts.\(^\text{21}\) In one sense, Yan’s translation can be
described as “paraphrastic,” as noted by Schwartz.\(^\text{22}\) In another sense, his words were
creative, and went beyond the usual limits of a translator. Unlike other translators, Yan
added considerable commentary of his own in *Tianyan Lun*. It is unusual that these
comments were not limited to footnotes or endnotes. On the contrary, Yan used
commentary to complement and expand on his translation of Huxley’s text. The total
volume of Yan’s comments is close to the total length of his translation. For many
Chinese readers of *Tianyan Lun*, Yan’s commentary was an accessible way to understand
Darwinist ideas. However, in his comments, Yan clearly stated his disagreements with
Huxley, and favoured Spencer’s views. As Schwartz concluded, *Tianyan Lun* was
therefore both “a paraphrase of Huxley’s lectures” and “an exposition of Spencer’s

\(^{19}\) Schwartz, 95.
\(^{21}\) Ibid.
\(^{22}\) Schwartz, 95.
essential views as against Huxley.” Meanwhile, Huxley’s “very anti-Spencerian animus” gave Yan the opportunity to defend Spencer’s arguments.

The book *Tianyan Lun* was a huge success in China. By the early twentieth century, more than thirty editions were circulating in China’s markets for books. The Commercial Press of Shanghai alone produced twenty-four reprints between 1905 and 1927. Even after the publication of a new translation of *Evolution and Ethics* in 1971, *Tianyan Lun* continues to be reprinted in huge quantities. In today’s market, more than a dozen Chinese publishing houses are still printing *Tianyan Lun*. It is unlikely that Yan Fu’s translation has the same influence in China as it did a century ago. Yet the continued popularity of the book indicates at least a lasting respect for the success and influence of Yan’s translation and commentary.

Today, the title “Tianyan Lun” is accepted as a term for Yan Fu’s evolutionary views. The title can be translated as “the theory of tianyan.” *Tianyan* (天演) is a phrase created by Yan Fu. It was used initially as a translation of the word “evolution.” Yan then

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23 Schwartz, 103.
24 Schwartz, 102-3.
26 Ouyang Zhesheng (欧阳哲生), “中国近代思想史上的《天演论》,” (“*Tianyan Lun* in Modern Chinese Intellectual History,”) in 进化论与伦理学 (全译本, 附《天演论》) (*A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics* (including *Tianyan Lun*)), Song Qilin (宋启林) translator (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2010), 20.
27 According to data from the Amazon online bookstore. Accessed June 9, 2017. [Link](https://www.amazon.cn/s/ref=nb_sb_noss?__mk_zh_CN=%E4%BA%9A%E9%AC%98%E5%88%98%7B%5C7D%91%E7%AB%99&url=search-alias%3Daps&field-keywords=%E5%A4%A9%E6%BC%94%E8%AE%BA&rh=i%3Aaps%2Ck%3A%E5%A4%A9%E6%BC%94%E8%AE%BA).
infused this phrase with multiple meanings. In the first chapter of *Tianyan Lun*, Yan offered the following explanation.

*Tianyan* should be taken as a substance, and it has two functions: one is *wujing* (struggle for existence), and the other is *tianze* (natural selection). All things in this world are under this law, especially the living beings. *Wujing* means things are struggling for their existence. One thing is competing with many other things; whether something is alive or dead, the outcome follows the law of *tianze*. *Tianze* means that things are competing for their own survival.

(以天演为体，而其用有二：曰物竞，曰天择。此万物莫不然，而于有生之类为尤著。物竞者，物争自存也，以一物以与物物争，或存或亡，而其效则归于天择。天择者，物争焉而独存。)\(^{28}\)

This paragraph shows that from the very beginning of the book, Yan Fu did not intend to follow Huxley closely. Yan’s illustration of Darwinism was presented in a Confucian style, and Darwinist principles were placed within the context of Confucian philosophy. The pair of concepts *ti* (体, substance) and *yong* (用, function) represents a fundamental concept in Chinese philosophy. Numerous Confucian and Buddhist scholars have debated the relationship between *ti* and *yong*.\(^{29}\) The most influential argument on this point was advanced by Feng Guifen (1809-1874) in the late nineteenth century. Feng argued that, “Chinese learning should be followed as the essence, and Western learning as the practical application.” (中学为体, 西学为用) In Chinese, the character *ti* (体) can mean “body,” “object,” or “form.”\(^{30}\) In Wang Fuzhi’s works, which were widely read in China from the 1860s onwards (see Chapter Two), *ti* can be explained as consisting of three aspects: “(1) the concrete existence of things, their physical shape; (2) their

\(^{28}\) A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics (including *Tianyan Lun*), 153.
essential nature; and (3) the supreme original source of heaven, earth, and the myriad things."\textsuperscript{31} In Yan Fu’s words, \textit{ti} is used to mean “essential nature” and “supreme original source of heaven, earth, and the myriad things.” Given these implications in a Confucian context “evolution” (\textit{tianyan}) is seen as connected closely to Heaven, and holds a supreme status. From the moment that Yan Fu declared \textit{tianyan} to be a “substance” (\textit{ti}), the Western concept of “evolution” was detached from Darwinism, and included within the system of Confucianism. In his Chapter One, Yan Fu gave \textit{tianyan} a definition with clear Chinese characteristics.

Although nature ever changes, there is something changeless moving within it. What is it that is changeless? It is called \textit{tianyan}.\textsuperscript{32}

(虽然天运变矣，而有不变者行乎其中。不变惟何? 是名“天演”。)\textsuperscript{33}

Yan Fu’s definition in Chinese is translated by James Pusey, and included in his book, \textit{China and Charles Darwin} (1983). However, Pusey’s translation was not precise. The word “nature” does not fully convey the multiple meanings of the Chinese phrase \textit{tianyun} (天运). According to the \textit{Ciyuan} (辞源), the leading etymological dictionary in China since 1915, \textit{tianyun} means “the destiny of nature,” as well as “the revolution of planets.”\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Tianyun} is in fact a concept belonging to the field of \textit{tianxue} (天学) of imperial China, which focuses on the study of astronomy and astrology. Until the nineteenth century, the study of \textit{tianxue} always fell within the control of the imperial families, and was undertaken as a service to the emperor. By using the concept of

\textsuperscript{31} Zhang Dainian, 255.
\textsuperscript{33} A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics (including \textit{Tianyan Lun}), 153.
\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ciyuan}, 692.
Therefore, Yan Fu successfully placed the western idea of evolution within the Confucian domain of *tianxue*. Furthermore, the connection to *tianxue* provided the word *tianyan* with an authoritative association.

The phrase *tianyan* is composed of two Chinese characters—*tian* (天), which means “Heaven”; and *yan* (演), which means “evolve.” An important concept in Chinese philosophy, *tian* contains two meanings. According to Zhang Dainian, one is “an objective infinite reality, the ‘sky’”; the other is “‘God’, or the supreme concept.” For thousands of years, the supreme status of *tian* remained unchanged in China. Yan Fu did not intend to disturb the status of *tian*; on the contrary, his introduction of western scientific theories was an attempt to improve China’s existing ideological system. In Yan’s eyes, “evolution” was a kind of *Dao* (the Way, 道). Although all things in the world are changing, and the future is uncertain, the *Dao* is “changeless.” This is indeed an echo of the Confucian idea “Heaven changeth not, likewise the Way changeth not” (天不变, 道亦不变). Although there were many conspicuous crises in China at the end of nineteenth century, Yan nonetheless hoped that China could be improved through reform rather than by means of a revolution in which everything would be overthrown. Because of these hopes, Yan Fu introduced Spencer’s theory by choosing terms that were fully intelligible within the Confucian worldview.

The man named Spencer, lived in the same period with Darwin. He wrote the book *Tian Ren Huitong Lun (A System of Synthetic Philosophy)*, which was based on the theory of evolution. In that book, the theory was consistent on the examples of Heaven, Earth, human, *xing* (form, 形) and *qi* (air, 气), *xin* (heart, or

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35 Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, 1282, 1501.
36 Zhang Dainian, 3-4.
mind, 心) and xing (human nature, 性), animals and plants. His theory was really penetrating and magnificent.

(斯宾塞尔者, 与达同时, 亦本天演著《天人会通论》, 举天、地、人、形气、心性、动植之事而一贯之, 其说尤为精辟宏富。)\(^\text{37}\)

As in his description of tianyan quoted above, Yan Fu summarized Spencer’s synthetic philosophy in Confucian terms. Spencer’s book title *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (ten volumes, 1862-1892) was translated into a Confucian-style title—*Tian Ren Huitong Lun*, which literally means “a theory on the communication between Heaven (tian, 天) and humans (ren, 人).” In this paragraph, three essential concepts from Confucianism, namely Heaven, Earth (di, 地), and humankind, are highlighted and combined. Meanwhile, Yan Fu attached several other important Chinese philosophical concepts to Spencer’s theory, which include xing (form, 形), qi (air, 气), xin (heart, or mind, 心), and xing (human nature, 性). These core concepts are discussed in some way in every Confucian work.

Given Yan Fu’s focus on Confucian concepts, it is not surprising that in his introduction to Spencer’s book, he mentions the category of animals and plants last. For thousands of years, the study of animals and plants did not develop into a subject in China, and was not considered as a suitable subject for investigation by Confucians. Therefore, Yan Fu showed no interest in biology in *Tianyan Lun*. Another paragraph on Spencer’s theory in *Tianyan Lun* was truly a philosophical statement. Spencer’s text in English is hard to understand; Yan’s introduction in classical Chinese is even more

\(^{37}\) *A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics* (including *Tianyan Lun*), 154.
obscure. I quote Spencer’s original words below, followed by Yan’s Chinese translation for reference.

Evolution is an integration of matter and concomitant dissipation of motion; during which the matter passes from an indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to a definite, coherent heterogeneity; and during which the retained motion undergoes a parallel transformation.38

(斯宾塞尔之天演界说曰: “天演者, 窠以聚质, 辟以散力。方其用事也, 物由纯而之杂, 由流而之凝, 由浑而之画, 质力杂糅, 相剂为变者也。”)39

Yan Fu used other examples as well to construct his theory of tianyan. He also made many other comparisons between Chinese philosophy and evolutionary theory, not only in Tianyan Lun, but in other translations and essays as well. For instance, in an essay published in 1913, Yan offered a complete summary of common features between evolutionary thought in the West and in China.40

The theory of tianyan was created in the time between the Zhou and Qin periods. In China, the comparable idea was “know nature” from Daoist scholars. Nature was the root of tianyan. In Laozi’s words, tianyan was like “Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent; they deal with all things as the dogs of grass are dealt with.”41 In Zhuangzi’s words, it was like “(the views are) grounded on the use of things, and using the (proper) light,”42 or “when (the wind) blows, (the sounds from) the myriad apertures are different, and (its cessation) makes them stop of themselves”43 from the essay “Qi wu lun” (or The Adjustment of Controversies); and “following the natural laws, the fire is transmitted (elsewhere) even though the faggots have been consumed”44 from the essay “Yang sheng zhu” (or Nourishing the Lord of life). These words all expressed the essence of tianyan. The most profound and famous idea is from I

38 Herbert Spencer, First Principles (London: Williams and Norgate, 1867), 396.
39 A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics (including Tianyan Lun), 155.
42 James Legge, 184, 187.
43 James Legge, 178.
44 James Legge, 202.
Ching (or Book of Changes), all things began with the qian (乾) and kun (坤), and ended in the status between finished and unfinished.

The word tianyan, as used in the paragraph above, cannot be taken as a simple translation of the word “evolution.” Rather, Tianyan is endowed with rich connotations in both Confucianism and Daoism. Spencer applied Darwin’s theory to social science; Yan Fu applied Spencer’s theory to Chinese philosophy. From the classic I Ching, to Laozi and Zhuangzi’s ideas, Yan Fu gathered the ideas that seemed most similar to the ideas about evolution that he introduced and compared them with western evolutionary theory.

