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NO FORBIDDEN
ZONE IN READING?

Dushu and the Chinese Intelligentsia

THE PUBLICATION DATE for this long-planned selection of articles from *Dushu*—probably China’s leading intellectual journal of the past decade, as well as its most controversial—has turned out to be highly ironic.¹ In July 2007, even as the six-volume *Essentials of Dushu* collection was appearing in the bookshops, its two chief editors, Wang Hui and Huang Ping, were being dismissed from the monthly magazine by its parent company, SDX Publishing. The official grounds for this seemed scarcely plausible: initially there was talk of falling circulation, although in fact the number of *Dushu* subscribers had risen under Wang and Huang, from around 60,000 to well over 100,000. SDX then announced that it was implementing a company policy that required all chief editors to be full-time, rather than complement their work with university teaching, as was the case for Wang and Huang. The company could provide no explanation, however, as to why it had suddenly ‘remembered’ this policy, which had existed for many years without ever being enforced.

The dismissals provoked a storm of controversy among Chinese intellectuals: debate raged in cyberspace, newspapers and journals over the merits of the ‘Wang and Huang era’ of *Dushu*. The editors’ detractors argued that the two had turned the journal, ‘universally recognized’ by the Chinese intelligentsia in the 1980s and early 90s, into a platform for a small ‘new-left clique’, abandoned its elegant prose tradition and rendered it too specialized to be readable. *Dushu*’s supporters, however,

argued that Wang and Huang's editorial policy embodied precisely the sort of critical orientation that intellectuals should insist upon in an age of dramatic social transformation, when marketization and uneven development have created widening disparities in the midst of high-speed growth. This selection of the *Essentials of Dushu* allows readers to form their own assessments of the journal's contribution to understanding and evaluating those processes. It offers an overview of *Dushu's* intellectual preoccupations during the decade from 1996 to 2005, reflecting the major changes brought about under the joint editorship of Wang and Huang. For those outside China, it can also provide a good window on intellectual debates in the PRC during this period: the journal provoked a great many discussions, exchanges and political polemics and, as its title suggests, this selection includes nearly all the essential pieces.

Openings

Dushu—the name literally means 'book reading'—was founded as a monthly journal in 1979, with the famous slogan 'No Forbidden Zone in Reading'. It has published a range of book reviews, memoirs and scholarly essays, running from brief notices—a few hundred characters long—to texts of 12,000 characters (around 7,500 words in English), with a median length of about 4,000 characters or 2,500 words. During the early 1980s, under the editorships of Ni Ziming and Chen Yuan, elegantly written contributions by an older generation of scholars and political essays by open-minded thinkers within the Party made up a significant portion of the journal's articles. *Dushu* was by no means the only platform for intellectual discussion at the time: *Lishi Yanjiu* (Studies in History) and *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue* (Social Sciences in China) were also influential in debating contemporary issues. *Dushu* was known especially for its publication of memoirs and intellectual portraits, which provided a sort of pantheon through which the Chinese intelligentsia could construct a new collective identity.

Despite many disagreements, there was a tacit consensus of outlook among the intelligentsia in this period: they shared a feeling of weariness after the recent revolutionary past and an aspiration for modernization that was summed up in the notion of the 'new enlightenment' as the

¹ *Dushu Jing Xuan* [The Essentials of Dushu], 1996–2005, SDX Publishing Company: Beijing 2007, in six volumes.

character of the age, reflecting an inclination towards liberal universalism; this would be expressed in Tiananmen Square in 1989. The 'new enlightenment' was marked by a certain West-centrism, based on the belief in a linear-historical model of modernization, for which the West's experience was seen as a prime example. Interestingly, many *Dushu* articles in the 1980s tended to look towards Japan: restructured by the United States after 1945, and spared the trauma of political revolution, the Japanese economy had emerged as the second largest in the world. Such admiration was underpinned by an unspoken comparison: in China, revolution had disrupted the modernizing process and caused the country to lag behind. When the Chinese Communist Party distanced itself from its revolutionary past and re-fashioned itself as a 'party of modernization' after 1978, it was therefore seen by many intellectuals as getting back on the right track. For China, the urgent task was to follow the example of the developed countries and integrate herself into the mainstream world order, according to the post-revolutionary consensus. Correspondingly, the glorious mission of Chinese intellectuals was to use the codified criteria of modernity to criticize China's development, past and present.

