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# CONTROLLING MINDS: GUO RENYUAN, BEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGY, AND FASCISM IN REPUBLICAN CHINA

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*In this article, the author explores the life of the Chinese psychologist Guo Renyuan (郭任遠 1898–1970). As a radical behaviorist, Guo believed that he could “engineer” the ideal Chinese citizen through a combination of proper political education, militarized discipline, and the wholesale removal of negative social stimuli. Guo was given the opportunity to test his hypotheses through a series of high-ranking administrative positions at Fudan University, Zhejiang University, and in the Nationalist Education Ministry. This article argues that Guo’s social engineering pursuits, which were consistently supported by the Nationalist government, reveal the politicized nature of the social sciences in Republican China as well as the direct correspondence between radical behaviorism and Chinese fascism.*

KEYWORDS: *behaviorism, psychology, fascism, education*

In 1960, Guo Renyuan drafted a long overdue letter to a close friend. Having moved from mainland China to Hong Kong fourteen years earlier (and having left behind his home, family, and promising career as a psychologist and Nationalist statesman in the process), Guo’s letters were generally filled with past regrets and present woes; at one of his lowest moments, he went so far as to characterize himself as little more than a “walking dead man” condemned to inhabit the “intellectual and cultural desert” of the British colony for the remaining years of his life.<sup>1</sup> Yet the letter he was about to write was marked with an uncharacteristic enthusiasm. “I am,” he proudly confessed, “scientifically reactivated after nearly fifteen years of hermit life.”<sup>2</sup> As Guo revealed to his friend, he had decided to embark upon one final scientific publication: a career-defining tome that could serve as the capstone to his life as a behavioral psychologist. The manuscript, which Guo mailed along with his letters in chapter-length segments, revealed an unexpected twist. Although the headstrong psychologist had originally made a name for himself on the basis of his unyielding support for radical Watsonian behaviorism, he had ironically decided to crown his career with a tome that contradicted almost everything he had accomplished

<sup>1</sup> Guo Renyuan, letter to Leonard Carmichael, November 3, 1958. The Leonard Carmichael correspondences are held at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, September 12, 1960.

up until that point. How had a man, so driven by his unflagging faith in behaviorist law, come to question the very rudiments of the science upon which he had forged his career?

In order to answer this question, it is necessary to take a closer look at the vicissitudes of Guo's life in Republican China (1911–49). In two previous retellings of his life story, Guo has been portrayed as either a scientist or a statesman, as though these two facets of his career stand at irreconcilable ends of an occupational divide. His obituary, written by the American psychologist Gilbert Gottlieb, is divided into “public” and “private” sections, with the former addressing Guo's scientific pursuits and the latter hinting at his political undertakings—something that the author knew very little about.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Geoffrey Blowers' 2001 article on Guo's “other” career as a university administrator presents Guo's political endeavors as little more than an “ironic twist” in the psychologist's otherwise scientifically oriented existence.<sup>4</sup> While Blowers acknowledges that Guo was involved, to some extent, in the nation-building program of the Nationalist government, he fails to draw any connections between Guo's science and his socio-political interests. As a result, Blowers has no choice but to characterize Guo's affiliation with the Nationalists as “some still-to-be-accounted-for fact.”<sup>5</sup>

Through a careful investigation of Guo's personal and academic writings, this paper will argue that Guo's political pursuits were influenced by his scientific beliefs, while his evolving attitude toward behavioral psychology was likewise informed by his experiences working in conjunction with the Nationalist government. Indeed, at a time when the very notion of “science” seemed to hold the key to national salvation, Guo's desire to apply psychological theories toward sociopolitical ends was nothing out of the ordinary. As one author put it, social science research in Republican China was part of a larger movement toward “an empirical study of society” that aimed to “control the social, political, and economic forces at work.”<sup>6</sup> In other words, intellectuals of the time did not turn to the social sciences for purely philosophical ends, but instead deployed social science ideas and methodologies as a means of gaining control over the heretofore-ungovernable elements of human life. Guo, aspiring to achieve the “advancement of mankind,”<sup>7</sup> spent much of his career in the laboratory attempting to derive steadfast, experimentally proven laws that could then be applied toward the practical ends of behavioral and institutional reform. In this regard, Guo's behavioral psychology was never detached from the sociopolitical desire to strengthen the Chinese nation through social engineering.

This paper will aim to accomplish two goals. First, it will seek to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship that was forged between psychology and high

<sup>3</sup> Gilbert Gottlieb, “Zing-Yang Kuo: Radical Scientific Philosopher and Innovative Experimentalist,” republished in *Portraits of Pioneers in Psychology, volume 3*, ed. Gregory Kimble and Michael Wertheimer (Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association, 1998), 197–210.

<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey Blowers, “To be a Big Shot or to be Shot: Zing-Yang Kuo's Other Career,” *History of Psychology*, 4, no. 4 (2001): 369.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 378.

<sup>6</sup> Yung-Chen Chiang, *Social Engineering and the Social Sciences in China, 1919–1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 1.

<sup>7</sup> Guo Renyuan, “Xinli xue limian de gui” (The ghosts of psychology), *Ri liming*, February 13, 1927.

politics in Republican China. Guo's belief in radical behaviorism, with its emphasis on disciplinary control and social engineering, found a willing supporter in the Nationalist government. His appointment to multiple positions within the Nationalist party and within the government-backed higher education system testifies to the Nationalists' sponsorship of both his scientific methods and his political philosophies, and further attests to the fact that Guo's scientific beliefs were never far removed from their potential political applications. His scientific research, in other words, should not be considered separately from his political aspirations, and this paper will view both aspects of Guo's career as mutually constitutive, rather than fundamentally distinct.

Second, this paper will investigate the ways in which Guo's vision of behavioral psychology can be considered alongside broader discussions of fascism and authoritarian social control in the interwar period. At the time that Guo was most active in Nationalist politics, fascism was gaining currency both in Europe and East Asia, though its deployment was inconsistent across time and place. In spite of the heterogeneity of fascism as both an ideological doctrine and a political movement, the historian Stanley Payne argues that it is nevertheless useful to "treat fascism as a general type or generic phenomenon for heuristic and analytic purposes."<sup>8</sup> In this paper, I will rely on Payne's tripartite description of a "generic" fascism, which can loosely be characterized by the following traits: the creation of an authoritarian and nationalist state, an opposition to Marxism and liberalism, and a political choreography that laid its stress on militarization and mass mobilization, particularly of the nation's youth. The deployment of Guo's behaviorist politics resonated conspicuously with the ideals of the fascist state, and his close association to Chiang Kai-shek lends further credence to Lloyd Eastman's earlier assessment of the Nationalist government as being attracted to the lure of fascist politics.<sup>9</sup> In the end, then, Guo's story is not just the tale of one solitary figure, but a testament to the ways in which science and politics, behaviorism and fascism were interwoven throughout much of the Republican period.