It is noteworthy that some of the examples that Yan used in his arguments were less apt than others for his purposes. Moreover, Yan confused certain concepts. First of all, in Yan Fu’s argument as quoted above, the concept of “nature” from the West was combined with the Chinese concept tian (Heaven, 天) and ziran (自然). In both Confucianism and Daoism, the concept tian has supreme status. As mentioned above, the concept tian can mean both “sky” and “God” in Chinese philosophy. Furthermore, Chinese philosophers developed a system of connections between tian and humans. Mencius believed that tian was “the source of the human mind and of human nature,” and that humans could somehow communicate with tian. Since the nineteenth century, a

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45 A Supplementary Anthology of Yan Fu, 135.
46 Zhang Dainian, 3-4.
47 Zhang Dainian, 7.
Daoist term—ziran (自然), has been used as the translation of “nature.” However, this term conveys different meanings in the classic works of Laozi and Zhuangzi. The concept “to know nature,” (明自然) includes the implication that humankind should not interfere with nature. A clear Daoist statement is made in the well-known sentence: “The Dao in its regular course does nothing (for the sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which it does not do” (道常无为而无不为).48 In contrast with this Daoist view, Confucians had a more pragmatic view of the world. Wang Fuzhi, for instance, argued that in cultivation of a junzi (君子 gentlemen), it does not work to let nature take its course (听其自然). Instead in self-cultivation it is beneficial to try some new things.49

When Yan Fu argued that “nature is the root of tianyan,” he used the Daoist phrase ziran (自然). However, in using the following quotation from Laozi, “Heaven and earth do not act from (the impulse of) any wish to be benevolent,” Yan changed the focus of his topic from the concrete natural world to the domain of ethics. The “benevolent (benevolence)” that Laozi refers to is the Confucian concept ren (仁). Ren is a supreme virtue which can “encompass all others and so is rendered as ‘goodness,’ and ‘perfect virtue.’”50 Ren can also be translated as “humanity,” “perfect virtue,” “goodness,” “human-heartedness,” and “altruism.”51 Through the connection of ‘benevolence’ with ren, Yan Fu linked together the concepts “nature,” ziran, and tian. It was unlikely that

49 Qian Mu (钱穆), 中国思想史 (The Intellectual History of China, Taipei: Student Book Store, 1988), 247.
50 Zhang Dainian, 285.
Yan did not understand well the differences between these concepts. Therefore, it appears that he was constructing his own theory through the integration of these concepts.

In addition to his idiosyncratic mixture of terms relating to nature, Yan Fu combined the European concept “to evolve” with the Chinese concept of yan (演). In modern Chinese, yan means “change, deduction, and performance.”\(^5^2\) In classical Chinese, however, yan has different meanings altogether. According to the Ciyuan (辞源), yan means a “long stream” (长流), and “to nourish” (滋润), both concepts related to the flow of water.\(^5^3\) The compound yanhua (演化), now the standard translation for “evolution,” is a phrase that had been used in Chinese texts for thousands of years. For instance, in an essay by the poet Wang Bo (649-676), yanhua means to “popularize and civilize” (推广教化).\(^5^4\) In the classic Confucian text called Guoyu (国语), yan is connected to the people’s livelihood. A passage from the Guoyu reads: “If rivers and soil are nourished well, people can harvest well; if rivers and soil are not nourished, people will not have enough food and income” (夫水土演而民用也, 水土无所演, 民乏财用).\(^5^5\)

Given these connotations, the character yan as employed by Yan Fu not only indicates change in the natural world, but also suggests its potential applications to human society. Another character, hua (化, change), sometimes means “change” as well and is widely used in Daoist terms such as Huasheng shuo (化生说, see Chapter Two). It is significant that hua also has meanings are linked to society and civilization. In addition to yanhua,

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\(^5^2\) 现代汉语词典 (Contemporary Chinese Dictionary), 1501.
\(^5^3\) Ciyuan, 1865.
\(^5^4\) Ibid.
\(^5^5\) Ibid.
hua is often composed of phrases such as jiaohua (教化, edification) and ganhua (感化, influence). Therefore, by choosing yan instead of hua to create the phrase tianyan, Yan Fu was not only making a choice based on the meaning of the words, but also indicating his preference for Confucian ideology over the associations of Daoist terms. Combined with tian, the supreme Confucian concept, to form tianyan, the word yan acquired divine associations, and a strengthened link to Confucian thought.

Qun and Jinhua: New Conceptions of Human Progress

In addition to tianyan, another new term emerged in Yan Fu’s book Tianyan Lun. This was jinhua (进化). Jinhua was composed of the character jin (进), meaning “advance,” or “move forward;”56 and hua (化), which means “to change,” or “transform.”57 As a compound, jinhua literally means “change to a higher level or grade.”58 During the twentieth century, jinhua was the most popular translation of “evolution” in China. However, Yan Fu did not use this word to translate “evolution.”

Before 1897, jinhua was not an established word in Chinese. In the Ciyuan (辞源) dictionary, a compilation of phrases from traditional Chinese works, there is no entry for jinhua in any of its various editions.59 According to Shen Guowei, jinhua was a term

56 Xinhua Dictionary, 237.
57 Xinhua Dictionary, 192.
58 Contemporary Chinese Dictionary, 677.
devised by the Japanese politician Katō Hiroyuki (1836-1916) in 1878. The first appearance of the word in China was an essay in *Shiwu Bao* (*Current Affairs Newspaper, 时务报*) on January 13, 1897. In that essay, *jinhua* conveyed the meaning of “civilized” and “progress.” In Yan Fu’s *Tianyan Lun*, *jinhua* appeared eight times in all, including once as a chapter title, once in comments on Spencer’s words, and six times in compound phrases. Yet none of these appearances of *jinhua* was in an exact translation of “evolution.” Yan Fu used *jinhua* as the title of the last chapter of *Tianyan Lun*, and focused on how to achieve good governance in human society. In Yan’s comments on a passage from Spencer (Chapter Fifteen), he employed both *tianyan* and *jinhua*, while distinguishing between their meanings.

“From this (Spencer’s words) can find the reasons why evolution (*tianyan*) dominates people’s livelihood, and how people’s livelihood adapted to the process of evolution. Things can change their shapes and abilities to adapt to environments. Evolutionists (*tianyan jia*) have named these phenomena as adaptation. Adaptation is really the secret of *jinhua.*”

(于此见天演之所以陶钧民生，与民生之自为体合。物自变其形能，以合所遇之境。天演家谓之体合。体合者，进化之秘机也。)

In this paragraph, it can be seen that *tianyan* indicates the process of change in the universe, and appears to have been the preferable translation of “evolution” in Yan Fu’s...
eyes. Another phrase tianyan jia, in which tianyan is equal to “evolution,” and jia is equal to “-ist” in English, also demonstrates this definition of tianyan. In comparison, jinhua conveys the sense of a separate process of changing to tianyan.

Meanwhile, the other six appearances of jinhua in Tianyan Lun all occurred in compounds, including shanqun jinhua (善群进化), appearing three times), one occurrence each of hequn jinhua (合群进化), baoqun jinhua (保群进化), and baozhong jinhua (保种进化). Through these phrases, a distinctive concept—qun (群), was connected to jinhua. In Chinese, qun means gathered people or things. Shanqun means to improve the group; hequn means to be sociable with other group members; and bao qun means to save the group. The word baozhong, which literally means to save the species, is close in meaning to baoqun. The scope of the concept qun was narrowed down in Yan Fu’s book. In all the phrases above, the meaning of qun was limited to discussions of human groups. Meanwhile, all progress made by qun was defined as jinhua.

As well as using compounds that associated social groups (qun) with jinhua, Yan used the terms baoqun and baozhong to express anxieties about the survival of the Chinese people. At the same time, hequn and shanqun implied his wish to promote a higher level of morality in Chinese society. After an inexact translation of Huxley’s words in Chapter Thirteen of Tianyan Lun, Yan made his ethical view of qun clear in comments on Huxley’s view.

What causes men to enter society and leave their state of dispersion is the interest in security. In the beginning, man does not differ on this from birds, beasts, and other lower forms. It is not his fellow-feeling which leads to the formation of

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68 A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics (including Tianyan Lun), 154, 158, 160, 174.
society, but his interest in security. The process of evolution determines that those who can form social groups survive and those who cannot shall perish. Those who form effective social groups survive, those who do not, disappear. What makes them effective? The ability to develop a sense of mutual sympathy. This ability to feel sympathy is, however, an effect of the process of natural selection and not something which was there from the outset. Those groups which do not effectively develop this fellow-feeling are eliminated in the struggle for existence.69

(盖人之由散入群，原为安利，其始正与禽兽下生等耳。初非由感通而立也。夫既以群为安利，则天演之事，将使能群者存，不群者灭；善群者存，不善群者灭。善群者何？善相感通者是。然则善相感通之德，乃天择以后之事，非其始之即如是也。其始岂无不善相感通者？经物竞之烈，亡矣，不可见矣。)70

Following this passage, Yan Fu commented that on the topic of qun, Huxley’s argument was not as thorough as Spencer’s, and that Huxley’s point was focused on “the secondary (末，mo) to explain the fundamental (本，ben).”71 Yan also considered Huxley’s view of mutual sympathy to be illogical.72 He did not agree with Huxley that “fellow-feeling” or “mutual sympathy” could be the leading cause of a group’s survival. Yan considered the ability to “form effective social groups” as the leading cause of the survival of groups; furthermore, “mutual sympathy” was not a cause but rather a result in the process of evolution. Yan argued that in the case of China, although the Chinese were certainly capable of forming social groups, they did not form groups in an effective manner; therefore, at the end of the nineteenth century they were no match for the social groups that had formed in European countries. Yan’s discussion indicates that he had a clear goal in introducing evolutionary theory to China: to ensure the survival of the

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69 Schwartz, 107-8.
70 A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics (including Tianyan Lun), 168.
71 Schwartz, 108. Yan’s words in Chinese were “赫胥黎执其末以齐其本，此其言群理，所以不若斯宾塞氏之密也.”
72 A Full Translation of Evolution and Ethics (including Tianyan Lun), 168.
Chinese people. In his essay “Baozhong Yuyi” (保种余义 “The remaining meaning of baozhong”), published in Guowen Bao (国闻报) in 1898, Yan declared that other races were competing against the Chinese, and that China’s survival would depend on the self-improvement of Chinese society. Yan used both ren (人 people) and zhong (种 race) in the essay, such as huang ren (黄人 yellow people) and huang zhong (黄种 yellow race).

Through association with his concept of qun, Yan Fu endowed the word jinhua with a social Darwinian meaning. In a 1913 essay “Tianyan jinhua lun” (天演进化论, “The theory of tianyan and jinhua”), Yan distinguished between two of his key terms, stating that tianyan indicates the evolution of the universe and natural world while jinhua should refer exclusively to the progress of human society. In some places, Yan Fu used jinhua to refer specifically to moral progress. Through these connections to qun and to morality or ethics, Yan charted a clear path for the process of jinhua. It is clear that he advocated progress toward an advanced society by means of improved morality. On a key point, however, Darwin provided no guidance, as he was silent on the ultimate results of the process of natural selection. It was social Darwinists who tended to advocate moral and ethical improvements to strengthen society. As a faithful “bulldog” in defense of Darwin’s theory, Huxley pointed out the fallacy of the social Darwinist’s “moral flavour” in his 1893 Romanes Lecture.

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73 Guowen Bao was an influential newspaper during the Hundred Days Reform (June 11-September 21, 1898), published between October 1897 and December 1898.
74 An Anthology of Yan Fu, vol. 1, 85-88.
76 Shen Guowei (沈国威), “近代关键词考源: 保守、进步、进化、退化、退步,” (“The Origins of Early Modern Keywords: Conserve, Progress, Evolve, Degenerate, Regress,”) 东亚观念史集刊 (Journal of the History of Ideas in East Asia), no. 6 (2014): 315.
I suspect that this fallacy has arisen out of the unfortunate ambiguity of the phrase “survival of the fittest.” “Fittest” has a connotation of “best”; and about “best” there hangs a moral flavour. In cosmic nature, however, what is “fittest” depends upon the conditions.\(^{77}\)

Yan Fu evidently did not agree with Huxley on this point. In *Tianyan Lun*, the passage from Huxley quoted above was not translated, and the ambiguity inherent in the phrase “survival of the fittest” was not mentioned. It seems reasonable to infer that Yan Fu found the ambiguity to be useful for his purposes. In the Chinese version of the Spencerian catch-phrase, “shizhe shengcun,” (适者生存 “survival of the fittest”) the “unfortunate ambiguity” noted by Huxley was not reduced in the slightest. In Chinese, the word *shizhe* (适者) is not a superlative like “the fittest” in English. But the meaning of *shizhe* certainly corresponds to a range of meaning, from “fitter” to “fittest.” In this sense, the cruelty implied by the phrase “survival of the fittest” was reduced in Yan’s Chinese translation. The group of those who survived the process of natural selection was expanded to include those who were fitter as well as those who were the most fit.