From around 1985, the introduction of Western concepts and methodologies became a major focus of *Dushu*'s interest: modernization theory, semiology, Russian formalism, Foucauldian analysis, Braudel and the *Annales* school of historiography were a heady brew for a younger generation of intellectuals. The move was part of the wave known as the 'cultural fever' of the 1980s, in which SDX was an active participant; the publishing house produced a famous series of translations edited by Gan Yang, then a graduate student at Beijing University, under the rubric 'Culture: China and the World', which systematically introduced the work of Western thinkers. A similar series, edited by Jin Guantao and Bao Zunxin, was published by Sichuan People's Press under the title 'March to the Future'. *Dushu* ran reviews of many of these translations, including works by Nietzsche, Freud, Heidegger, Sartre and others. At the same time, looking back at the *Dushu* of the late 1980s and early 1990s, one hardly gets any glimpse of the changes that were taking place in Chinese society beyond the intellectual world: the dissolution of the People's Communes, the rise of village and township enterprises, economic marketization, fiscal decentralization and so on; the journal operated more like a salon or club.

Dushu did not suffer as much from the official clampdown after 1989 as some of its sister journals, and continued as a site for ‘cultural fever’. The fact that many of the other influential magazines of the 1980s were affected by such pressures and deprived of much of their intellectual vigour led to *Dushu* assuming greater salience. If anything, the commercialization of Chinese society after 1992 probably posed greater challenges to *Dushu*. The readership of most intellectual reviews was shrinking at the time and Shen Changwen, chief editor during 1986–96, turned to a more populist policy, aiming to make its articles easier to read. From 1996, however, when Wang Hui and then Huang Ping were invited to join the journal—initially on a temporary basis—after Shen’s retirement, *Dushu* was orientated along more critical and scholarly lines. The pair strengthened the social-science coverage of the journal and encouraged an open engagement with contemporary political and economic issues. They were also more interested in interacting with the international intellectual community than their predecessors had been. It was under Wang and Huang that *Dushu* emerged as a socially critical journal; uncongenial to some, but nevertheless posing questions that indubitably had a wider resonance.

New generation

The two scholars represented a professional as well as a generational break. During the period 1979–96, *Dushu*’s chief editors were publishers and editors, whose intellectual formation was largely in literature, history and philosophy. Wang Hui and Huang Ping emerged from a more formal academic background. Wang, born in 1959, was first known as a Lu Xun specialist, and completed his doctoral studies in the history of Chinese literature. In the late 1980s, he turned to intellectual history. His long paper, ‘Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity’, originally composed in 1994 but published in 1997, was a shock to Chinese intellectuals at that time and provoked serious debates, due to its critical attitude toward capitalist modernity and its strongly socio-historical approach to the history of ideas.² His recent four-volume work, *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought*, systematically explores the transformation of traditional thinking within modern social contexts. Wang currently teaches at Tsinghua University and is one of

² Wang Hui, ‘Dangdai Zhongguo Sixiang Jingkuang yu Xiandaixing Wenti’, in *Tianya* 5, 1997. For an English translation, see Wang Hui, ‘Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity’, *Social Text* 55, 1998, pp. 9–44.

the best-known scholars in China. Huang Ping was born in 1958 and received his PhD in sociology from the London School of Economics; he now teaches at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He has served as an editor on several international journals, including *Comparative Sociology*, the *British Journal of Sociology* and *Current Sociology*, and has written on social development, modernity and globalization, and—above all—rural development and regional balance in China. Both have a solid background in social theory, which enables them to pose many critical questions about contemporary China. In terms of intellectual formation, they are mutually complementary: Wang is strong in literature and history, Huang in empirical social science.