## A NEW PSYCHOLOGY

It is particularly symbolic that Guo Renyuan was born in 1898. This was the year of the Hundred Days Reform, a last-ditch effort undertaken by the leaders of the crumbling Qing dynasty to breathe new life into the late imperial political, cultural, and educational systems. The movement, for a number of reasons, proved to be an unequivocal failure. In spite of the cautious optimism with which its chief proponents had initiated the reform effort, it quickly became bogged down in political infighting and ended nearly as suddenly as it had begun. The young reformist emperor was deposed, conservative factions regained power, and Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao—two of the leading intellectuals who had catalyzed the movement—were forced to flee overseas in order to save their lives. Having wished to

<sup>8</sup> Stanley Payne, *A History of Fascism, 1914–1945* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1995), 4.

<sup>9</sup> Lloyd Eastman, "Fascism in Kuomintang China: The Blue Shirts," *China Quarterly*, no. 49 (January–March 1972): 1–31.

engage with the politics of the time, they had learned, perhaps, that the times were not quite ready to engage with them.

Guo first learned the story of Kang and Liang as a young boy, and recalls being deeply influenced by the narrative of their frustrated ambition. Like his erstwhile heroes, Guo too had been groomed from an early age for a life of scholarship. Although his father had built his fortune in the Shanghai opium trade, his mother remained resolutely opposed to her son taking over the family business. She had been born into a long line of scholars and was, as Guo proudly recalled, one of the few women in their “backward” region of Shantou able to read the classics. Education, in her mind, was not a choice but an imperative. Her oldest son was to be sent to school.<sup>10</sup>

Aided by the financial support of his father’s lucrative business, Guo sailed from Shanghai to California in the summer of 1918 in order to pursue an undergraduate degree at Berkeley. It was at Berkeley that Guo first became interested in the study of psychology, and he threw himself with gusto into psychological discussions with his classmates. At the time, the raging debate in the psychology department centered on the relative merits of two distinct camps: the Gestalt psychologists and the behaviorists. The Gestalt camp was primarily concerned with the concept of perception. Upholding the introspective method as an indispensable methodological tool for understanding the human psyche, the Gestalt psychologists maintained that mental life could be distinguished from the corporeal world. The behavioral psychologists, on the other hand, argued for a science free from notions of consciousness. One of the major leaders of the behaviorist movement, John B. Watson, propounded that psychology should be a science of behavior, and not one of mind. In order to make psychology into a truly “scientific” discipline, it had to engage with objectively verifiable data. The abstract and subjective views of the Gestalt school were thus considered mere distractions to more empirical explanations of human functioning.

Guo early on positioned himself on the side of the behaviorist camp. After finishing his undergraduate degree with a major in psychology, he determined to pursue a doctoral degree under the guidance of E. C. Tolman, one of the forerunners of the behaviorist movement. Between 1921 and 1924, Guo published a series of articles defending the methodology of the behavioral school, but challenging its practitioners to go even further in their assertions.<sup>11</sup> Frustrated at the fact that behaviorists denied the existence of consciousness but continued to uphold the unverified notions of heredity and instinct, Guo challenged his behaviorist contemporaries to renounce these concepts in exchange for a theory that could be subjected to laboratory testing. Instinct, he argued, was nothing more than a stopgap in our understanding of behavior; it was simply “another name for the god of the primitive

<sup>10</sup> Zing-Yang Kuo (Guo Renyuan), *Confessions of a Chinese Scientist* (1953), chapter 1. Guo’s unpublished autobiography is housed at the American Philosophical Society.

<sup>11</sup> Guo’s earliest articles, published under his English name, Zing-Yang Kuo, include “Giving up Instincts in Psychology,” *Journal of Philosophy*, 18 (1921): 645–64; “How are Instincts Acquired?” *Psychology Review*, 29 (1922): 344–65; “A Psychology without Heredity,” *Psychology Review*, 31 (1924): 427–48.

man.”<sup>12</sup> In order to continue making progress in the revolutionary field of behavioral psychology, Guo determined to give up all “lazy” catchphrases that served no other purpose than to obscure the root causes of behaviors he had yet to understand.<sup>13</sup>

Guo’s articles, which were originally published in English, gained him an early following in both Western and Chinese academic circles. His determination to expunge all traces of instinct from the field of psychology incited a vociferous debate among respected academics of the time—most of whom, including his own advisor, challenged Guo’s intensely radical position.<sup>14</sup> Thus, in spite of his relatively novice status in the world of academia, Guo had already begun to earn an international reputation as an extremely radical behaviorist. Perhaps lured on by his first taste of success, Guo decided to forego defending his dissertation and left Berkeley in 1923 without a doctoral degree. He decided, instead, to return to China so as to spread his knowledge of behavioral psychology to other members of the intellectual elite.

By the 1920s, psychology in China was still a relatively nascent field. Although a number of Chinese psychiatrists claim that psychological thinking has been extant in China since the time of Confucius,<sup>15</sup> the “psychology” of the ancients was far removed from the psychology of the newly emergent Watsons and Freuds. Even with the increasing volume of translated Western texts that had begun flowing into China via Japan at the turn of the century, psychological study in China was in a comparatively embryonic state. According to Guo, most Chinese psychologists were nothing more than “spirit doctors,” while the larger public assumed that psychologists were merely mind readers and hypnotists. Disappointed with the state of the discipline, Guo determined to popularize the true meaning of psychology upon his return to China: a science that was concerned with observable, quantifiable behaviors rather than with processes of the mind or soul.<sup>16</sup>

In 1923, Guo landed a plum teaching position at Shanghai’s prestigious Fudan University. He embraced the new responsibilities of the position with a heady enthusiasm. Within five months of his appointment, Guo had already begun fundraising for the establishment of Fudan’s first laboratory for psychological and physiological experiments, and had founded Fudan’s first psychology department for which he was actively recruiting students.<sup>17</sup> His pupils admired him for challenging them to think critically, and his fellow professors and administrators were impressed by his boundless energy and enthusiasm.<sup>18</sup> By 1924, Guo had successfully insinuated himself into the ranks of the Fudan administration. An active participant at

<sup>12</sup> Guo Renyuan, “Fandui benneng yundong de jingguo he wo zuijin de zhuzhang” [Experiences with the anti-instinct movement and my most recent assertions], *Beijing daxue rikan*, March 28, 1924.