*Jinhua and Sun Yat-sen*

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the theory of evolution was attractive to many revolutionaries and reformists in China. A wide variety of political activists claimed that their particular theories and programs were more “advanced” than others and would ensure China’s progress to a higher level of development. Instead of the word *tianyan*,

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\(^{77}\) Huxley, 80.
which was linked to the universe and Confucian ideology in Yan Fu’s elaboration,
political leaders clearly tended to prefer the phrase *jinhua*, which Yan had associated with
social progress. No matter whether they were nationalists or communists, all called for
immediate effects through revolutionary struggles and rapid reforms rather than the slow,
gradual changes seen in earlier reform programs.

A conversation between Sun Yat-sen and Yan Fu in 1905 demonstrates well the
difference in views between a revolutionary and a reformist.\(^78\) Yan believed that China
could be improved through a series of reforms; and criticized Sun’s efforts to mobilize
support for a revolution. Yan declared that, “In China today, the primary goal should be
to change the system of education.” Sun’s reply was, “You are a thinker, but I am a
doer.”\(^79\) Coincidentally, just a few months after this conversation, the Guangxu Emperor
(1871-1908) issued an edict ordering the immediate abolition of the imperial
examinations.\(^80\) Nonetheless, the Qing government’s sweeping educational reforms did
not prevent the eruption of China’s anti-monarchical revolution six years later. The
success of the Revolution of 1911 (Xinhai Revolution), followed by Sun Yat-sen’s
election as the Republic of China’s first President, apparently validated Sun’s radical
approach.

As the founding father of the first Republic in Chinese history, Sun Yat-sen also
contributed to popularizing the term *jinhua*. Sun showed no interest in Yan Fu’s term

\(^{78}\) This conversation took place in London, England. See Wang Shi (王栻), 严复传 (*A Biography of Yan
\(^{79}\) Wang Shi, 109.
\(^{80}\) Li Xinda (李新达), 中国科举制度史 (*The History of Chinese imperial examination system*, Taipei:
tianyan, but advocated jinhua as the standard translation of “evolution.” Furthermore, Sun proposed that the process of evolution could be divided into three stages: the evolution of matter, the evolution of species, and the evolution of humans. In contrast to Yan, Sun adopted Nels Quevli’s (1865-1957) ideas on Cell Intelligence, coining a term shengyuan (生元) for the translation of “cell.” In Chinese, sheng (生) means “to live,” or “to be born;” and yuan (元) means “beginning,” or “element.” As a compound word, shengyuan can mean either “elements of living beings,” or “the beginning of lives.” Sun Yat-sen explained the difference between his new term and jinhua as follows.

From the origin of cells (shengyuan) to the birth of human beings is the second stage in the process of evolution (jinhua). Species have evolved in size from tiny to very large, from simple to complex forms. They all follow the principles of “struggle for existence” and “natural selection.” After millions of years, humans emerged through the selection, and achieved survival as the fittest. At their starting point, humans were no different from other animals. However, through evolution over tens of thousands of years, humanity was formed, and the stage of human evolution began.

(由生元之始生而至于成人, 则为第二期之进化。物种由微而显, 由简而繁, 本物竞天择之原则, 经几许优胜劣败, 生存淘汰, 新陈代谢, 千百万年, 而人类乃成。人类初出之始, 亦与禽兽无异, 再经几许万年之进化, 而始长成人性。而人类之进化, 于是乎起源。)

Even though the term tianyan did not appear at all, it is clear in Sun’s discussion that the influence of Yan Fu’s Tianyan Lun remained significant. Except for Sun’s term

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81 The Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen, vol 1, 385.
82 Ibid.
84 Xinhua Dictionary, 436, 590.
shengyuan and his description of distinct stages of evolution, his phrases in Chinese had all been provided by Yan.

Calculations published by Jiang Yinghao in 2006 demonstrate clearly the shift from tianyan to jinhua early in the twentieth century. Jiang counted the frequency of these two words in three popular Chinese newspapers between 1897 and 1907.\(^{87}\) Jiang found that tianyan and jinhua both began to appear in Shiwu Bao in 1897.\(^{88}\) In that year, tianyan appeared five times, and jinhua appeared seven times in the newspapers he studied. In 1902, the appearance of tianyan increased in frequency to 55 occurrences while the frequency of jinhua increased to 261 times. In 1906, there were only seven appearances of tianyan but jinhua appeared 162 times.\(^{89}\) From 1897 to 1907, tianyan was used 147 times in all, and jinhua appeared 935 times.\(^{90}\) Jiang Yinghao thus concluded that the word jinhua proved to be more well-adapted to China’s social environment at the beginning of the twentieth century.\(^{91}\) Furthermore, the clear preference for the term jinhua is an indication of ideological transition in China. At a time when revolutionaries threatened the old order, tianyan, with its Confucian connotations, lacked the resonance of the rival Japanese-style jinhua.

\(^{87}\) The three newspapers are Shiwu Bao (时务报), Qingyi Bao (清议报), and Xinmin Congbao (新民丛报). Liang Qichao (1873-1929) was the editor of all three.
\(^{89}\) Jiang Yinghao, 80.
\(^{90}\) Ibid.
\(^{91}\) Jiang Yinghao, 88.
Critiques of Social Darwinist Philosophy

Although Sun Yat-sen discarded the Confucian-style term *tianyan*, he nonetheless expressed the spirit of Confucian ethics in his writing. He commented that the Spencerian phrase “survival of the fittest” was effective in the second stage of evolution, when competition was among species other than humans. Following the emergence of human society, however, the process of evolution should be transformed from the “crude material evolution” (野蛮物质之进化) to the “civilized evolution of ethics” (道德文明之进化). Instead of endorsing the law of the jungle, Sun advocated upholding Confucian moral principles for the benefit of Chinese society. Furthermore, Sun adopted Peter Kropotkin’s (1842-1921) theory of mutual aid to strengthen his argument. Sun declared his principles as follows.

competition is the principle for species; mutual aid, however, is the principle for human beings. Societies and countries are the substance (*ti*, 体) of mutual aid; meanwhile, moral principles, especially benevolence and righteousness (*renyi*, 仁义), are the functions (*yong*, 用) of mutual aid.

(物种以竞争为原则, 人类以互助为原则, 社会国家者, 互助之体也, 道德仁义, 互助之用也。) 93

Sun Yat-sen’s use of the linked terms meaning “substance” (*ti*) and “function” (*yong*) reflects a Confucian mode of thought. The combination of *ti* and *yong* with the theory of mutual aid showed in Sun’s discussion echoed the views of Feng Guifen (1809-

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1874) on the relationship between Chinese learning and Western learning. Like Wang Fuzhi and Yan Fu, when introducing theories from the West, Sun did not intend to damage the philosophical foundation of Confucianism. On the contrary, he persistently attempted to develop a theory based on Confucian ethics. In a speech delivered on August 30, 1912, Sun declared that since the Revolution of 1911 had succeeded, “savage knowledge,” (野蛮学问, yeman xuewen) such as Social Darwinism, should give way to “civilized knowledge,” (文明学问, wenming xuewen) which included the theory of mutual aid, and the traditional Confucian virtues. Sun also drew an analogy, declaring that Social Darwinism would damage the society of a republic like moths damage cloth, and concluded that Social Darwinism was not suitable for the young Republic of China.

Instead of advancing Western ideas, Sun Yat-sen proposed an ideal society—Datong (大同, great harmony, or Grand Union), as the final destination of human evolution. A popular paragraph of the Liji (礼记, Book of Rites), traditionally attributed to Confucius (551-479 BC), depicted an image of the society that achieved Datong.

When the Grand course was pursued, a public and common spirit ruled all under the sky; they chose men of talents, virtue, and ability; their words were sincere, and what they cultivated was harmony. Thus men did not love their parents only, nor treat as children only their own sons. A competent provision was secured for the aged till their death, employment for the able-bodied, and the means of growing up to the young. They showed kindness and compassion to widows, orphans, childless men, and those who were disabled by disease, so that they were all sufficiently maintained. Males had their proper work, and females had their homes. (They accumulated) articles (of value), disliking that they should be thrown away upon the ground, but not wishing to keep them for their own gratification. (They laboured) with their strength, disliking that it should not be exerted, but not exerting it (only) with a view to their own advantage. In this way

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95 Ibid.
96 The Complete Works of Sun Yat-sen, vol 6, 196.
(selfish) schemings were repressed and found no development. Robbers, filchers, and rebellious traitors did not show themselves, and hence the outer doors remained open, and were not shut. This was (the period of) what we call the Grand Union.  

Sun Yat-sen praised this Confucian-style utopia highly, and chose a phrase from this paragraph as a slogan: *tianxia weigong* (天下为公, the world is for all/the whole world is one community). Promoted by Sun, the saying *tianxia weigong* became as well-known in China as his Three Principles of the People (三民主义, *sanmin zhuyi*). In an autobiographical essay, Chiang Kai-shek (1887-1975) recalled Sun Yat-sen’s idealistic principles as follows.

When I started to study philosophy, I believed firmly in the principle of “survival of the fittest.” I once asked Sun Yat-sen, who was the premier of the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party), to write a couplet of these words for me. However, the premier was reluctant to do so. Two weeks later, he sent me a couplet with different words, *dadao zhixing, tianxia weigong* (大道之行, 天下为公). He explained that China has very good philosophies on ethics and politics. The philosophy of Social Darwinism was the one that modern westerners believed in; it could be dangerous thought if not handled well. The doctrines in the

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99 Ibid.
101 Chiang’s original words were *ruorou qiangshi, yousheng liebai*. (弱肉强食, 优胜劣败) These two phrases are both translations of the “survival of the fittest.” *Ruorou qiangshi* literally means “the weak are meat for the strong.” *Yousheng liebai* literally means “the superior win, and the inferior are defeated.”
Confucian classic *Da Xue* (大学, *The Great Learning*) and *Zhong Yong* (中庸, *The State of Equilibrium and Harmony*) are good ones for China.  

Just as Wang Fuzhi aimed to find a new *Dao* (道) through study of the Confucian classics, Sun Yat-sen was trying to establish his *Dao* on the foundation of Confucian ethics. By advocating the theory of mutual aid, along with Confucian ethical principles, Sun Yat-sen demonstrated his opposition to Social Darwinism.

Sun Yat-sen was not alone among China’s twentieth-century leaders in opposing Social Darwinism. Mao Zedong expressed opposition to social Darwinist philosophy beginning in the 1930s. In the 1950s, Mao even launched a movement to criticize a number of philosophers who held social Darwinist ideas. Before discussing Mao’s arguments, it would be best to examine briefly the connections between Marxism and evolutionary theory.

In the early twentieth century, the theory of evolution was held in such high regard that a variety of new ideas were introduced with an emphasis on their supposed associations with evolutionary thought. Marxism, the orthodox doctrine of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), first emerged in China as *shehui jinhua lun* (社会进化论, social evolutionism).

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evolutionary theory). Li Dazhao (1889-1927), a co-founder of the CCP, introduced Marxism using these words.

There are two key points in Marx’s historical materialism: one is the explanation of human experiences from culture; the other is evolutionary theory applied to social organisms.

According to Shan Jigang, Ma Junwu (1881-1940) was the first writer to introduce Marxism to China in a systematic manner. Ma was also the first Chinese translator of Darwin’s work *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Ma explained the relationship between Darwinism and Marxism in an essay published in 1903.