In part, this represented a wider process of differentiation among Chinese intellectuals during the 1990s. The social sciences became increasingly important in the discussion of public problems from the middle of the decade onwards, and Wang Hui is one of many scholars who moved from literature to social and intellectual history during this period. But *Dushu's* orientation also reflected the dramatic ideological cleavage that has taken place within the intelligentsia from the mid-90s, when many of its authors began to articulate a critique of China's development path. This was a highly controversial stance, soon dubbed 'new left' or 'post-modernist'. Both labels had strong negative connotations in this context: for a long time after the 1970s, it was almost scandalous for an intellectual to be described as 'left' (as opposed to 'liberal'), because the majority of the intelligentsia had once been the victim of the ultra-leftism of the Chinese Communist Party. Post-modernism seemed even stranger: how could an intellectual criticize the ideal of modernization in a backward society?

Yet the growth of the 1990s produced social outcomes that the intellectuals of the 1980s could scarcely have envisaged. Following Deng Xiaoping's famous 'southern tour' speech in 1992, the CCP threw itself into a reform process characterized by marketization, privatization and integration into the capitalist world order, in which the rapid expansion of export-oriented manufacturing laid the foundation for China's rise to become the 'workshop of the world'; at the same time, the sale of state-owned enterprises, combined with cuts in social welfare to balance the deficit arising from the fiscal decentralization of the 1980s, resulted in millions of state-owned enterprise workers being laid off. As the wave of privatization spread to collectively owned township and village enterprises,

millions more peasants lost their jobs and had to travel to the coastal cities to look for work. Disparities grew between rich and poor, urban and rural districts, coastal regions and the hinterland. Pollution worsened dramatically. The high cost of development fell on ordinary people.

It was these conditions that split the relative consensus that had obtained among Chinese intellectuals during the 1980s. The government held fast to the doctrine of ‘efficiency first’—*xiaoliu youxian*—and forbade any open challenge to this programme. Mainstream economists formed a virtual priesthood around the project of privatizations and social-welfare cuts, and for a long time they almost monopolized the discussion within the intelligentsia and society at large. Any problems emerging from privatization and uneven development were dismissed as temporary hiccups that would be solved by further marketization. For many intellectuals, the rapid growth of the 1990s confirmed their belief in modernization: privatization would lead to economic development, which would in turn give rise to political freedom; this Hayekian–Friedmanite process was understood to be an irresistible tide of world history. Others, however, called attention to the ‘dark side’ of China’s growth model. New voices emerged; the 1980s concept of modernization now seemed increasingly problematic and vulnerable. Disagreements rose to the surface and the shaky intellectual foundations of the old consensus were exposed. As a leading intellectual journal, *Dushu* not only witnessed this transformation but was an important participant in it.

Essentials of Dushu provides a good record of many of these debates and of the strong critical views expressed within them. In contrast to the 1980s, the pages of *Dushu* in its ‘Wang and Huang phase’ also offer a clear picture of the turbulent developments in Chinese society, as the journal grappled with contemporary problems. *Dushu* has not been the only locus for such discussions: other journals have thrived over the past decade, including *The Twenty-First Century*, *Strategy and Management* and the more left-wing *Tianya*, all of which publish longer articles than *Dushu*. Wang Hui himself has written for all three; his famous essay, ‘Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Question of Modernity’, which is around 35,000 characters long, appeared in *Tianya*. However, *Tianya* focuses on literature, not social sciences; *Strategy and Management* concentrates on social sciences, not humanities; *The Twenty-First Century* is strong in both, but it is published in Hong Kong and not many people in mainland China have direct access to it. In the

early 1990s, *The Twenty-First Century* was the only journal available to those who had fled overseas after 1989 and became a very important resource. It published key debates on conservatism and radicalism in 20th-century Chinese thought, for example, and on China's state capacity. Since the mid-1990s, as journals on the mainland regained their vigour, its significance has declined. *Dushu* for its part has enjoyed an important advantage in being located in Beijing, and has historically maintained close relations with scholars in a wide range of fields. These, however, are not the major reasons for *Dushu's* significance during this period: the journal's real strength lies in its systematic reflection on the ongoing changes of its times.