<sup>13</sup> Guo Renyuan, “Yi ge xinli xue gemingzhe de kougong” [Confession of a revolutionary psychologist], *Dongfang zazhi*, 24, no. 5 (1926): 49–57.

<sup>14</sup> Edward Chace Tolman, “Can Instincts Be Given Up in Psychology?” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 16 (1922): 139–52.

<sup>15</sup> Gao Juefu, *Zhongguo xinli xue shi* [History of Chinese psychology], (Shanghai: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1987) and Yan Guocai, *Zhongguo xinli xue shi ziliao xuanbian* [Collection of source materials on Chinese psychology], (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Guo Renyuan, *Xinli xue ABC* [The ABCs of Psychology], (Shanghai: Shijie shuju chuban, 1928), 1.

<sup>17</sup> *Fudan nianjian* [Fudan yearbook], (Shanghai: n.p., 1925), 146.

<sup>18</sup> Hu Jinan, *Xinli xue lunwen xuan* [Selected essays on psychology], (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1995), 275.

administrative meetings, he was elected acting chairman of the administrative council in April. Yet less than a month later, Guo tendered his resignation. At a mere twenty-six years of age, he had been asked to assume the role of acting university president.<sup>19</sup>

Although becoming president of Fudan undoubtedly cemented Guo's reputation as a shrewd player in university politics, attending to the minutiae of presidential life diverted his attention away from his laboratory investigations and put an undue stress on both his physical and mental health. In October 1926, he was struck with a severe case of typhoid and hospitalized at the Shanghai Red Cross for nearly two months.<sup>20</sup> After narrowly escaping death, Guo began to reevaluate his priorities. In an interview with the staff of Fudan's newspaper, Guo told a journalist that the responsibilities of his presidential position had forced him to make too many "personal sacrifices." "I'm a scholar," he reaffirmed. "Until my studies begin to make some progress, I shall refuse to take on other administrative functions."<sup>21</sup>

Guo's refusal to act in an administrative capacity did not last long. Although he had given up his high-ranking role in Fudan's administrative hierarchy, he had simultaneously made plans to oversee the development of an affiliated "experimental" middle school. The curriculum of the middle school, which Guo designed himself, was influenced by the relatively nascent field of educational psychology, a discipline that shared many similarities with behaviorism. Pioneered by the American psychologist William James, early educational psychology aimed to employ Pavlovian-style punishment and reward toward the development of well-behaved, attentive pupils.<sup>22</sup>

Although sources are lacking on the specific types of approaches Guo employed to develop positive habits of conduct among his students, contemporary accounts show him to be an unforgiving disciplinarian in his capacity as psychologist-cum-administrator. When the school "failed to produce any noticeable results" in a short period of time, Guo expelled a number of students for their lackluster performance and hired an American professor to jointly direct the academy. Admitting that he was "ashamed" of his students' poor adjustment to the experimental curriculum, Guo redoubled his efforts to instill a sense of discipline and order in the pupils under his control.<sup>23</sup>

The plan backfired. In the spring of 1927, the dismissed students staged a rally in which they called for Guo's expulsion from both the experimental middle school and Fudan University. Attracting the support of the Fudan student association, the proponents of the "Expel Guo Movement" (驅郭運動 *qu Guo yundong*) also submitted

<sup>19</sup> In 1925, with the return of Fudan's regular president from abroad, Guo assumed the vice-presidency. See Fudan daxue bainian jishi bianzuan weiyuan hui, *Fudan daxue bainian jishi 1905–2005* [Events in the last hundred years of Fudan University], (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chuban she, 2005), 38.

<sup>20</sup> "Fu xiaozhang huan shuanghan" [Vice-president ill with typhoid], *Fudan zhoukan*, October 13, 1926.

<sup>21</sup> "Guo fu xiaozhang ciyi jianjue" [Vice-president Guo's decision to resign affirmed], *Fudan zhoukan*, December 9, 1926.

<sup>22</sup> William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1899).

<sup>23</sup> Guo Renyuan, "Fudan daxue xinli xueyuan shiyan xuexiao zhongxue bu zhuren baogao" [Announcement from the director of Fudan University's experimental middle school], *Fudan nianjian* (Shanghai: n.p., 1926), 189.

a petition to the newspaper *Shen bao* calling for the “reactionary” Guo to be expelled from Fudan. In the editorial, Guo’s students blasted him for “ingratiating with warlords and imperialists in order to suppress students.”<sup>24</sup> Despite the fact that Guo had established the experimental middle school with the intention of engineering a more disciplined graduating class, the students had not perceived the effort as having been adopted in their best interests. Without any fanfare, Guo quietly submitted his resignation to Fudan’s administrative council soon thereafter.

Although Guo had chosen to relinquish his connections to Fudan, his unpleasant experiences at the university had not amounted to naught. In the two years immediately following his expulsion, Guo published six books that explicitly argued for psychological principles to be implemented toward the end of national self-strengthening. Condemning contemporary China as a “societal hell,” Guo argued that his nation needed to become more organized and its people needed to take responsibility for their actions.<sup>25</sup> Indirectly criticizing the mob mentality that had led to his expulsion from Fudan, Guo sneered that there was nothing more “unreasonable” than a crowd and that the spread of fashionable behavior was an uncontrollable “pestilence.” The Chinese, he asserted, were obstinately opposed to thinking for themselves; even when current trends disproved their beliefs, they preferred to remain swept up in the popular ideologies of the day rather than question the correctness of their opinions.<sup>26</sup>

It was during this period that Guo’s thinking began to adopt a progressively more fascistic orientation, particularly in terms of his increasing fixation on engineering model citizens. Although Guo’s ideologies diverged somewhat from German fascism, which placed a strong emphasis on the importance of heredity in the realization of a master race, Guo nevertheless showed a marked influence by European fascism’s emphasis on the mobilization and socialization of youth in order to create an ideal citizenry.<sup>27</sup> In 1928, with the publication of two psychological sourcebooks, Guo directly elaborated on the relationship between applied psychology and human engineering (人類工程學 *renlei gongcheng xue*).<sup>28</sup> “If a child is not educated properly from the time of his youth,” Guo intoned, “there is no chance for him to become a strong and healthy citizen [...] Early life is like a blank sheet of paper: when you put color on it, the color remains forever.”<sup>29</sup> The purpose of psychology, Guo affirmed, was to create the ideal citizen. As he directly stated, “The very point of science is to better people’s lives. Studying psychology is just a means to an end.”<sup>30</sup>

As a behavioral psychologist, Guo believed that he was in a unique position to change China. Like other behaviorists of the day, Guo sought to apply empirically derived behavioral principles toward the modification of human actions. In contrast to eugenicists, Guo claimed that an individual’s environment—rather than his

<sup>24</sup> “Fudan daxue xuesheng hui qu Guo Renyuan qishi” [Announcement for the expulsion of Guo Renyuan by the Fudan student association], *Shen bao*, March 30–April 1, 1927.