Darwin himself was not a materialist; however, his theory was in fact a kind of materialism. Marx was the one who used materialism to explain human history. Marx said: class struggle is the key to history. Therefore, the Marxists say that this point is really in accordance with Darwin’s principle “the struggle for existence.”

(达尔文虽非唯物论者, 然其学说实唯物论之类也。马克司者, 以唯物论解历史学之人也。马氏尝谓: 阶级竞争为历史之钥。马氏之徒, 遂谓是实与达尔文言物竞之旨合。) 

Earlier than Sun Yat-sen, Ma Junwu had the idea that at the starting point of human society, human struggles were no different from those of other animals. Together with the development of society, however, human struggles developed from the basic struggle to survive and multiple goals emerged, as humans struggled to achieve multiple

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104 The other co-founder was Chen Duxiu (1879-1942). See Wikipedia, accessed August 30, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Dazhao](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Dazhao).
105 Shan Jigang, 3.
purposes, such as rights, happiness, and other intangible goals. Meanwhile, Ma argued that the “struggle for existence” was not the only force directing the progress of human society; he claimed that social progress was also influenced by other principles such as the desire for equality and mutual aid. Furthermore, Ma stated that socialist theory did not contradict Darwinism, but served as an extension of Darwinism, and was truly a significant complement to Darwinism.

In Karl Marx’s (1818-1883) works, “a conception of progress” established the basis for historical materialism; however, the definition of “progress” was not clearly delivered by Marx. According to Tom Bottomore (1920-1992), a British Marxist sociologist, there were two implications in Marx’s explanation of progress. One was cultural progress, which depends on “the full development of human mastery over the forces of nature;” the other was that progress is not “a gradual, continuous and integrated process,” but “characterized by discontinuity, disharmony, and more or less abrupt leaps from one type of society to another, accomplished primarily through class conflict.” This Marxian view was in fact the basis for Mao Zedong’s critique of social Darwinist philosophy.

In the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals influenced by Tianyan Lun tended to conceive of the progress of Chinese society as a gradual, continuous and integrated process. Hu Shi, a leader of the New Culture Movement (1915-1923), adopted

107 Ma Junwu, 86.
108 Ma Junwu, 87.
109 Ibid.
112 Ibid.
John Dewey’s (1859-1952) philosophy of pragmatism, inventing the term *shiyan zhuyi* (实验主义) as a translation of experimentalism. Hu stated that for decades after the publication of Darwin’s book *On the Origin of Species* (1859), philosophers continued to use G. W. F. Hegel’s (1770-1831) definition of “evolution,” rather than Darwin’s.\(^{113}\) According to Hu Shi, Darwin’s idea of evolution was not applied in any philosophical theorizing until the birth of experimentalism in the twentieth century.\(^{114}\) Hu considered Dewey to be greatly influenced by Darwinist thought, and that Dewey’s philosophy was closely connected to Darwinism.\(^{115}\) Hu also adopted Dewey’s view that it is possible for social progress to occur through gradual change.\(^{116}\) Meanwhile, Hu pointed out that Marx’s dialectics were based on Hegelian dialectics, and therefore far from Darwinist evolutionary thought.\(^{117}\) Thanks to its introduction and promotion by Hu Shi and other Chinese intellectuals, Dewey’s philosophy became popular in China between 1920 and 1950.

Based on the philosophy of dialectical materialism, Mao Zedong saw the contradiction between the conception of a gradual, continuous process of evolution and the communist goal of violent revolution. In the 1950s, Mao launched a far-reaching campaign to criticize the ideas associated with evolutionary gradualism. Mao employed a term *yongsu jinhua lun* (庸俗进化论, vulgar evolutionism) as a general label for such thought, which included the evolutionary ideas of Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, Lester

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\(^{114}\) Ibid.

\(^{115}\) *Hu Shi Anthology*, vol. 2, 229.


\(^{117}\) Ibid.
F. Ward (1841-1913), and Eduard Bernstein (1850-1932). Identified as a faithful supporter both of Dewey’s philosophy and the leadership of the Guomindang (国民党, Kuomintang), Hu Shi was a major target in Mao’s campaign against vulgar evolutionism.

The scale of the campaign of criticizing *yongsu jinhua lun* in the 1950s was very large. According to Hu Shi’s memoir, articles containing approximately three million words in all were published in 1954 and 1955 alone to “expose and criticize the ‘specter of Hu Shi’. “118 For many of the authors attacking Hu Shi’s thought, Mao Zedong’s argument in a 1937 essay *On Contradiction* (矛盾论) served as a philosophical foundation.

The metaphysical or vulgar evolutionist world outlook sees things as isolated, static and one-sided. It regards all things in the universe, their forms and their species, as eternally isolated from one another and immutable. Such change as there is can only be an increase or decrease in quantity or a change of place. Moreover, the cause of such an increase or decrease or change of place is not inside things but outside them, that is, the motive force is external. Metaphysicians hold that all the different kinds of things in the universe and all their characteristics have been the same ever since they first came into being. All subsequent changes have simply been increases or decreases in quantity. They contend that a thing can only keep on repeating itself as the same kind of thing and cannot change into anything different.119

(所谓形而上学的或庸俗进化论的宇宙观, 就是用孤立的、静止的和片面的观点去看世界。这种宇宙观把世界一切事物, 一切事物的形态和种类, 都看成是永远彼此孤立和永远不变化的。如果说有变化, 也只是数量的增减和场所的变更。而这种增减和变更的原因, 不在事物的内部而在事物的外部, 即是由于外力的推动。形而上学家认为, 世界上各种不同事物和事物的特性, 从它们一开始存在的时候就是如此。后来的变化, 不过是数量上的扩大或缩小。)120

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On the basis of Mao Zedong’s argument, Chinese Marxist scholars elaborated a variety of supporting points. In Guo Yuezheng’s conclusion, some representative arguments were that Spencer should take the blame for vulgarizing Darwin’s theory of evolution, and that Spencer was at fault for denying the existence of qualitative changes and revolutionary leaps in social progress. Moreover, they argued, the idea of *yongsu jinhua lun* was created by bourgeois philosophers and sociologists to undermine the proletarian revolution and rescue the capitalist system, and *yongsu jinhua lun* ideas were “anti-science” (反科学) and “counter-revolutionary” (反革命).

During the 1960s and 1970s, as Mao Zedong’s political dominance continued, the criticisms of *yongsu jinhua lun* remained influential. Since the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), and the death of Mao in 1976, critiques of *yongsu jinhua lun* have seldom appeared in public, and *yongsu jinhua lun* has become an obsolete term.

In conclusion, Yan Fu’s creative interpretation of Darwinist and social Darwinist ideas in the book *Tianyan Lun* represented the arrival of evolutionary theory in China. Following the inclination apparent in Zhong Tianwei’s essays, Yan concentrated on explaining the principles of evolution in the context of Confucianism. Yan admired Spencer’s application of Darwinist principles in human society, however, he did agree to a certain extent with Huxley that the brutal competition between individuals and groups should be restrained by moral principles. Although the Chinese politicians later than Yan Fu did not agree with him on all points, the logic of Yan’s critique of Social Darwinism

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122 Ibid.
123 Guo Yuezheng, 19.
was inherited, especially in Sun Yat-sen’s discussions. During the second half of the twentieth century, Yan Fu’s influence in China became much weaker. Accompanying Mao Zedong’s critique of Social Darwinism, Yan’s theory of tianyan faded from the public view for a few decades. However, Yan’s design for the reform of the Chinese education system, and the new educational principles that he articulated, which were basically borrowed from Spencer, were inherited by generations of educationists in China. In the following chapter, connections will be traced between Yan’s educational principles and the official policies that currently direct education in China.
Chapter Five

Suzhi Education: Socialist Practice Informed by Social Darwinist Ideas

After surviving the tumultuous years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the Chinese leaders who succeeded Mao Zedong had the opportunity to modify national policies. In the context of the program of Reform and Opening announced in 1978, the government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) began to promote a new concept—suzhi education (素质教育, suzhi jiaoyu). In the 1980s, the word suzhi was used in educational circles to associate educational goals with the policy of improving “national quality.” Thereafter, the concept rapidly became widespread and soon dominated educational policies in the People’s Republic of China. From the Decision on the reform of education system (1985) to the Education Law (1995) and the Decision on Deepening Educational Reform and Fully Advancing Suzhi Education (1999), suzhi education evolved from a topic vaguely mentioned in passing to a complete theory, and was elevated to the status of a national strategy. Tens of thousands of articles, reports, and books discussing suzhi education have been published during the past few decades. In most of these works, suzhi education has been commended as a boon to the Chinese people. A few works have been more critical, raising questions on the meaning, scope, and practical value of the concept. An interesting fact is that most of the educational principles gathered under the banner of suzhi education were derived from Herbert Spencer’s ideas on education, introduced through Yan Fu’s promotion of social Darwinism. This chapter examines the origins of
the concept suzhi, the popularizing of suzhi education, and the connections between suzhi education and specific social Darwinist ideas.

**Etymological Origins**

In the Chinese context, the word *suzhi* has been used more than two thousand years, but not precisely in its modern meaning. The characters *su* (素) and *zhi* (质), which together formed the compound suzhi, each has distinct meanings. In the classical work *The Book of Odes* (诗经, 700-500 BC), the character *su* was used in the word *suguan* (素冠, a white hat), in which *su* means white. In *The Analects* (论语, 540-400 BC), *zhi* was used in the idiom—*wenzhi binbin, ranhou junzi* (文质彬彬, 然后君子), in which *zhi* means natural and solid qualities.¹ Over the next two thousand years, several other extended meanings were associated with the characters *su* and *zhi*, but the central meanings of white and nature remained constant. Today, in the best-selling Chinese-language dictionary, the *Xinhua Dictionary* (新华字典), the first explanation of *su* is still “natural color or white” (本色, 白色). The second explanation is “natural” (本来的), and the compound *suzhi* is provided to illustrate this meaning in the entry.² The two major meanings of *zhi* in the same dictionary are “body” or “natural” (本体，本性); and “simple” or “plain” (朴实).³ The three explanations of suzhi as a compound in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*

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³ Ibid, 628.
(现代汉语词典), the most reliable dictionary for press and publishing professionals, are the “nature of things” (事物本来的性质); “accomplishment” (素养); and a psychological term meaning “inborn traits of the human nervous system and sense organs.”

Meanwhile, the word zhisu (质素) is also defined in the Contemporary Chinese Dictionary. This compound contains the same Chinese characters in the opposite order as suzhi. Zhisu is identified as a dialect word meaning “accomplishment” (素养). Zhisu is also found in ancient texts. In Liu Xiang’s Shuo Yuan (说苑), written in the Han period, zhisu was used in the sentence “When I think about zhisu, white is just white, black is just black.” (吾思夫质素, 白当正白, 黑当正黑). The meaning of zhisu here is simple and plain. At the end of the nineteenth century, zhisu came into use as the translation of the English word “predisposition”. Many Chinese intellectuals used this meaning of zhisu in their essays, including Zhang Taiyan (章太炎, 正名杂义), Li Dazhao (李大钊, 什么是新文学) and Lu Xun (鲁迅, 忽然想到·十). Before 1949, zhisu was more popular than suzhi when used in reference to human characteristics. In the 1936 edition of the Cihai (辞海), zhisu was defined as “innate characteristics.”

Rong Ruo, a scholar based in Hong Kong, has claimed that zhisu was a commonly used word in the first half of the twentieth century; during the 1960s, it was

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5 Ibid, 1679.
8 Ibid.
replaced by suzhi in mainland China, but not in Hong Kong and Macao; therefore, it was mistaken for a dialect word by many, including language researchers. In the People’s Republic of China, some scholars have used the two words interchangeably, while others claim that zhisu and suzhi have distinct definitions.