Social strategies

The six volumes of *Essentials of Dushu* are organized thematically. The first, 'Reform: Looking Back, Pushing Forwards', focuses on issues of political economy, grouped under four headings: the problems of agriculture, the reform of state-owned enterprises, 'equity and efficiency', and sustainable development—62 articles in all.³ *Dushu* is to be congratulated for its discussion of agrarian problems, which initiated a national debate. In the 1990s, the government was mainly occupied by reforms in urban areas, and paid scant attention to the problems of the countryside. *Dushu's* coverage alerted people to the desperate situation of the peasantry (*nongmin*), agriculture (*nongye*) and the rural areas (*nongcun*)—'the three nongs', as they are known in Chinese. Some of the authors see the root of the problem in the dual urban/rural system, under which peasants are institutionally discriminated against; they propose a reform of the system to guarantee equal citizenship, and accelerate urbanization to transfer the agricultural population to the towns—essentially a market-oriented policy. Others express deeper doubts about the market and China's capacity for urbanization. Wen Tiejun, in his 1999 text 'The Problem of the "Three Nongs"', traces the current state of agrarian China back to the contradiction between the country's large population and poor resources, and analyses the major institutional changes in rural areas over the last century. Viewed from this perspective, the official policy of increased urbanization and marketization risks leading to a 'Latin Americanization', characterized by urban poverty, violence and political turmoil. Wen Tiejun thus turns consideration of these problems into a

³ *Dushu Jing Xuan*, vol. 1: *Gaige: Fansi yu Tuijin* ('Reform: Looking Back, Pushing Forwards'), 547 pp, paperback, 978 7 108 026330.

reflection on China's overall path of development. Other authors may not share this outlook, but they too are concerned that the high risk factor of the market may exacerbate the peasants' plight; all are well informed.

Likewise for the state-owned enterprise reforms: many *Dushu* contributors have doubts about a crude privatization policy and point out that it is misleading to attribute the low efficiency of SOEs to public ownership alone, since management practices are also important. Radical privatization has often bred corruption and led to a veritable theft of public property; in these circumstances the introduction of a joint-stock system does not always improve production. A series of articles responds to the 'efficiency first' doctrine, arguing that it has proved a self-destructive force. The question 'should economics discuss morality?' provokes a fierce debate on the nature of economics itself, with both sides urging a re-reading of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* and *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. The role of the economists themselves also comes under close scrutiny: their authority is questioned in the 1996 article 'Theories of Economics and the Art of Dragon-Killing' by He Qinglian, a liberal journalist whose famous book *The Trap of Modernization* discussed the social injustices of China's growth model. Her text provoked a counter-blast from some economists, whose responses have also been included in this volume. This is another debate of which *Dushu* may be justly proud: it was the earliest discussion on this subject in China, and the first time that the intellectual supremacy of the economists was called to account. Even if their views are also represented in this volume, the agenda itself—social inequality, the morality of colossal private enrichment—is a challenge to them.

The second volume, 'Reconstructing Our Image of the World', reflects *Dushu*'s response to the changing international order, both political and economic.⁴ The Yugoslav war, the US bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, China's entry into the WTO, 9-11 and the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq inevitably led many intellectuals to modify the rosy picture of the Western-led world order they had held since the 1980s. Shu Chi's 'International Terror and International Politics', published in November 2001, analyses the Cold War origins of Islamic fundamentalism, while the Hong Kong poet Huang Canran discusses the intelligentsia's response to the Iraq War and to Western neo-conservatism in his 'Gain

⁴ *Dushu Jing Xuan*, vol. II, *Chonggou Women de Shijie Tujing* ('Reconstructing Our Image of the World'), 430 pp, paperback, 978 7 108 026354.

the Empire, but Lose Democracy'. The invasion of Iraq provoked a heated debate in China, with some right-wingers declaring their support for the war, while the left denounced it.