<sup>25</sup> Guo Renyuan, *Shehui kexue gailun* [Outline on the social sciences], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1928), 5, 21–22.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 49–50.

<sup>27</sup> Lisa Pine, *Education in Nazi Germany* (New York: Berg, 2010), 2.

<sup>28</sup> *Xinli xue ABC*, 77, 128, and Guo Renyuan, *Xingwei zhuyi xinli xue jiangyi* [Teaching materials on behaviorism and psychology], (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1928), 128.

<sup>29</sup> *Xinli xue ABC*, 51.

<sup>30</sup> *Xingwei zhuyi xinli xue jiangyi*, 149.



heredity—was the main determining factor of his personality and behavior. If Guo were to improve the nation he had so recently castigated as socially deficient, he would logically have to start by reforming the social conditions underlying Chinese behaviors and habits. The best place to begin, he determined, was in the educational system.<sup>31</sup>

## A LIVING LABORATORY

In 1928, the educator Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1940) asked Guo to join the psychological research institute of the Academia Sinica, and Guo obliged. While in Nanjing, Guo was not only introduced to high-ranking politicians through the well-connected Cai, but also had the opportunity to share his psychological views with other academics through his membership in the Chinese Psychological Society.<sup>32</sup>

Between the years 1928 and 1932, Guo alternated between two research positions at National Central University in Nanjing and Zhejiang University in Hangzhou. He fondly recollected this period as one of productivity and relative peace; in his laboratory, he was finally in a land “of which [he] was the sole ruler,” free from the distractions of Shanghai and able to pursue a higher scientific truth on his own terms.<sup>33</sup> It was during this period that Guo made some of his most noteworthy strides in the field of behavioral research. In 1930, he published an article in the *Journal of Comparative Psychology* (later translated into Chinese) demonstrating that cats will not exhibit aggressive tendencies toward mice when raised in the same cage since birth.<sup>34</sup> This finding seemed to confirm Guo’s suspicions that a cat’s aggressive behavior was not inherited, but rather the product of its social environment and developmental history. It was also during this period that Guo began to research chick embryos. After developing a method for observing the behavior of chicks while still *in vivo*, Guo concluded that a chick’s behavior is rarely spontaneous even in a fetal state. Rather, he argued, a chick’s movements are almost always motivated by external stimuli such as food and oxygen supply.<sup>35</sup> Once again, Guo’s experiments bolstered his general thesis that behavior is an environmentally determined phenomenon.

Although Guo was content to perform laboratory experiments for a time, his research was never far removed from his primary ambition to apply behavioral principles to living subjects. In March 1933, he was given the opportunity to realize this goal when the education ministry of the Nationalist government appointed Guo president of Zhejiang University, and gave him free rein to implement whatever reforms

<sup>31</sup> *Shehui kexue gailun*, 286–89.

<sup>32</sup> “Zhongyang yanjiu yuan xinli yanjiu suo choubi weiyuan minglu” [The psychological research institute of the Academia Sinica prepares the directory of its council members], *Daxue yuan gongbao*, 1 (1928): 159, and *Zhongguo xinli xue hui, Zhongguo xinli xuehui 80 nian* [Eighty years of the Chinese psychological society], (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001), 5, 45–46.

<sup>33</sup> *Confessions*, chapter 4.

<sup>34</sup> Z. Y. Kuo (Guo Renyuan), “The Genesis of the Cat’s Responses to the Rat,” *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 11, no. 1 (October 1930): 1–36.

<sup>35</sup> Z. Y. Kuo (Guo Renyuan), “Ontogeny of Embryonic Behavior in Aves,” *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 13, no. 2 (1932): 265.

he wished so as to “discipline and militarize” the student body.<sup>36</sup> At the time of Guo’s appointment, the area of Hangzhou was a known Nationalist stronghold and base to Chiang Kai-shek’s loyal supporters, the brothers Chen Lifu and Chen Guofu (collectively referred to as the “C. C. Clique”). The C. C. Clique, according to Frederic Wakeman, Jr., was “linked in the public’s eye with [the] new ‘fascist’ formations” that had recently begun springing up around Chiang Kai-shek.<sup>37</sup> Guo maintained close ties to the Chens and became intimately linked in their network of power. The close relationship between Guo and the C.C. Clique can be exemplified by one particular incident in which Chen Guofu bailed Guo’s younger brother, a known communist, out of prison.<sup>38</sup>

What can explain the Nationalist attraction to Guo, a mere psychologist? While official government sources remain silent on Guo’s explicit relationship to the regime, it is undeniable that Guo and his Nationalist colleagues supported similar political ideals. Indeed, Guo’s aims for the psychological self-strengthening of the Chinese populace fit neatly into the Nationalists’ political program. Beginning with Sun Yat-sen, who had called for the “psychological establishment” (心理建設 *xinli jianshe*) of the Chinese people, Nationalist politicians had consistently seen a link between a strong psychology and a strong populace. As Sun wrote, “The psychology of the populace manifests itself in the affairs of the nation. This is why the strength of the government is tied to the strength of men’s minds.”<sup>39</sup> Chiang Kai-shek supported a similar outlook in his 1934 New Life Movement. Claiming that the Chinese people were suffering from “spiritual degeneration,” Chiang’s movement sought to introduce new hygienic and behavioral standards in an effort to strengthen the psychological constitutions of his people.<sup>40</sup> In a way, Chiang’s stress on behavioral reform distinctly rang of Watsonian psychological instrumentalism.

The explicit link between psychological and national self-strengthening was a benchmark of the Nationalist educational agenda, and Guo’s close relationship to high-ranking members of the Nationalist Ministry of Education undoubtedly served to strengthen this association. It was, perhaps, Guo’s intimate ties to the Nationalist party that help explain why he professed a “childish desire to demonstrate to Chiang Kai-shek and his men what should and could be done in higher education.” Zhejiang University, he would later write, “was about the best place to stage [his] demonstration.”<sup>41</sup>

Within months of his appointment to Zhejiang, Guo had already begun to implement a series of reforms meant to streamline the administrative structure of the university and consolidate power in his own hands. In order to make university affairs more manageable, Guo replaced the large number of pre-existent administrative bureaus with two departments: the secretariat and the department of general

<sup>36</sup> *Guoli Zhejiang daxue yaolan* [Guidebook to Zhejiang University], (Hangzhou: n.p., 1935), 5.