In my view, disagreement about zhisu and suzhi demonstrates the significance attached to particular Chinese characters. No matter how they are ordered, the basic meanings of the single characters su and zhi always denote their core meanings. In the history of modern Chinese translation, uncertainty always haunts translators seeking to equivalent words. Certain words were not chosen because of the perfectness of their meaning, but by chance. In the case of zhisu, its obscurity following the shift to suzhi in mainland China reflected the dominance of absolutism in Chinese cultural circles. In China since 1980s new meanings and metaphors were associated only with the authorized form of the word. In the context of discourse on suzhi education, the synonym zhisu has disappeared.

**Translations and Debates**

Translations of the terms suzhi and “suzhi education” are diverse. Although its modern meaning was originally related to the word “predisposition” in English, suzhi has since taken on other connotations and therefore cannot usually be translated as predisposition. So far, there is no generally accepted translation of suzhi. Therefore, I use suzhi in pinyin transliteration (and suzhi education for suzhi jiaoyu (素质教育)). Individual translators of

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9 Ibid.
these terms, including those associated with official institutions, have interpreted their
meaning in various ways, and institutions have occasionally adopted new translations.
The variation in translation demonstrates that the meanings of suzhi and suzhi education
have always been open to interpretation.

According to Rong Ruo, zhisu (as the translation of “predisposition”) was widely
used in China during the first few decades of the twentieth century. The period
corresponds to the spread of social Darwinist thought in China. “Predisposition” was a
social Darwinist term used to describe certain qualities of human inferiority.

In Yan Fu’s social Darwinist thinking, improvement of the suzhi of Chinese
people should be promoted as a strategy of national salvation. In the 1980s, the social
Darwinian sense of saving the nation was still an implication in official statements on
suzhi education. Certainly, some new political meanings were infused into this concept
under the governance of the CCP. But neither government officials nor socialist scholars
defined this concept well. Consequently, the meaning of the term suzhi education
remained vague.

Due to its negative implications, “predisposition” has not been adopted in
translations of suzhi since the 1980s. Available materials show that “quality” and “quality
education” have been the most popular translations for suzhi and suzhi education since
1990s. Almost every English-language paper on suzhi has accepted the word “quality” in
translation. But many Chinese translators have felt that the English word quality is far
from the meaning of suzhi in Chinese. Zhao Zhongjian recommended the plural

\[10\] Ibid.
“qualities” for the translation of suzhi, and “education in qualities” for suzhi education, while “qualities-oriented education” was also acceptable.\textsuperscript{11} Zhang Yu’e argued that in the English-speaking world, quality is a word used frequently in the field of economic management; when it is used in the field of education, it always means good quality, or high quality.\textsuperscript{12} Zhang also mentioned that the concept of “quality education” was admired in some Western countries in the 1970s and 1980s, but its object was to cultivate those who demonstrated outstanding talent, which is very different from the goal of suzhi education.\textsuperscript{13} Thus Zhang suggested the translation of “education for all-round development” as the solution.\textsuperscript{14} This translation also was adopted by the Translators Association of China.\textsuperscript{15} In a co-authored paper, Wang Jingfei and Ge Shuhui argued that although this translation is better than “quality education,” it still fails to convey the meaning of “for all students,” suggesting a new translation of “open and comprehensive education”.\textsuperscript{16} In 1999, Liu Shaozhong and Liao Fengrong made a survey among Chinese students and scholars at Wake Forest University in North Carolina by email.\textsuperscript{17} Liu and Liao received twenty-three replies, none of which accepted the translation of “quality

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 93.  
\textsuperscript{16} Wang Jingfei (王景飞), and Ge Shuhui (葛树慧), “‘素质教育’到底如何译?” (“How should ‘suzhi education’ be translated?”) \textit{Journal of China University of Mining & Technology} (中国矿业大学学报), no. 3 (2001): 158, 159.  
\textsuperscript{17} Liu Shaozhong (刘绍忠), and Liao Fengrong (廖凤荣), “‘素质教育’英译的 Email 调查,” (“Translationg ‘suzhi jiaoyu’ into English: an email survey,”) \textit{Shanghai Journal of Translators in Science and Technology} (上海科技翻译), no. 2 (2002): 55-57.
education.” The favorite translation was “education on intellectual and non-intellectual qualities of people,” which was recommended in six replies. Through comparison and analysis, Liu and Liao concluded that “empowerment education,” which was adopted in three replies, was the best translation. Other influential translations for suzhi education include “competence education,” “character education,” and “nature-developing education.”

By reviewing these discussions on translation of “suzhi education,” we can see that the understandings and explanations of suzhi education have been versatile. Some scholars’ translations expressed only one aspect of the authorized descriptions of the PRC government, such as “nature-developing education” and “competence education.” Some translations conveyed the general understanding of a certain time or context, but were not suitable universally, such as “education for all-round development.” Therefore, it is necessary to examine the meaning of suzhi in the official documents of the Chinese government.

**Intentions of the Government**

In 1982, the *People’s Daily* (人民日报) began to use the term *renkou suzhi* (人口素质) to replace the term *renkou zhiliang* (人口质量). The two terms are closely synonymous. Both may be translated as “population quality.” By this link, we can find some trace of

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18 Ibid.
19 Zhang Yu’e, 91.
the most influential translation of suzhi—quality. In Chinese, *zhiliang* (质量) is the exact translation for quality in its most usages. But it seems inappropriate to use zhiliang to refer to any qualities or characters of persons or peoples. Zhiliang has two major meanings in the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*. One is a physical quantity which indicate the inertia mass of an object; the other refers to the quality of products or works.23 These two meanings both denote the attributes of objects. When juxtaposed with *renkou* (population), zhiliang appears to treat people like objects. In contrast, suzhi appeared to be a sympathetic and humanizing term.

As been mentioned above, the word suzhi has a long history in China. It has some traditional meanings, along with links to modern Western culture. Meanwhile, the two Chinese characters in this word are in common use, and are therefore easily understood by the general public. Modification of the term zhisu, used widely before 1949, gave suzhi a modern look. The promotion of suzhi therefore seemed to introduce a fresh new concept as part of the post-Mao reform program. At the same time, it provided official promoters with the opportunity to introduce a new policy direction.

Somewhat later than promotion of *renkou suzhi* (suzhi for the population) a set of policies on raising the suzhi of Chinese people was put forward in the 1980s. On May 27, 1985, the CCP Central Committee declared a *Decision on reform of the educational system* (中共中央关于教育体制改革的决定), in which the concept of *minzu suzhi* (national suzhi, 民族素质) was proposed.24 In this document, the basic goal of the reform

23 *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, 1679.
of the education system was to raise the national suzhi of the Chinese people, thereby encouraging the more widespread development of talent along with a deeper fostering of talent.\textsuperscript{25} Meanwhile the nine-year compulsory education was considered as an obligation of the state, and a key policy issue related to the raising of national suzhi and the country’s prosperity. In 1986, the newly enacted \textit{Compulsory Education Law of the PRC} provided detailed prescriptions for compulsory education. Article Three of this law states that the purpose of compulsory education is to implement the educational policies of the state; to improve education quality (\textit{jiaoyu zhiliang}, 教育质量), and to achieve the full development of children in morality, intelligence and physique; to lay a foundation for raising the suzhi of the whole nation, and fostering the construction of socialism through idealism, morality, literacy and discipline.\textsuperscript{26} Li Peng, as vice premier and director of the National Education Commission, delivered a speech on April 2, 1986 to present the draft of the \textit{Compulsory Education Law}.\textsuperscript{27} Li Peng declared that Article Three of the law expressed an important guiding ideology for implementation of the new legislation. Li stated that students’ burden of assignments and examinations should be reduced. Li also emphasized that the guidelines to be followed in elementary schools and middle schools featured the principle that moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic education should be comprehensively developed. In addition, there should be adequate attention to labour education (\textit{laodong jiaoyu}, 劳动教育).\textsuperscript{28}

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\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 236.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
It is noteworthy that before the *Compulsory Education Law* of 1986, the words suzhi and jiaoyu (教育 education) had never been juxtaposed before. Suzhi jiaoyu (suzhi education) first appeared as a phrase in 1987. According to a research report of the task team on the “Concept, Connotation and Related Theory of Quality Oriented Education”, the term suzhi jiaoyu was first used in a conference speech by Liu Bin,\(^{29}\) who was the vice director of the State Education Commission (国家教委)\(^{30}\). In 1988, according to Jiang Tong’s statement,\(^{31}\) suzhi jiaoyu first appeared in the title of a paper published on the periodical *Shanghai Education*.\(^{32}\) I have not found this article in the China Knowledge Resource Integrated Database (CNKI), which is the largest and most complete database of Chinese academic articles, but found another paper also published in 1988. In this paper, suzhi education was proposed as a new concept to replace the education for higher rates of entering higher schools (*shengxue jiaoyu*, 升学教育).\(^{33}\)

From that point onward, discussion of suzhi education intensified. I have searched “suzhi jiaoyu” by title in the CNKI database, and compiled data on publications appearing from 1988 to 2014. (Table 5.1)

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30 The name of the Ministry of Education of the PRC between 1985 and 1998.


32 Yan shi (言实), “素质教育是初中教育的新目标.” (“Suzhi jiaoyu is the new goal of the junior high school education,”) *Shanghai Education* (上海教育), no. 11, (1988): 43.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of publications (with suzhi jiaoyu in the title)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>36</td>
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<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>90</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>69</td>
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<td>1994</td>
<td>199</td>
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<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>339</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>999</td>
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<td>1997</td>
<td>2637</td>
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<td>1998</td>
<td>4473</td>
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<td>1999</td>
<td>5892</td>
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<td>2000</td>
<td>7228</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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<td>2002</td>
<td>4586</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>3541</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>2008</td>
<td>4625</td>
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<td>2009</td>
<td>4633</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>4506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2012</td>
<td>4008</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1  Publications with *suzhi jiaoyu* in the title (1988-2014)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Publications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2013</td>
<td>3723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2014</td>
<td>3166</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It will be easier to observe the fluctuation of the amount of publications during this period in a curve chart. (Table 5.2)

Table 5.2  The fluctuation of the amount of publications (1988-2014)
The Table illustrates that the number of articles on suzhi education peaked in the year 2000, following an entire decade of increasing attention to the concept. Thereafter, the number of publications declined until 2004. Considering political conditions in China, such trends do not occur randomly. The tenure of Jiang Zemin (江泽民) as the general secretary of the CCP was from 1989 to 2002, and the tenure of Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) was from 2002 to 2012.\textsuperscript{34} We can see that the warming up and peaking of discussion on suzhi education occurred during the tenure of Jiang Zemin. During Hu Jintao’s time in office, the fever of discussion on suzhi education dropped rapidly at first, and then stayed at a stable level. In 2012, China entered the era of Xi Jinping (习近平) as President and General Secretary of the CCP. Attention to suzhi education in publications fell off again. Although this was not as steep a decline as occurred between 2002 and 2004, the tendency of decline is apparent. Both declines could be explained as the result of instability in educational policies. Even though suzhi education has been upheld as a national policy in each period, each of the top leaders has emphasized it differently.

It is significant in relation to trends of attention to suzhi education that the Tiananmen Square protests erupted in 1989. Jiang Zemin assumed office just after the suppression of the protests. In late June 1989, Jiang Zemin was elected as the general secretary of the CCP in the fourth plenary session of the thirteenth central committee. At this juncture, party leaders considered that educational policy during the decade before

\textsuperscript{34} 新华网 (Xinhua Net), accessed August 15, 2016, \url{http://news.xinhuanet.com/ziliao/2004-10/25/content_2136722.htm}
1989 had been too open to Western thought and culture, especially in the universities and colleges. In a paper published just a few months after the Tiananmen Incident, the causes of the social unrest during the spring of 1989 were identified as “the deficient political and ideological qualities of the young students, and their low level of awareness of Marxism.”

Thus, from the standpoint of the CCP, it was necessary to find a new concept to help strengthen ideological control over Chinese young people. At that time, the word suzhi was still rather novel and had recently appeared in the text of the *Compulsory Education Law* (1986). Furthermore, as part of the terms population suzhi and national suzhi, the term suzhi had been promoted into the level of a national strategic goal. Therefore, the creation of the term suzhi education aptly fit a current political need.