Many of the articles in Volume Two—there are 41 in all—grapple with the current path of globalization and explore alternative, more equitable options. Volume Two also reflects *Dushu's* increasing interaction with intellectuals overseas: there are interventions by Benedict Anderson, Chomsky, Amy Chua, Derrida, J. K. Galbraith, Habermas, Thomas Pogge and Vandana Shiva. There is a very strong debate around the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis. Xu Baoqiang, based in Hong Kong, argues in his 1998 article, 'Re-reading Braudel in the Storm of the Asian Financial Crisis', that the crash has exposed the vulnerability of neo-classical economics, developmental state theory, and 'Confucian capitalism' models; the crisis should be situated within the shifting of world capitalism's 'centre of gravity' eastwards, in the terms of Braudel's structural analysis. In 'From Open Society to the Global Crisis of Capitalism', Luo Yongsheng, also from Hong Kong, draws attention to George Soros's critique of market fundamentalism. Benedict Anderson's 'The Ghost Behind the Miracle' views the crisis from a historical perspective.⁵ As the four geographico-political conditions for Southeast Asia's economic miracle—US support, Japanese investment, the PRC's self-isolation and Chinese immigration to Southeast Asia—gradually disappeared, and in the absence of any other effective reform, the miracle finally collapsed.

These analyses were new to most Chinese intellectuals on the mainland, who were still unfamiliar with the notion of capitalist crisis or the debates around deregulated capital flows; 1997 provided much food for thought. Jiao Wenfeng's 2002 article 'The Regulated Market', citing the work of Polanyi and Braudel, argues that the pre-capitalist market economy was deeply embedded in local society and points to the role of the state in breaking down barriers between local markets. The 'regulated market' is the end product of a long social-political process. These discussions were implicit responses to the prevailing Hayekian doctrine of a 'spontaneous order'.

The general aim of this volume is to emphasize that the market is not self-sufficient, it operates in specific political, social and cultural contexts. The

⁵ Published in English as 'From Miracle to Crash', *London Review of Books*, 16 April 1998.

international economic order is inseparable from international politics. Some texts point out that the ideology of free trade conceals the historical reality that its proponents rose to power through protectionism and colonial plunder. Others propose that the current path of globalization has led not just to increasing disparity between rich and poor but also to the deepening of domestic social or ethnic conflict, as Amy Chua's *The World on Fire* (2004) suggests. The question of global terrorism is viewed in a similar light: a large, oppressed population suffering from uneven development has become the breeding ground for extremism. These discussions generally present a grey picture of the international political–economic order; but the implication is not a return to isolationism, but a change in direction on the path of globalization towards greater equality.

Dushu's efforts to restore an Asian dimension to the worldview of Chinese intellectuals are worthy of special note. Asia was a constant presence for Chinese revolutionaries, whether nationalist or communist, during the first half of the 20th century, but it had disappeared by the 1980s; for most intellectuals in the 1990s, the world essentially meant China and the West, with the image of the latter wavering between imperialist exploiters and exemplars of modern civilization. The sole Asian country frequently mentioned was Japan, which featured only as an economic success story. This situation was transformed by Wang and Huang. The 30 *Dushu* articles (around 350 pages) collected in Volume Four under the title 'The Pathology of Asia' cover the intertwining of Chinese and Japanese history, the dilemmas of East Asian historiography, the Korean question, so-called 'Asian values', the political and cultural identity of overseas Chinese, 'subaltern studies' and more.⁶ Authors—among them Sanjay Subrahmanyam, Chalmers Johnson, Samir Amin, Arundhati Roy, Partha Chatterjee, Muto Ichiyo, Mizoguchi Yuzo, Koyasu Nobukuni, Kojima Kiyoshi, Baik Young-Seo, Lee Nam Ju, Chen Lijuan, Wang Gengwu and Ma Yiren—come from China, Japan, South Korea, India, Singapore, Malaysia, the US and Egypt; four from Taiwan contribute their reflections on the island's recent history. The wide range of authorship illustrates the editors' goal: not simply to reconstruct the horizon of 'Asia' for the Chinese intelligentsia but to build *Dushu* as a platform for international discussion on Asian problems—including the ambiguities