<sup>37</sup> Frederic Wakeman, *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 93.

<sup>38</sup> *Confessions*, chapter 6.

<sup>39</sup> Quoted in Hu, 288.

<sup>40</sup> See Arlif Dirlik, “The Ideological Foundations of the New Life Movement: A Study in Counterrevolution,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, 34, no. 4 (August 1975): 945–80.

<sup>41</sup> *Confessions*, chapter 6.

affairs, both of which would henceforth report directly to him. In addition to undertaking a series of administrative reforms, Guo also revamped the general educational program at the university. Focusing most of his attention on the natural and applied sciences, he overhauled the curriculum at the engineering and agricultural schools and hired a number of new professors—while simply dismissing those professors who did not meet his professional or personal standards.<sup>42</sup>

While Guo's reforms did not win him any friends within the administration, Zhejiang University students resented his presidency for other reasons. Starting in 1934, Guo began instituting sweeping changes to student life on campus. He vastly altered the requirements for admission to the university; introduced a number of new fees; mandated a final exam system at the close of each semester; cracked down on cheating, plagiarism, and absenteeism with the threat of immediate expulsion; and completely restructured the previous curriculum by instituting a series of required classes. He eliminated pro-communist propaganda on campus and implemented tactics for the harassment of openly communist students. Finally, he mandated daily military training, and placed the military affairs department under his direct supervision. In the words of the Zhejiang yearbook, Guo aimed to “militarize, discipline, and collectivize the spirits” of the Zhejiang University student body.<sup>43</sup>

The authoritarian structure of the university, coupled with its anti-communist stance and overt military emphasis, distinctly recalls contemporary trends within the Nazi education system. According to Lisa Pine, the purpose of Nazi education beginning in the 1930s was to “sponsor the physical, mental, and spiritual development of the children” by instilling in them a sense of “service to the ‘national community’” and a fear of the “Marxist spirit” which had permeated the previous Weimar republic. Through military drills, ideological lectures, and an emphasis on the hierarchical primacy of the headmaster's authority, the German school system sought the centralization of state control over education and the elimination of liberalist tendencies.<sup>44</sup>

While Guo's curriculum at Zhejiang was likely influenced by contemporary strains of fascist political thought, his undertakings at the university also reflected his previously enunciated desire to improve the Chinese citizenry through behaviorist principles. By changing the social “stimuli” at the university—through a new dress code, new academic standards, and a new emphasis on corporal and spiritual militarization—Guo was, in effect, attempting to change the behavioral “responses” of his students. As he had written previously, “I believe that the human character (人性 *ren xing*) can be changed. If one's environment and education are sound, then [...] any type of society is possible.”<sup>45</sup> Simply stated, Guo's authoritarian tactics at Zhejiang University linked fascism and behaviorism through a common emphasis on social engineering.

The students at Zhejiang were not pleased with Guo's dictatorial inclinations. In numerous accounts, he is remembered as a stubborn and ambitious man, with one memoirist going so far as to characterize him as a “fascist running dog” (法西斯走狗

<sup>42</sup> *Guoli Zhejiang daxue yaolan*, 6.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 6–20.

<sup>44</sup> Pine, 25–31. See also Gilmer Blackburn, *Education in the Third Reich* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1985), 3.

<sup>45</sup> *Shehui kexue gailun*, 287.

*faxisi zougou*).<sup>46</sup> Hu Qiaomu, a Zhejiang University student who would later become a prominent member of the Chinese Communist Party, alleged that Guo created a particularly unwelcoming environment for students with communist leanings. Hu was so put off by Guo's constant harassment of leftist students that he eventually decided to leave Zhejiang altogether.<sup>47</sup>

Most contemporary critics dismissed Guo's anti-communist stance as a product of his affiliation with the Nationalist Party. By the time Guo arrived at Zhejiang, he had already been accused of being a "hired scholar" (御用學者 *yuyong xuezhe*) of the Nationalists<sup>48</sup> and a Guomintang lackey.<sup>49</sup> Yet Guo, himself, did not base his aversion to communism on account of his political connections; rather, he justified his distaste for communist values on the basis of Marxism's "unscientific" nature. "I too want to issue a wake-up call to social scientists," Guo wrote in a 1928 tract condemning Marxist theory. "I too want to exhort them to stage a revolution [...] But Marxism is not revolutionary *enough*. It is neither the newest nor the most progressive of doctrines."<sup>50</sup> The "most progressive doctrine" to which Guo was referring was none other than that of behaviorism. Only through psychological tactics, Guo affirmed, could China be revolutionized—from above, not below.

Thus, while Guo's students sought revolution, Guo admitted to looking for one as well—but one that he could control on his own terms. His heavy-handed tactics at Zhejiang can therefore be interpreted not simply as the result of an increasingly fascist orientation in Nationalist party thought, but also as the manifestation of a behavioral philosophy given free rein in the living laboratory of a Chinese university. Similar to B. F. Skinner's experiments in operant conditioning throughout the 1930s, Guo's administration at Zhejiang reflected the radical behaviorist impulse to apply physiological principles toward behavioral engineering.<sup>51</sup> In his efforts to organize and improve the Chinese nation and its people, Guo was bridging the increasingly thin divide between behaviorism and authoritarianism.

Unfortunately for Guo, Zhejiang students consistently rejected his plans for an educational "revolution" at the university. Throughout the first two years of his presidency, a tense climate continually threatened to boil over into outright conflict. On December 20, 1935, Zhejiang students finally found a unifying motive to topple their school's president. A week prior, students in Beijing had launched a massive demonstration protesting the Nationalist government's conciliatory attitude toward Japanese incursions into North China. When the nationalistic fervor sweeping Beijing trickled down to Zhejiang, a number of Guo's students resolved to travel

<sup>46</sup> Zheng Tang and Yu Ru, *Fei Gong zhuan: Yige aiguo minzhu jiaoshou de sheng yu si* [The story of Fei Gong: The life and death of a patriotic and democratic professor], (Beijing: Shenghuo, dushu, xinzhi sanlian shudian, 1981), 33.

<sup>47</sup> Ye Yonglie, *Hu Qiaomu* (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dang xiao chuban she, 1994), 23–25.

<sup>48</sup> Zheng Jing, "Ping Guo Renyuan boshi *Shehui kexue gailun*" [A critique of Professor Guo Renyuan's *Outline on the Social Sciences*], *Xin sichao*, 2, no. 3 (1929): 3.

<sup>49</sup> Yang Gesi, "Makesi baidao Guo Renyuan" [Marx prostrates before Guo Renyuan], *Huanzhou banyue kan*, 3 (1927): 148.