Given the available materials, it remains unclear whether or not these terms were first promoted by Jiang Zemin’s administrative team. However, the phrase was first used by Liu Bin, vice director of the State Education Commission from June 1985 to March 1998.

According to an interview of Professor Chen Xiaobin at Beijing Normal University published in 1997, the term suzhi education was first mentioned by Liu Bin in a national-level conference on education. An excerpt of Liu Bin’s speech was published in the journal *Curriculum, Teaching Materials and Methods* (课程·教材·教法) in 1987. From then on, the phrase was adopted with enthusiasm in many parts of China. In 1988 and 1989, papers were published in *Anhui Education* (安徽教育), *Sichuan Education* (四川教育), *Jiangsu Education* (江苏教育), *Shandong Foreign Language Teaching Journal*

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(山东外语教学), and *Educational Research and Experiments* (教育研究与实验). Four of the five periodicals are hosted and issued in different provinces, as shown in their titles. *Educational Research and Experiments* is a periodical hosted by Central China Normal University in Wuhan.

Since 1990, articles on suzhi education appeared in *People’s Education*, the leading journal of education in China, hosted by the Ministry of Education of the PRC (教育部). Meanwhile, several other journals published by institutions and universities in Beijing also published papers on this topic. These journals included *Curriculum, Teaching Materials and Methods* (People’s Education Press); *Journal of The Chinese Society of Education* (中国教育学刊) (the Chinese Society of Education, under the supervision of the Ministry of Education); and *Educational Science Research* (教育科学研究), hosted by the Beijing Institute of Education Sciences and Beijing Open University.

In his report to the Fourteenth National Congress of the CCP on October 12, 1992, Jiang Zemin declared that the CCP must make education a strategic priority, and make efforts to improve the ideological, moral, scientific and cultural level of the whole nation, declaring this to be the fundamental emphasis for fulfillment of China’s modernization goals.\(^{37}\) Jiang also emphasized that the CCP’s education policies must be implemented comprehensively in all types of schools at all levels.\(^{38}\) A few months later, the *China Educational Reform and Development Program* document (中国教育改革和发展


\(^{38}\) Ibid.
展纲要，这里inafter referred to as the Development Program) was issued by the CCP Central Committee and the State Council (February 26, 1993). This program was formulated under the direction of the principles articulated at the Fourteenth National Congress of CCP. In the document, the former principle of “implementing the national educational policies” that had been upheld in the Compulsory Education Law, was modified to “implementing the educational policies of the Party and the nation.” Furthermore, this document also declared that all educational work must adhere to the Party’s leadership. In the Development Program, moral education in Chinese schools was defined as education in ideology and politics (思想政治) and moral education (品德教育). In addition, firm and correct political orientation was emphasized as the first priority in education. Strengthened instruction on the Party’s basic line (党的基本路线) should be provided to youth, to enhance students’ capacity to resist the corrosion of bourgeois liberalization and other decadent ideas originating with the exploiting class. In the aftermath of the Tiananmen Incident, the first priority of educational reform under Jiang Zemin was to strengthen control over the thoughts of Chinese young people.

In the Education Law of PRC, issued on March 18, 1995, the intention to strengthen ideological control was less apparent. In several articles, the benefits for the nation were stressed, and CCP leadership was not mentioned. However, the Notice on studying, publicizing and implementing the Education Law of the PRC (关于学习宣传和贯彻实施《中华人民共和国教育法》的通知, hereinafter referred to as the Notice) explained that study and publicizing of the Education Law should be combined with the implementation of the Development Program. Moreover, the Development Program was
considered as a fundamental policy of the *Education Law*, and a programmatic document for directing the educational reform and development of China. The *Education Law* fully reflected the basic spirit of the *Development Program*. The *Notice* was issued by the Ministry of Justice (司法部), the Publicity Department of the CCP central committee (中宣部), and the State Education Commission on March 24, 1995, just a week after the promulgation of the *Education Law*.

In comparing some corresponding articles in the *Compulsory Education Law* and the *Education Law*, we can see the shifting emphasis in different expressions. Article Five in the *Education Law* and Article Three in the *Compulsory Education Law* both discuss the purposes and targets of the education system in China, but different phrasing reflects different intentions.

**Article 5**  
Education shall serve the construction of socialist modernization, be combined with production and labour and satisfy the needs of training constructors and successors with all round development of morality, intelligence and physique for the socialist cause.

(第五条 教育必须为社会主义现代化建设服务，必须与生产劳动相结合，培养德、智、体等方面全面发展的社会主义事业的建设者和接班人。)  

**Article 3**  
In compulsory education, the State policy on education shall be implemented and quality-oriented education shall be carried out to improve the quality of education and enable children and adolescents to achieve all-around development—morally, intellectually and physically—so as to lay the foundation for cultivating well-educated and self-disciplined builders of socialism with high ideals and moral integrity.

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39 English and Chinese versions are all extracted from the website of the Ministry of Education of the PRC (中华人民共和国教育部网站), accessed August 27, 2016.  
In the Compulsory Education Law, the stated purpose of education was to improve the quality of education and enable youth to achieve all-around development. The aim to cultivate builders of socialism was mentioned, but was not emphasized as a primary educational goal. However, in the Education Law, issued nine years later, the purpose of education was defined as to “serve the construction of socialist modernization,” and to train “builders and successors” in the socialist cause. In the Article Five, “socialist” appeared twice, and a role of “successors” was added to the description of those receiving education. Combined with the Development Program and the Notice, the CCP’s aim of consolidating political power was evident. Education was a tool for the party to maintain its governance, and this purpose was articulated in law. The first priority of education in China during the 1990s was to cultivate politically correct (政治正确) constructors and successors. A clear implication of the fifth article of the Education Law was that China could not allow an incident like the protests in Tiananmen Square to re-occur. Indeed, no large-scale student protests have taken place in the People’s Republic of China since June 1989.

On June 13, 1999, the Decision on Deepening the Education Reform and Fully Advancing Suzhi Education was issued by the CCP central committee and the State Council of the PRC (中共中央、国务院关于深化教育改革全面推进素质教育的决定).
hereinafter referred to as the Decision). The Decision declared that suzhi education should be carried forward all around, and that new socialists should be cultivated to satisfy China’s modernization needs of the twenty-first century. This explanation of suzhi education combined the spirit of the Development Program and the Education Law, and also implemented the Party’s education policy by emphasizing the raising of national suzhi. The importance of moral education was emphasized more than ever in this document. It was stated that “schools of all kinds at all levels must pay more attention to the work of moral education,”\(^{41}\) and that moral education should be conducted with the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory.\(^{42}\)

There is also a slight difference between this document and the previous ones on aesthetic education. Since the Decision, aesthetic education was added to suzhi education as its fourth aspect, in addition to moral education, intellectual education and physical education. Table 1 (page 12) shows that the number of publications with suzhi jiaoyu in title was 7,228 in the year 2000. These official documents—the Development Program in 1993, the Education Law and the Notice of 1995, and the Decision in 1999 together reflect what appears to have been a deliberate policy to promote discussion and practice of suzhi education in China.

The Origins of Suzhi Education

Data on the volume of publication on suzhi education show that the intensity of discussion on suzhi education dropped off during the first few years of the twenty-first


\(^{42}\) Ibid.
century. Around this time, a common understanding of the meaning of suzhi education was reached. Beginning with the sixth edition of the *Contemporary Dictionary of Chinese* (2012), currently the most popular dictionary for writers and editors in China, suzhi jiaoyu (suzhi education) has been included as an entry. Its definition is given as “a type of education for the purpose of improving personal suzhi; and in its all links, the moral education, intellectual education, physical education, and aesthetic education are reinforced; especially to cultivate students’ spirit of innovation and practical abilities.”

This definition cited a passage from the *Decision*, omitting part of the content, apparently because of overtly political goals, such as the *Decision’s* emphasis on full implementation of the Party’s educational policy, along with the reference to the cultivation of socialist constructors and successors. This dictionary definition also complied with the spirit of the Ministry of Education, while peeling off the ideological surface of the Ministry’s statements.

Although the dictionary definition of suzhi education appears to be neutral, scientific, and contemporary, to a historian the definition is appears to be rooted in discourses of the past. Each component part of suzhi education—moral education, intellectual education, physical education and aesthetic education, had already been discussed earlier in Chinese history. The four aspects of suzhi education were already declared goals among educationalists during the late Qing and early Republican periods. Yan Fu advocated intellectual and physical education during the late nineteenth century.

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43 *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, 1241.
and Cai Yuanpei began to advocate aesthetic education soon after the founding of the Republic of China in 1911.

Introduced in Chapter Four, Yan Fu’s translation of Thomas Henry’s *Evolution and Ethics, and Other Essays* was a best-seller in China at the end of nineteenth century and the beginning of twentieth century. Yan Fu’s *Tianyan Lun* combined Yan’s own interpretation of Huxley with Herbert Spencer’s points on the theory of evolution. Yan Fu’s points on education were influenced greatly by the ideas of Huxley and Spencer. In his famous essay *Yuan Qiang* (原强, revised version, 1896), Yan Fu advocated that China’s priorities at that time would be achieved through efforts in three key areas, namely inspiring the people’s strength, illuminating the people’s intelligence, and promoting their morality (是以今日要政，统于三端：一曰鼓民力，二曰开民智，三曰新民德).⁴⁵ China’s national quality would thereby be improved. In another essay “On the relationship between education and the nation” (论教育与国家之关系, 1906), Yan Fu declared that education consisted of three aspects: physical, intellectual, and moral education. Although each of the three were important; in different circumstances, they should receive varying emphasis.⁴⁶ Before Yan Fu’s essays appeared, Herbert Spencer had published his book titled *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (1861), in which Chapters Two through Four were devoted successively to intellectual, moral, and physical education.⁴⁷ In 1882, the first chapter of Spencer’s book, discussing what sorts of knowledge are most valuable, was translated by a Chinese missionary named Yan

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¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 167.
Yongjing (颜永京), and published with the Chinese title Yiye Yaolan (肄业要览).48

Yan’s translation became very popular. In 1895, it was reprinted by Gezhi Shushi (格致书室, The Chinese Scientific Book Room), founded by John Fryer (1839-1928). Yan Fu, moreover, had studied at the Royal Naval College in Greenwich, England between 1877 and 1879, and might have had the opportunity then to read Spencer’s Education. It is very likely that Yan Fu had read the Chinese translation titled Yiye Yaolan by the time he composed his essay Yuan Qiang. Given Yan Fu’s stated admiration of Spencer’s thought, there is good reason to believe that Yan Fu’s points of intellectual education, moral education, and physical education were drawn directly from Spencer’s book. In an incomplete manuscript, Yan Fu quoted some of Spencer’s words on physical education.49 However, because Yan Fu’s quotation was a free translation,50 and no annotation was included, it is difficult to guess which were originally Spencer’s words. In the same essay, Yan Fu also cited Huxley’s view on education that there are two important functions of education: to open the mind, and to accumulate knowledge.51 At the end of the essay, Yan Fu wrote that education was constituted by physical, moral, and intellectual education, among which intellectual education was the most complicated. As for the situation of China, Yan declared that because intellectual education was not well-established, the intelligence of Chinese people was not high, and thus the nation was

49 The Works of Yan Fu, 278.
50 Yan Fu’s translation was “斯宾塞亦云：不讲体育而徒事姱心，无异一气机然，其筋绒关键极精，而气箱薄弱不任事也.”
51 Yan Fu’s words are “赫胥黎谓教育有二大事：一、以陶练天赋之能力，使毕生为有用可乐之身；二、与之以人类所阅历而得之积智，使无背于自然之规则。是二者，约而言之，则开瀹心灵，增广知识是已.” (The Works of Yan Fu, 280.)
weak. To overcome these shortcomings, Yan argued that to teach the science of physics would be the best solution.\textsuperscript{52} According to textual research by Wang Shi, this essay was written between 1901 and 1911.\textsuperscript{53} Huxley’s book \textit{Science and Education} (1895) had been published by this time.\textsuperscript{54} In Huxley’s view, there were four main aims in technical education. They were physical strengthening, the elevation of moral faculties, cultivation of intelligence, and acquisition of a broad and clear view of natural law.\textsuperscript{55} These aims appeared in Yan Fu’s essays as \textit{minli} (民力, popular physical strength), \textit{minde} (民德, popular morality), \textit{minzhi} (民智, popular wisdom), and education in \textit{wuli} (物理, physics). Therefore, Yan Fu’s ideas on education were drawn directly from Spencer and Huxley, and modified to meet what Yan considered to be China’s needs at the turn of the century.