⁶ *Dushu Jing Xuan*, vol. IV, *Yazhou de Bingli* ('The Pathology of Asia'), 350 pp, paperback, 978 7 108 026378.

and contradictions in the notion of Asia itself. As Wang Hui's account in *Le Monde Diplomatique* suggests:

The idea is simultaneously colonialist and anti-colonialist, conservative and revolutionary, nationalist and internationalist; it originated in Europe and shaped the self-interpretation of Europe; it is closely related to the matter of the nation-state and overlaps with the vision of empire; it is a geographic category established in geopolitical relations.⁷

The tacit point of reference for 'The Pathology of Asia' is Europe's transition from warring nation-states to economic and political union. While 'Europe' as an identity has acquired some substance, 'Asia' remains a more ambiguous concept. The two editors tend to think that although an 'Asian Union' with political and economic substance is still a distant prospect, it is possible to conceive an intellectual community based upon transnational intellectual networks. *Dushu's* effort has at least promoted mutual understanding between Chinese, Japanese and Korean thinkers. Many Chinese intellectuals have recognized the importance of the Kyoto School and begun to respond to it, for instance. Korean scholar Wookyon Lee and Japanese scholar Yaoichi Komori expressed open regret when Wang and Huang were dismissed from *Dushu*. Both spoke highly of the journal's contribution to intellectual dialogue in East Asia during the last decade.

Vision and memory

Dushu's wide-ranging cultural coverage is represented in Volume Three, 'A Compelling Gaze'—there are some 41 articles in all, on theatre, fine arts, architecture, film and music.⁸ The title comes from a sharp critique by Zhang Chengzhi, a Chinese Muslim, of the National Geographic Channel's activities in Afghanistan. In 2002, the channel commissioned a programme to look for a green-eyed Afghan girl whose picture had appeared on the cover of *National Geographic* sixteen years earlier, when her country had been the battlefield for a proxy war between the two superpowers. They found her, now a middle-aged woman, and took a series of new pictures. Her gaze, revealing a mixture of fear, grief and

⁷ Wang Hui, 'An Asia that isn't the East', *Le Monde Diplomatique*, 27 February 2005.

⁸ *Dushu Jing Xuan*, vol. III, *Bishi de Yanshen* ('A Compelling Gaze'), 390 pp, paperback, 978 7 108 026361.

suspicion, resisted the interpretative power of the imperialist invaders, Zhang argued—not only the US troops, but also the photographers.

This may stand as an example of the general critical orientation of these texts: the aim is to interpret the ‘compelling gaze’ veiled by the dominant culture. Although these pieces deal with different arts and forms, there is a shared perspective: images, shapes and rhythms do not simply carry aesthetic values, but may also reveal the social relations of specific historical contexts. *Dushu*’s authors ask: who is speaking, how, and of what; who listens or watches? Their questions illuminate the assumptions, repressions or rebellions that inform works of art. There are discussions of China’s new documentary movement, Soviet architecture, Bauhaus design, sculpture during the revolutionary period, Zhang Yimou’s movie *Not One Less*, Jia Zhangke’s *The World*, contemporary Taiwanese film, music during the Cultural Revolution and in contemporary China.