<sup>50</sup> Guo Renyuan, *Fan kexue de Makesi zhuyi* [Anti-scientific Marxism], (Shanghai: Minzhi shuju, 1927), 3–4.

<sup>51</sup> James Capshew, "Engineering Behavior," in Laurence Smith and William Woodward, eds., *B.F. Skinner and Behaviorism in American Culture* (Bethlehem: Lehigh University Press, 1996), 128–50.

to Nanjing to petition the government. Once Guo received word of the plan, he dispatched local police forces to arrest the student representatives at their dormitory. Onlookers soon called together an emergency rally. By five o'clock the next morning, an estimated eight hundred students had gathered at the train station, determined to carry out the original plan to travel to Nanjing. Yet again, however, they were met by an overwhelming police force and sent back to campus. The police, it later turned out, had been notified of the students' activities by the university's Committee for Military Affairs—a committee that was directly overseen by Guo.<sup>52</sup>

Although the student representatives were released from prison later that day, the offense had been too egregious to brush aside. Guo Renyuan, they decided, had to go. Gathering together two days later, the students crafted a screed intended to force Guo's expulsion from the university. The tract, which they entitled the "Expel Guo Manifesto" (驅郭宣言 *qu Guo xuanyan*) outlined his crimes. Guo, the students claimed, had usurped power at Zhejiang by assuming authority over the university's many committees and academic departments. He had hired spies to investigate the communist affiliations of staff and students. He had expelled over one hundred pupils at his own whim for minor transgressions like dressing improperly. He was a seducer of female students and had, evidently, even taken one as his concubine. He had discreetly enrolled his son at the university, although his son had never formally gained admission. He had taken kickbacks from the campus contractor, who had previously worked for him at Fudan. And, on top of everything, he had refused to allow his own students to patriotically petition the government, even going so far as to call the police and have them arrested. "For the future of the school," the manifesto pleaded, "we cannot allow Guo to continue as president!"<sup>53</sup>

The publication of the manifesto, combined with a number of student editorials that were published in the national newspaper *Shen bao*, culminated in a student-wide "Expel Guo Movement"—the second of his career.<sup>54</sup> The campus-wide furor brought academic life to a standstill, and in January 1936 Chiang Kai-shek was forced to pay a personal visit to the campus of Zhejiang in a futile attempt to restore order. By the end of January, Guo was asked to step down.

Guo's fall from grace at Zhejiang eerily mirrored his earlier expulsion from Fudan, when his students gathered to protest his administrative policies at the experimental middle school. Similar, also, to his experiences after the debacle at Fudan, Guo again came to terms with his administrative failures by returning to his scientific studies with renewed vigor—and renewed radicalism. After his expulsion from Zhejiang, Guo broke completely with his fellow behaviorists. He was consistently disappointed with their unwillingness to give up "subjective" and "teleological" practices in determining the causes of behavior, and charged them with being more concerned about philosophical speculation than physiology. In lieu of continuing to be identified with a group he did not fully support, Guo made the decision to design his own branch of psychology: one that he called "praxiology." In contrast to

<sup>52</sup> "Qu Guo xuanyan" [Expel Guo manifesto], *Guoli Zhejiang daxue xiaokan*, 24, no. 203 (December 23, 1935).

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> "Jiaoyu xiaoxi" [School news], *Shen bao*, December 28, 1935, and "Zheda xuesheng qinyuan" [Memorial from Zhejiang students], *Shen bao*, December 28, 1935.

behaviorism, praxiology was to be considered an offshoot of biology that dealt solely with the ontogenetic and physiological aspects of behavior. Its ultimate purpose was to predict and control human behavior. In a particularly poetic interlude to his “prolegomena” to praxiology, Guo underscored his reasoning for embarking on such a project:

A feather travels down to the ground in a “roundabout way,” depending on the speed and direction of the wind. A piece of stone falls to the ground in a much more sudden and direct way. But has any physicist ever said that the feather finds its way to the goal by “*trial and error*,” while the stone solves its problem by “*insight*”?

Since, in Guo’s reckoning, there was “no sharp distinction between the living and the non-living,” he was determined to apply the same laws to human behavior as those that already governed the natural world.<sup>55</sup>

Guo’s radicalism had reached its zenith. If, as he put it, the trajectory of a man’s life was no different than a stone barreling towards earth under the force of gravity, then all that remained was for him to determine the mathematical equations capable of describing the systematic arc of a man’s existence. And if he had failed to do so earlier, it was simply because he had accorded too much weight to the role of subjectivity in decision-making and behavioral responses. Armed with these new insights, Guo set out once again to prove his competence as a scientist—one who was capable of achieving a radically new method for determining human behavior.

### A FINAL ATTEMPT

Between 1936 and 1939, Guo flitted back and forth across the United States with various research positions at Berkeley, Rochester, Yale, and the Carnegie Institute. In order to forget the humiliation of his Zhejiang experiences, he busied himself with laboratory experiments in the hopes of obtaining a tenure-track position at an American university. Guo greatly downplayed the circumstances surrounding his dismissal from Zhejiang to his American colleagues. Claiming that he had “burned the bridges behind [him] in order to save [his] scientific career” and was willing to “accept any humble position if it [could] help [him] get away from politics in China,”<sup>56</sup> Guo sculpted his biographical narrative so as to bolster his image as a man unconcerned with politics and wholly preoccupied with the pursuit of science. His American colleagues had no reason not to believe the yarn. Chalking his return to the United States up to the fact that he could not possibly be productive in a “troubled” China,<sup>57</sup> Guo’s colleagues sought to secure a position for their friend at an American university. Their appeals, for one reason or another, fell upon deaf ears. Realizing the bleak potential for his future employment in the United States, Guo made the decision in 1939 to return to China.

Despite the fact that Guo had cast himself as an apolitical scientist while in the United States, his high-level connections in China had not slackened during his

<sup>55</sup> Z. Y. Kuo (Guo Renyuan), “Prolegomena to Praxiology,” *Journal of Psychology*, 4 (1937): 19.

<sup>56</sup> Guo to Leonard Carmichael, March 30, 1939.