Just a few years after Yan Fu’s essays on education were published, another Chinese educator, Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培, 1868-1940) advanced several new educational aims for the newly established Republic of China. From January to July 1912, Cai served as the first minister of education in the Provisional Government of the Republic of China. Later, he was President of National Peking University (January 1917 to July 1926, and September 1929 to December 1930), also served as the first President of the Academia Sinica (中央研究院, Central Research Academy) from April 1928 to March 1940. In an essay published in 1912, Cai advocated five key aspects of modern education for the Republic of China. As Cai wrote,

\textsuperscript{52} \textit{The Works of Yan Fu}, 285.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 278.
On each of these five points there should be neither special emphasis nor negligence in today’s education. The principle of military citizenship, the utilitarian principle, and the moral principle are the three aspects of political education. Two other key principles, namely world view and aesthetic education, are above politics.\textsuperscript{56}

...Corresponding to the three kinds of education, the principle of military citizenship is physical education; the utilitarian principle is intellectual education; the moral principle and aesthetic education are related to moral education; and the world view unified all the three kinds of education.\textsuperscript{57}

There is a common feature in Cai Yuanpei and Yan Fu’s ideas, which were both influenced deeply by Social Darwinism. Yan Fu’s educational ideas were based on Spencer and Huxley’s theories. Yan’s intention was “to strengthen the army and enrich the state” (强兵富国). Cai Yuanpei’s principle of military citizenship and the utilitarian principle are also aimed at the same target of strengthening the nation and nationalism. Cai and Yan’s educational proposals shared the aim of cultivating a powerful and prosperous new China, and to thereby to ensure China’s survival in international competition. Departing somewhat from Yan Fu’s program, however, Cai Yuanpei added two additional aims to the set, namely aesthetic education and the world view. These aspects of education would promote the Chinese people’s understanding of the world and enhance their feelings of happiness. In Cai’s words, aesthetic feeling was the combination of beauty and dignity, and was also a bridge between the phenomenal world and the noumenal world. According to Cai, the concept of aesthetic education had been


\textsuperscript{57} Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培), \textit{蔡孑民先生言行录} (Words and Acts of Cai Yuanpei, Beijing: Xinchao She (新潮社), 1920), 199.
developed by Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), and later philosophers had not refuted Kant’s arguments.\textsuperscript{58}

A century later, all three aspects of Yan Fu’s educational proposal, together with four of the five principles articulated in Cai Yuanpei’s writings on educational goals, were adopted by the government of the PRC. From the widely accepted definition of suzhi education in the \textit{Contemporary Chinese Dictionary} to the official document \textit{Decision}, most contemporary discussions on suzhi education have argued that four aspects of education should be distinguished and promoted, namely moral, intellectual, physical, and aesthetic education. Although the world view, one of the five principles in Cai Yuanpei’s scheme, has not been adopted in any specific aspect, it is nonetheless reflected in the policies on suzhi education. In the \textit{Decision} (1999), Article Three states as follow.

The schools of all kinds and at all levels must pay more attention to the work of moral education, and the work should be conducted with the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory…Education on dialectical materialism and historical materialism should be reinforced to help students to build up scientific views on the world and life.

(各级各类学校必须更加重视德育工作，以马克思列宁主义、毛泽东思想和邓小平理论为指导……要加强辩证唯物主义和历史唯物主义教育，使学生树立科学的世界观和人生观。)\textsuperscript{59}

These statements reveal that in the context of suzhi education, the inculcation of a world view advocated by Cai Yuanpei has been modified, becoming a component of moral education. At the same time, Cai’s point that the world view is supra-political has

\textsuperscript{58} Ibid, 197.
been rejected. According to current educational doctrine, a world view must be
subordinated to political authority and serve political goals. Although most of Cai
Yuanpei’s educational ideas have been accepted by the government of PRC, this
significant difference demonstrates the ideological differences between the nationalistic
educationalists of the early twentieth century and the aims of the contemporary Chinese
state.

Much has changed in China since the late nineteenth century. Although the
national weaknesses described in Yan Fu’s essay have been largely overcome under the
governance of the CCP, the aims of Cai Yuanpei’s modern educational program have not
only been modified but remain far from realization. Although the concept of suzhi
education appears to be a scientific successor of the educational ideas of Cai and Yan, as
created in the 1980s, the concept has some problematic aspects, and many controversies
have accompanied the process of its extension and the implementation of suzhi
educational policy.

Critiques of Suzhi Education

As mentioned above, the phrase “suzhi education” was first endorsed publicly in an
address by Liu Bin at a conference of the Chinese Educational Association in 1987, and
an excerpt of his speech was published under the title “Strive to improve the quality of
fundamental education.” Liu introduced the concept of suzhi education for a socialist

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60 Liu Bin (柳斌), “努力提高基础教育的质量.” (“Strive to improve the quality of fundamental
citizenry (社会主义公民的素质教育). He outlined a system of fundamental education which would include a nine-year program of compulsory education along with education at the senior middle-school level, serving to promote socialist material progress and cultural and ethical progress as well, thus enhancing the “quality” of the entire nation. In Liu’s view, the aims of such a system of fundamental education were tied closely to determined resistance against tendencies toward “total westernization.” During December 1986, a few months before the publication of Liu’s speech, students had organized strikes in more than twenty cities across China. On December 30, 1986, Deng Xiaoping stated that these protests were the result of the government’s laissez-faire attitude regarding bourgeois liberal thought. In the published excerpt of his speech, Liu strongly denounced “total westernization” as an erroneous tendency that had appeared in China’s educational system. Liu also declared that the core of Western civilization was individualism, that Western society was driven by personal interests, causing a competitive law of the jungle to prevail, and that this would inevitably lead to humanity’s complete psychological and spiritual collapse. It is interesting that in Liu’s words, the struggle for survival in human society was identified as a negative characteristic of the Western world. In fact, numerous Chinese intellectuals and politicians, beginning with Yan Fu, and including Mao Zedong and others of his generation, had strongly endorsed social Darwinist ideas regarding competitive struggle.

61 Ibid, 3.
62 Ibid.
64 Liu Bin, 2.
Two years later, the student movement surged again, more strongly than ever. Published a few months after the Tiananmen Incident of 1989, Wang Hai’s paper “From shengxue (升学) education to suzhi education”, attributed the recent student protests to educational trends. According to Wang, during the preceding decade, the concept of zhiyu diyi (智育第一, intellectual education is the first priority) had become dominant, and fundamental education was transformed into purely academic education, aiming at increasing the rates of admission into higher-level schools. Consequently, political and ideological education in schools at all levels had not received sufficient attention, and the political and ideological qualities of young students were low as a result. Therefore, in Wang’s view, the first priority of China’s socialist education must be to foster students’ absolutely correct political direction. Through the statements by Liu Bin and Wang Hai, we can see that there were two overlapping trends during the 1980s. One trend was official criticism of the student strikes, and the other was the promotion of suzhi education. After the student strikes in 1986, suzhi education was promoted in the speech of a vice-ministerial official; soon after 1989, discussion and practice of suzhi education burgeoned across the country.

Critical discussion of the ideas associated with suzhi education appeared before long. For instance, Wang Cesan, a professor of education at Beijing Normal University, argued that in Chinese fundamental education, the prevalent opinion of transforming “education for testing” to suzhi education reflected a mindset of “despising

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65 Wang Hai, 16-17.
66 Ibid, 16.
knowledge.” ⁶⁷ *Yingshi jiaoyu* (应试教育, education for testing) and the aim to increase the rates of entering higher schools (升学率) were set in opposition to suzhi education by many officials and specialists in education after Liu Bin’s speech in 1987. In Wang’s view, Liu’s statement represented a conception of education that denigrated knowledge, and could be traced back to the critiques of *zhiyu diyi* (intellectual education is the first priority) made in 1958. The issue was a sensitive one. During the late 1960s, Cultural Revolution radicals had taken extreme positions on education. Some denied the value of all abstract knowledge and contended that China’s educational systems should be completely dismantled. ⁶⁸ Wang Cesan argued that statements found in the *Decision on the Reform of Education System by the CCP Central Committee* (中共中央关于教育体制改革的决定, 1985) made clear that continuing through the mid-1980s, erroneous views that were contemptuous of education, knowledge, and talent continued to be upheld, reflective of the influence of extreme leftist views that continued to affect the field of education in China despite the official closure of the Cultural Revolution. ⁶⁹ It is significant that since the founding of the PRC, radical thought has always despised knowledge and intellectuals. The situation was very different in the first half of the twentieth century. In Yan Fu’s educational thought, traditional education in China had placed too much emphasis on moral education, while neglecting physical and intellectual education. Yan argued that intellectual development was the most complex form of

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⁶⁹ Ibid.
education, and had not been handled properly in the past, resulting in the low intelligence of the Chinese people, and China’s weakness as a nation.\textsuperscript{70} It is remarkable that just fifty years later, when education remained undeveloped in China, radical political leaders and intellectuals believed that intellectual education was being over-emphasized. It is also noteworthy that this way of thinking revived during the 1980s. The first priority of suzhi education was to strengthen instruction aimed at political and ideological correctness and conformity, emphasizing this over education aiming to develop intelligence and build knowledge.

During its first few years, the educational policy of the newly established government of the PRC adhered quite closely to the educational aims advanced by Cai Yuanpei. In the \textit{Interim Provisions of Middle Schools (draft) and Interim Provisions of Primary Schools (draft)}, issued by the Ministry of Education in 1952, the following goals were set: to “implement intellectual education, moral education, physical education, and aesthetic education in all around development” (实施智育、德育、体育、美育全面发展的教育).\textsuperscript{71} Thus the four aspects of Cai Yuanpei’s educational program were adopted, and intellectual education was endorsed as the most important aspect of education. In 1957, however, in the course of a discussion on the issue of all-round human development, Mao Zedong proposed that “our educational policy should ensure that the recipients of education develop through moral education, intellectual education, and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{70} \textit{The Works of Yan Fu}, 285.
\end{itemize}
physical education, so as to become cultured labourers with socialist consciousness” (我们的教育方针，应该使受教育者在德育、智育、体育几方面都得到发展，成为有社会主义觉悟的有文化的劳动者).\textsuperscript{72} In Mao’s statement, aesthetic education was omitted, and the sequence of the other three aspects was changed. Moral education has been promoted as the first priority of education ever since. This emphasis continued in educational policies promoted by Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. Under Jiang Zemin’s leadership, \textit{de} (德, morality, virtue) was emphasized not only in the field of education, but also in national governance. In January 2001, Jiang raised the concept of \textit{yide zhiguo} (以德治国, govern the country with virtue), and advanced the policy of “governing the country by combining the rule of law with the rule of virtue” (把依法治国与以德治国紧紧结合起来).\textsuperscript{73} The contents of \textit{yide zhiguo} are almost identical to the principles emphasized in the \textit{Education Law} (1995) and other official documents on suzhi education.

Governing the country by virtue is governance with the guidance of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory, focused on serving the people, by the principle of collectivism, with the mandates of love the motherland, love the people, love labour, love science, love socialism … to build a socialist ideological and moral system, which is adapted to the development of the socialist market economy.