A good example is Lü Xinyu’s 2004 review of *West of the Tracks*, the epic documentary on the decline of heavy industry in Northeast China.⁹ Starting from a vivid description of key scenes and an analysis of the narrative art of the documentary, Lü proposes a far-reaching historical analysis of the emergence and decline of Chinese working-class consciousness. Criticizing orthodox Marxism, she emphasizes the importance of the alliance between peasants and workers: in a semi-colonial country like China, peasants made up the major force of the revolution; the first generation of heavy-industrial workers (the ‘leading class’) also came from peasant backgrounds. Today, both workers and peasants have been tragically marginalized; Lü implies that an alliance between the two will be necessary for the liberation of each. Her theorization is illustrated by an in-depth analysis of the documentary. Not all the writers would concur with Lü’s radical perspective; many share the theoretical approaches of their Western peers, including post-colonialism, feminism and Said’s critique of orientalism. Nor are these theories all of recent import: *Dushu*’s first encounters with Foucault date back to the mid-80s. But at that point it was still a question of introducing new concepts. ‘A Compelling Gaze’ shows to what extent these have now been assimilated by the Chinese intelligentsia.

⁹ A shorter version was published in English under the title ‘Ruins of the Future’, NLR 31, Jan–Feb 2005.

Pantheon

It is the fifth volume of this collection, 'Not Only for Commemoration', that best preserves a continuity with the old *Dushu*.¹⁰ It carries on the tradition of portraits, memoirs and biographies of scholars and intellectuals for which the journal has long been famous. Among those discussed here are Liang Qichao (1873–1929), one of the leading thinkers of the Hundred Days' Reform of 1898; the educationalist Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940); Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), the founding intellectual of the CCP and editor of *New Youth*; the Confucianist Gu Hongming (1857–1928); the classical Chinese historian Chen Yinke (1890–1969); the Marxist historiographer Jian Bozan (1898–1968); the philosopher Feng Youlan (1895–1990) and the writer Wang Xiaobo (1952–97). There is also a useful discussion of the intellectual community at the Southwestern United University between 1938–46, when the three main universities from the north were evacuated to escape the Japanese invasion.

Interestingly, however, the two major thinkers of the first half of the 20th century, Lu Xun (1881–1936) and Hu Shi (1891–1962), are missing from this volume, despite the fact that *Dushu* published quite a few articles about them during this period. No explanation is given by the volume's editor, Wu Bin. (It should be noted that, while Wang Hui and Huang Ping are the chief editors of *Essentials of Dushu*, there are individual editors for some of the volumes; 'Not Only for Commemoration' was put together by Wu Bin, who became *Dushu*'s chief editor after Wang and Huang's dismissal.) This silence is strange, but not totally incomprehensible. In contemporary China, Lu Xun is the hero of left-wing intellectuals, while the right champions Hu Shi; research on both thinkers has been highly sophisticated. Had both Hu Shi and Lu Xun been included, sensitive readers might have calculated how much weight had been given to each. It is hard to reckon the historical significance of two such complex figures in a single essay without incurring heated intellectual or political disagreement; it may therefore have seemed safer to leave both out of the picture.

Dushu's interest in narrating the life of intellectuals can be dated back to its late 70s origins. At that time, when the experience of the Cultural

¹⁰ *Dushu Jing Xuan*, vol. v, *Bujin Weile Jinian* ('Not Only for Commemoration'), 579 pp, paperback, 978 7 108 026309.

Revolution was still fresh, such portraits were often tinted with the memory of political trauma and informed by the longing for autonomous individual space. They were generally written by poets and literary scholars as well as distinguished CCP intellectuals, and composed to a very high standard. *Dushu* was famous for this genre in the 1980s; no other journal published such pieces at a comparable level. The series played an important role in shaping the collective consciousness of the new intelligentsia.