<sup>57</sup> Carmichael to unspecified recipient, January 25, 1937.

absence. Guo acknowledged in a letter to his confidant, Leonard Carmichael, that Chiang Kai-shek was still interested in his “personal welfare,” and had even arranged for him to come to Chongqing, the temporary seat of the Nationalist government.<sup>58</sup> Shortly after arriving in the inland capital in early 1940, Guo was appointed director of the China Institute for Physiology and Psychology, and quickly reunited with his Nationalist colleagues over discussions of China’s political future.<sup>59</sup>

Being in such close proximity to his political patrons once again reignited Guo’s ultimate aim—one that had been rendered temporarily latent during his time in the United States—to reform his nation through psychological tactics. In a 1941 article published in the Chinese periodical *Spirit of the Times*, Guo drew a parallel between social reconstruction and psychological rehabilitation. “The thoughts, habits, and behavior patterns of the Chinese do not fit with the new environment of the twentieth century,” he wrote. “These social questions are, at root, psychological issues [...] Only by completely transforming the thoughts, habits, and behaviors of the Chinese will there be hope for Chinese society in the future.”<sup>60</sup>

The question of how, exactly, one could go about transforming the behaviors of an entire nation of people was one that Guo had been wrestling with since his time at Fudan. Although Guo’s laboratory experiments had convinced him of the direct relationship between a person’s behavioral tendencies and his social environment, his negative experiences as a university administrator at Fudan and Zhejiang had led him to the conclusion that behavioral reform was too large a problem to take on alone. Thinking back to his own experiences in a Western university, during which time he had become a “thoroughbred American in [his] personal habits, habit of thought, and logic and convictions,”<sup>61</sup> Guo had decided that successfully reforming the behaviors of the Chinese youth required Western aid.

In 1941, Guo wrote a letter to a few American colleagues in which he delineated the very rough outlines of his “scheme” to transform China through the reform of higher education. Chinese universities, Guo wrote in his proposal, were suffering from “intellectual starvation.” Even when Chinese students went abroad to study, they failed to acquire the adequate training needed to address the “specific and unique” problems plaguing the Chinese polity and its people. In order to rectify such deficiencies, Guo suggested a plan for cultural and economic cooperation between China, the United States, and Great Britain.<sup>62</sup> “It is hoped that through exchange of information and mutual understanding,” Guo emphasized in an article published in *Nature* magazine, “the efforts of Great Britain and the United States to assist China to rebuild her culture and to train young minds for her national reconstruction can be coordinated.”<sup>63</sup>

Between 1941 and 1943, Guo traveled to London and over eighty universities in the United States and Canada in order to plead his cause. Despite his good faith in

<sup>58</sup> Guo to Carmichael, March 7, 1939.

<sup>59</sup> Portia Kuo to Carmichael, 1970.

<sup>60</sup> Guo Renyuan, “Shehui jianshe yu xinli gaizao” [Social construction and psychological reform], *Shidai jingshen*, 4 (1941): 1–2.

<sup>61</sup> *Confessions*, introduction.

<sup>62</sup> Guo Renyuan, letter to Leonard Carmichael, March 31, 1941.

<sup>63</sup> Zing-Yang Kuo (Guo Renyuan), “Reconstruction in China,” *Nature*, 149 (January 10, 1942): 42–43.

Sino-Western cooperation, however, the United States government viewed his plans with skepticism. Guo's wish to dispose of the laissez-faire policy that had previously governed Chinese students studying in American universities was looked on with suspicion by Cordell Hull, the secretary of state:

We have been disturbed by reports that KMT [Nationalist] agents have already been exercising pressure on Chinese students in American educational institutions, and the general matter of projected Chungking [Chongqing] regimentation of the thoughts of Chinese students in American educational institutions has already begun to receive unfavorable publicity in the United States.<sup>64</sup>

Hull was even more forward in his assessment of Guo. Having gained "confidential information" that Guo was to be appointed superintendent of Chinese students studying in the United States, Hull unequivocally condemned him as "a henchman of Chen Lifu and a fascist in attitude" in a memo to the Chinese ambassador.<sup>65</sup> Suspicious of the true intent of the program, Hull refused to give it his backing.

Lacking the support of the United States government, Guo's proposal for the reconstruction of Chinese higher education was definitively shelved. Following on the heels of his ousters from Fudan and Zhejiang, this had been his third failed attempt to remold the psychological constitutions of the Chinese youth through educational reform. Guo's hope for the resuscitation of the Chinese nation through international cooperation quickly turned to outright pessimism. In 1946, having spent two more unproductive years in a China torn asunder by both an international and a civil war, Guo finally came to the conclusion that his plans were futile. Feeling despondent and misanthropic, he made the decision to leave behind the land of his multiple defeats in order to live out the rest of his life as an exile in Hong Kong.

For the next fifteen years, Guo became a "scientific and social hermit."<sup>66</sup> Having fallen into a state of deep depression following his departure from China, he spent much of his time trying to come to terms with how and why he had failed so unequivocally to effect change in the nation of his birth, particularly when it seemed that science was allied on his side. Guo eventually arrived at two conclusions. First, he argued that intellectual "slavery" had been the norm in China ever since the time of Confucius. As a result, the Chinese had slowly developed a mentality that was characterized by its passivity, fatalism, and suspicion of new ideas.<sup>67</sup> Comparing himself to a modern-day Shao Chengmo, the "heretical" scholar sentenced to death by Confucius, Guo rationalized his numerous failures by positioning himself as a Chinese psychologist who "[could not] seem to understand the psychology of the Chinese people."<sup>68</sup> Second, Guo traced the root of his failings back to the

<sup>64</sup> Cordell Hull, memo to the Chinese Ambassador, in *Foreign Relations of the United States* (April 8, 1944), 1134.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>66</sup> Guo Renyuan, letter to Leonard Carmichael, December 31, 1959.

<sup>67</sup> Guo Renyuan, "Historical Origins of the Behavior Patterns of the Chinese" (1961?) and "A Study of Certain Behavior Characteristics of the Chinese: Their Historical Origin and their Bearings on the Communist Revolution" (n.d.). Both unpublished manuscripts are held at the American Philosophical Society.

<sup>68</sup> *Confessions*, chapter 8.



fickle nature of science itself. Renouncing his prior faith in the universal objectivity of scientific laws, Guo had come to the conclusion that science was not as reliable as he had once thought it to be. "Science is always imperfect," he conceded. "Intellectual solutions are always tentative and are more often than not, apt to err. Once science becomes perfect, science is already dead."<sup>69</sup>

The irony of these statements, given Guo's earlier goals to deny mentalism, remove heredity from scientific inquiry, and uphold the transcendent power of science, was not lost on him. In the years that had passed since Guo moved to Hong Kong, he had slowly begun to reevaluate the radical behaviorist theories he had clung to so stubbornly throughout his professional career. Guo's final scientific publication, released in 1967, reflected his new mindset. *The Dynamics of Behavior Development: An Epigenetic View* announced from its very title the direction that Guo's psychological thinking had ultimately taken. Epigenesis, the science that considers environmental influences on physiological information, recognizes that biological and genetic factors play a key role in determining the behavioral reactions of an organism. Although Guo acknowledged that he was employing the term "epigenesis" with "a great deal of hesitation," the fact of the matter was that the sheer invocation of the word represented a major retreat from his previously held assumptions on behaviorism. In his introduction, he conceded that he was no longer "an environmentalist who tries to interpret everything in terms of environment."<sup>70</sup> Instead, it was his intent to provide a "revision of the most radical Watsonian behaviorism [...] by eliminating its early shortcomings."<sup>71</sup> Many of those shortcomings, Guo admitted, had been contributed by none other than himself.