(“以德治国”就是要以马列主义、毛泽东思想、邓小平理论为指导，以为人民服务为核心，以集体主义为原则，以爱祖国、爱人民、爱劳动、爱科学、爱社会主义为基本要求，以职业道德、社会道德、家庭美德的建设为落脚


Except for the phrase yide zhiguo itself, there is almost nothing new in this formulation. From a historical viewpoint, however, Jiang’s this concept is a modern application of Confucius’s political idea, weizheng yide (为政以德), meaning that virtue is the foundation of good governance. The function of moral education in today’s China, which contains the world view and the civil morality of Cai Yuanpei’s educational idea, also corresponds to the educational aims of the late Qing government, which includes zhongjun (忠君, loyalty to the emperor), zunkong (尊孔, reverence for Confucius), and shanggong (尚公, advocating virtue), the last of which corresponds to moral education.76 Loyalty to the emperor has been replaced by loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. Revering Confucius and Confucianism has been replaced by the veneration of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and Deng Xiaoping Theory. The diversified worldview of Cai Yuanpei’s proposals has been reduced to Marxism and socialism. Therefore, the concepts of de (德) and deyu (德育) featured in the promotion of suzhi education reflect the continuity of a traditional political principle that virtue upholds a government’s authority, with the supplementary assistance of a newer conception of moral education. In the Chinese official documents and public statements, however, Marx’s theory of the people’s all-round development is the only theoretical

76 Cai Yuanpei, 202. The other two aims of the late Qing government were shangwu (尚武, corresponding to physical education) and shangshi (尚实, corresponding to intellectual education).
foundation of the idea of suzhi education. Reference to other Western thinkers, such as John Locke, Thomas Huxley, or Herbert Spencer, is completely lacking.

Since suzhi education was first promoted by Chinese officials, observers have questioned the meaning and application of the concept. Chen Xiaobin, of the department of education at Beijing Normal University, thought that the term suzhi education had not been carefully considered when the official promotion was issued. Huang Fuquan argued that in the process of implementing the policies on suzhi education, the policy’s goals of formalism and political enthusiasm were much more significant than its concern with science and reasoning. Therefore, according to Huang, the promotion of suzhi education was merely “using a slogan to lead the practice of education” (用口号领导教育). In the twenty-first century, Fu Lujian, a specialist at the Shanghai Academy of Educational Sciences, stated that given the unsystematic articulation of the policies on suzhi education, together with the concept’s suspect implications, the policy was perhaps mere formalism. Ye Lan, another professor based in Shanghai, also considered that the work of suzhi education would face many difficulties. Through these questions, we can see that the concept of suzhi education remains unclear in many Chinese specialists’ minds. To officials, however, the purpose of implementing these policies was clear: to

77 “Concept, connotations and theory related to of quality education,” 6.
improve the nation’s “quality” was their pronounced goal, while strengthening CCP-led governance is demonstrably the real purpose of the policies.

It is also noteworthy that the “quality” of labour is an important component in the conception of suzhi education. Since Mao Zedong’s statement on educational policy in 1957, the development of “cultured labourers” has always been mentioned as an aim of socialist education. In every official document on suzhi education, labour has been stressed along with the listing of three or four aspects of suzhi education. Consequently, a few scholars have even introduced the phrase “wuyu” (五育, five aspects of education), in which labour has been added as a fifth component of suzhi education.82 The concept of wuyu has not received broad support, however, and has not appeared in official documents. The Education Law (1995) states that “education shall serve the construction of socialist modernization, be combined with production and labour and satisfy the needs of training constructors and successors with all-round development of morality, intelligence and physique for the socialist cause.”83 In an earlier document—the Development Program (1993), education was emphasized that would serve the construction of socialist modernization and be combined with production and labour.84 Before 1999, the Decision still featured similar phrases, such as “the combining of

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education and productive labour.” In the above documents, labour was not adopted as a single aspect of education, but its importance was emphasized. Combined with production, labour was definitely viewed as an indispensable link in the process of achieving socialist modernization.

In conclusion, as a dominant idea about the purpose of education in China in the last decade of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, the concept of suzhi jiaoyu was infused with meanings beyond its original connotations. The moral education, intellectual education, and physical education implemented in the official policy of suzhi education, corresponded closely to the minli (民力, popular physical strength), minde (民德, popular morality), and minzhi (民智, popular wisdom) articulated as educational principles by Yan Fu, and derived directly from Herbert Spencer’s writing on education. In Yan’s mind, implementation of these three principles was the crucial approach for China to survive as an independent country. Even almost a century later, hints of “save the species,” (baozhong, 保种) and “save the group” (baoqun, 保群) remain evident in the concept of suzhi education. However, educational administrators in the CCP-led government certainly have more confidence of the survival of China. Despite this, they have sought to infuse more duties into educational curricula, seeking to improve national quality, and to advance the construction of socialist modernization. Thus, the educational principles based on social Darwinist ideas were

subtly merged into the Chinese socialists’ striving for modernization in the late twentieth century.
Conclusion

Through an examination of the discussion of certain social Darwinist concepts in different periods, and analysis of the connections between these concepts and Chinese ideologies, the preceding chapters have traced connections between Social Darwinism and Wang Fuzhi’s Qi-ism, Zhuangzi’s *Huasheng shuo*, Yan Fu’s *Tianyan lun*, and suzhi education. The aim of this study was not to provide a panoramic description of all Chinese concepts related to Social Darwinism, nor to uncover links among all ideas influenced by the dissemination of Social Darwinism in China. On the contrary, my approach was to focus on several of the most distinct concepts and ideas, and sought to draw previously undiscovered connections between them. From the two indigenous Chinese intellectual roots of the theory of evolution, to the first appearance of Spencer’s theory in China, to the success of a social Darwinist theory in a Chinese form, and later to the application of educational principles based on social Darwinist ideas, this dissertation has traced the intellectual lineage of evolutionary ideas in modern Chinese social thought.

A fully satisfactory term for the set of social Darwinist concepts and ideas that developed in China has not yet been devised. The set was composed of certain fragmentary and far from coherent ideas reflecting the influence of Confucianism and other Chinese ideologies as well as new propositions. James Pusey’s term “Confucian Darwinism” could be a choice. However, this term has two shortcomings. First, it places the stress on Darwinism, neglecting the influence of Social Darwinism. Second,
Confucianism was not the only ideology that influenced the formation of certain social Darwinist ideas in China; Daoism and even Buddhism also made contributions. Therefore, the term “Confucian Darwinism” appears only in Chapter Two, which discusses Pusey’s work and Darwinism. Elsewhere in this study, I have referred to “social Darwinist ideas” and “social Darwinist concepts.”

An issue in my research is that the relevant materials in Chinese are abundant, while in English they are few. Due to time constraints, in this study does not attempt to translate and elaborate on all the Chinese concepts and ideas linked to Social Darwinism. Therefore, the cases examined are those most relevant to the theme. For example, Wang Fuzhi’s thought also inspired the rise of Chinese nationalism in the early twentieth century. Although I mentioned this in Chapter Two, I did not elaborate on Wang and nationalism. In fact, the development of nationalism in China and the spread of social Darwinist thought shared the same time span and similar intellectual foundations. As well as its anti-Manchu (反滿) emphasis, Chinese nationalism at the turn of the century featured certain social Darwinist elements. However, I consider Wang Fuzhi’s Qi-ism and the concepts explored in this study to be more significant parts of the set of social Darwinist ideas that circulated in China than nationalism.

In contrast to nationalism, eugenics is a discipline closely connected to Social Darwinism. However, I found it difficult to fit the topic of eugenics into any of the preceding chapters and was unable to include an additional chapter to focus on it. Therefore, I will briefly address eugenics here. Compared to the social Darwinist concepts translated by Yan Fu, the principles of eugenics did not draw much attention from Chinese intellectuals in the first half of twentieth century. The Chinese publications
on eugenics were few, and most were published in the 1920s. Pan Guangdan (1899-1967) was almost the only Chinese scholar who could be called a eugenicist. Pan’s major contributions to the development of eugenics were that he established the Chinese Eugenics Association in 1924, edited a few Chinese journals on eugenics, and composing books on eugenic principles.86 Because of warfare and political conditions, Pan’s promotion of eugenics halted during 1930s. Like the so-called vulgar theory of evolution (yongsu jinhua lun), eugenics as a theory received vehement critiques between the 1950s and 1970s.87 In China’s family planning policy (计划生育), launched in the 1970s, certain eugenic principles were employed. However, in the propaganda of the PRC government, the term yousheng xue (优生学), which is the standard translation of eugenics in Chinese, lacked the negative connotations of eugenics in the West. Yousheng xue referred instead to recent advancements in the study of human genetics. On topics related to family planning and eugenics, several scholars have contributed their thoughts in books including Cultivating Global Citizens: Population in the rise of China (2010); Imperfect Conceptions: Medical Knowledge, Birth Defects, and Eugenics in China (1998); and Struggle for National Survival: Eugenics in Sino-Japanese Contexts, 1898-1945 (2002).88 While doing my best to trace an intellectual lineage through Chapter Two to Five in a coherent manner, it is my hope to continue and expand the scope of my

research in the future by examining links between social Darwinist ideas and eugenics in China.

Overall, this thesis is not only an analysis of the acceptance of Western ideas in China, but also an exploration of the intellectual responses of Chinese society to the modern world. In this sense, Chapter Two was about a preparation for transition between two eras. During my research, I wondered whether another theory would have risen to prominence instead if the theory of evolution had not come to China. Could any other theory have had an equivalent influence? And would it be a theory drawn from Confucianism, Daoism, or any other Chinese school of thought? These concerns are reflected in Chapter Two. Wang Fuzhi’s thought was completely rooted in the soil of Chinese philosophy. There is no evidence that he was influenced by Christian missionaries from Europe or by another type of transmission of foreign ideas. Nonetheless, in his philosophy Wang developed ideas that were similar to dialectical materialism. Meanwhile, although he did not make advances in the direction of modern biology, Wang’s interpretations of certain changes in the natural world and human body certainly inherited the evolutionary views of Daoist scholars, and moved forward to a kind of evolutionary philosophy. The goal of Wang Fuzhi’s scholarly efforts was clearly to change Confucianism for a practical purpose, adapting ancient teaching in response to a changing world.

The revival of Wang Fuzhi’s works at the end of the nineteenth century reflects a consistent need within Chinese society. In the late nineteenth century, China was endangered by exterior forces, providing shocks similar to those of the seventeenth century when Wang Fuzhi experienced the fall of the Ming regime. The establishment of
the Shanghai Polytechnic was one of various initiatives that enlightened Chinese officials took for the purpose of strengthening China. Through the Prize Essay Contest, intellectuals were mobilized to generate ideas on how to reform the Chinese empire. Zhong Tianwei’s award-winning essays were composed in these circumstances, and aimed to contribute theoretical support for reforms. In contrast to Zhong’s essays, Yan Fu’s translations conveyed an appeal that was much more clear. Yan sought to save China through the introduction of new ideas. Like Wang Fuzhi, Yan was devoted to making changes to existing theories. Through Yan’s efforts, Darwinism and Social Darwinism were transformed to fit the environment of China. Furthermore, Yan’s creation—*Tianyan Lun*, was successful in inspiring people, not only to pursue reforms, but also to seek revolution.

Although Yan himself was a social reformer, his theory of *Tianyan* inspired many Chinese revolutionaries. Two very different political leaders, namely Sun Yat-sen and Mao Zedong, were both greatly influenced by Yan’s theory. Sun and Mao did not accept social Darwinist philosophy, however, nor did they agree with Yan’s advocacy of reform. Therefore, Sun and Mao both criticized Social Darwinism from their respective vantage-points. The two were also both ambitious about creating their own theories. Sun’s *Sanmin Zhuyi* (三民主义 Three Principles of the People), and Mao’s sinicization of Marxism are their contributions to the construction of new ideologies for modern China.

In the late twentieth century, after the ending of the Mao era, China entered a new phase. Certain ideas that had influenced China many decades earlier returned to public view. The word suzhi was popularized with the resurgence of certain social Darwinist ideas. The theory of suzhi education was indeed an echo of the educational principles of
Herbert Spencer, as they had been expressed and promoted by Yan Fu, Cai Yuanpei, and other Chinese intellectuals in the twentieth century.

In short, during the past one hundred and fifty years, generations of Chinese intellectuals sought a new *Dao* (道 the Way) for China to follow in adapting to the modern world. Their efforts brought about an accelerated modification of certain Western theories, and helped these theories adapt to the environment of Chinese society. Through their efforts, not only were Western theories able to adapt, but Chinese society also adapted, its members becoming *shizhe* (适者 survivors) in the modern world.
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