Throughout the book, Guo revealed the new mode of scientific thinking that he had developed while exiled in Hong Kong. He capitulated to the Gestalt psychologists' criticism of the stimulus-response model, admitted that behavior could not simply be reduced to the mathematical sum of a series of determinants, and re-evaluated his earlier assertions that all behavior is passive. Guo's most striking concession, however, was his reappraisal of heredity. Although exactly thirty years earlier, his theory of praxiology had vehemently denied the existence of inherited characteristics, Guo now argued that people are born with certain predispositions called "behavior potentials" that "set the boundary to the potential range" of their future actions.<sup>72</sup> In other words, physiological factors predetermine the range of behavioral patterns that an organism can potentially exhibit during its lifetime. Environmental factors then serve to limit that range, but cannot, by themselves, alter an individual's actions on a grand scale.

By his own admission, Guo's new science was no longer a psychology without heredity. As he underscored in one of his last letters to Leonard Carmichael, "No animal can learn anything unless it *inherits the capacity* to learn it."<sup>73</sup> After fighting so vigorously to erase all traces of heredity from psychological inquiry, Guo had finally come to acknowledge that some behaviors simply could not be controlled through

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., chapter 11.

<sup>70</sup> Zing-Yang Kuo (Guo Renyuan), *The Dynamics of Behavior Development: An Epigenetic View* (New York: Random House, 1967), xli.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., xxxviii.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 125-27.

<sup>73</sup> Guo to Carmichael, June 29, 1967. Italics mine.

environmental factors alone. “The source of the illness of China,” he emphasized in his autobiography, “was inherent in her own people.”<sup>74</sup>

### RETREAT FROM BEHAVIORISM

How had Guo come to these roundabout conclusions, thirty years after disengaging from serious laboratory inquiry? On the one hand, following advances in genetics research in the 1950s, trends in the Western scientific community had slowly begun to abandon radical behaviorist outlooks. Particularly following the defeat of Nazi Germany at the end of the Second World War, modes of scientific research that were geared toward the pursuit of social control and racial improvement were increasingly viewed with suspicion among the scientific community. On the other hand, Guo’s retreat from radical behaviorism cannot solely be explained in terms of global trends. In his final book, he continued to champion the methodologies of behavioral psychologists and never directly invoked more recent scholarship as having influenced his scientific reappraisals. Instead, I argue that Guo’s abandonment of praxiology and his ultimate turn toward epigenesis at least partially resulted from his own frustrated experiences in university administration and in the Nationalist government.

For Guo, the pursuit of scientific knowledge was never a disinterested affair; from the very outset of his career, he had made clear his efforts to strengthen the Chinese nation and its people through the application of behaviorist psychological principles and social engineering tactics. His efforts won him the support of high-ranking members of the Nationalist government, including Chiang Kai-shek himself, and continued to provide him with political benefactors in spite of repeatedly disastrous results. Even toward the end of Guo’s career in China, the Nationalists did not abandon him. Instead, it was his own fear of communist retribution—combined, perhaps, with the humiliation of his multiple defeats—that spurred his decision to leave the mainland for Hong Kong. No longer the cavalier psychologist and statesman that he once was, Guo’s final book reflected a self-doubt that had not previously been extant in his earlier writings.

While Guo feared that he would become a man “of no great consequence to society,”<sup>75</sup> his experiences as a radical behaviorist in Republican China remain particularly instructive, even if not in the ways he would have wished them to be. While previous scholarship on Guo’s career treats his scientific pursuits and his political activities as two distinct realms, this paper has demonstrated that psychological study in Republican China was never far removed from grander political imperatives to discipline the Chinese people and modernize the nation. Behaviorism, as Guo directly stated, was a way of understanding and controlling human action. At a time when China appeared to be facing its own impending collapse—through imperialism, warlordism, a largely ineffectual government, and an ongoing war with Japan—the desire to appeal to the universal principles of science as a means of obtaining national salvation appeared very attractive indeed.

Yet, even if Guo’s policies had been implemented with positive intentions, his students did not always interpret them as such. To them, Guo’s authoritarian politics

<sup>74</sup> *Confessions*, chapter 7.

<sup>75</sup> *Confessions*, chapter 1.

clashed with their democratic and liberalist yearnings, and seemed to epitomize the fascist currents sweeping much of contemporary Europe. It mattered little that Guo's administrative tactics were reinforced by laboratory experiments and apparently rigorous scientific principles; the reason that Fudan and Zhejiang students almost universally rejected his policies had less to do with the scientific underpinnings of his endeavors than with his politics. As Guo's students showed, the acceptance of scientific doctrine was only defensible insofar as that doctrine's political aims corresponded with their own: democracy, national autonomy, and a liberal patriotism that supported individual expression and self-determination. Guo's social engineering efforts, which sought to curtail the democratic sprouts of student activism in favor of a rigid authoritarianism, compelled his students to reject his plans to turn their campuses into living laboratories. Lacking the support of his own students, and snubbed by an American government that feared the establishment of another fascist power in the Far East, Guo was left with little backing for the continuation of his educational undertakings outside of his immediate Nationalist circles.

In the end, Guo did not abandon psychology. Yet the vision he presented towards the close of his life was a vastly different vision than the one he had originally crafted at the start of his career. Having launched his reputation as a radically anti-instinct behaviorist, Guo ultimately came to the conclusion that environmental conditions provide only one variable in the much more complex and convoluted equation of human behavior. This roundabout conclusion did not derive solely from Guo's laboratory experiments or the quickly changing world of psychological theory, however; it was, instead, as much a product of his experiences in a China beset by domestic instability and wracked by foreign imperialism—a China that, time and again, rejected his attempts to rein her in. In trying to change China through science, Guo's science had been changed *by* China. And like so many before him, Guo too had come belatedly to the conclusion that his own efforts were simply no match for a nation that seemed to have a life of its own: one that refused, with dogged determination, to be boxed into the narrow constraints of a scientific theory that thought it knew best.

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#### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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