During the decade 1996–2005, the biographical genre remained a significant component of the journal, but not as salient as before. One important reason for this lies in the wider social changes that have taken place since the 1980s. The intelligentsia has risen from being a vulnerable component of the socialist working class to a high position in the hierarchy of post-socialist society; the traumas of the revolutionary period have been left behind. This is the background that needs to be kept in mind when reading this volume, for it does not directly reflect this change of ethos. The articles are still written in elegant prose and in most cases the contributors are highly sympathetic to the thinkers they commemorate: critical assessments are relatively rare. The genre still serves to create an intellectual ‘pantheon’, a museum of exemplars, through which contemporary identities and commitments may be compared, assessed or affirmed.

Conversations

The final volume, ‘To Be Together with *Dushu*’, brings together the most important debates that the journal has hosted over the past decade.¹¹ It covers a wide range of issues: archaeology and Chinese historiography, the contemporary image of rural China, globalization, law, university reform, feminism, the environment, war and terrorism, etc. Some of the texts are transcripts of symposia organized by *Dushu*; others are clusters of articles on the same theme. Volume Six gives a good sense of the extent to which *Dushu* set the agenda for debate in an age of dramatic change. Most topics are fairly specialized, yet they share a common orientation: to deconstruct the codified image of modernity underpinned by West-centrism and linear history; to understand the dynamic of Chinese

¹¹ *Dushu Jing Xuan*, vol. VI, *Dushu Xianchang* (‘To Be Together with *Dushu*’), 469 pp, paperback, 978 7 108 026255.

history and contemporary practice; and to explore the possibility of democracy, equality and justice in the current context.

Included here is *Dushu's* important intervention in the controversies around market-driven reform proposals for Beijing University. A 2003 plan, drafted by an economist, aimed to introduce the principle of competition, encouraging departments to hire overseas rather than domestic scholars, and quantifying the evaluation system to replicate American academic norms. It was vehemently criticized by scholars in the humanities and social sciences. *Dushu's* symposium on the proposals raised the discussion to a new level. It brought together leading scholars from Beijing and elsewhere to argue the case for the university as an institution for the pursuit of intellectual freedom and innovation, and to question the bias of the economists behind the proposal.

In 2005, *Dushu* organized a further symposium on the crisis of traditional Chinese medicine within the national health system, which brought together famous scholars and physicians in traditional medicine, including Lu Guangxin from the China Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences and Cao Dongyi from the Hebei Academy of Chinese Medical Sciences, and other scientists, among them the chemist Zhu Qingshi from the China University of Sciences and Technology, together with humanities scholars such as the legal theorist, Deng Zhenglai. The discussion covered both policy issues and the different epistemological and methodological foundations of Western and Chinese medicine, defending the latter against claims that it is 'unscientific'. It was also argued that Chinese medicine, far cheaper than its Western equivalents, could expand the coverage of the national health system. Implicitly at stake here is China's tumultuous recent history. During the Cultural Revolution, Mao Zedong encouraged traditional medicine and used it to build up a relatively successful healthcare system. After the past two decades of market reform, however, medical care has become too expensive for ordinary people to afford. Although the speakers did not make such an explicit comparison, readers were left to consider the implications of the debate and to evaluate for themselves the importance of China's socialist legacy. *Dushu's* role was once again to bring together high levels of professional knowledge and critical intellectual reflection to inform the public discussion. Again, 'To Be Together with *Dushu*' includes a

selection of international interlocutors, including Habermas, Derrida, Perry Anderson, Mark Selden, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri.

Not all the overseas authors who appeared in *Dushu* during Wang and Huang's editorship are included in these six volumes. Alasdair MacIntyre and Immanuel Wallerstein are two contributors who are not represented here. The reason may be that the selected topics leave no margin for debates on virtue and community, or on the history of the social sciences; perhaps the editors judged that *Dushu's* treatment of these questions was not mature enough for inclusion. However, some important topics broached during this decade have clearly been left out on other grounds. One example is *Dushu's* very influential discussion on Che Guevara. In 1998 the journal published a commemoration of Che by the Latin Americanist, Suo Sa, which was the direct inspiration for a play by Huang Jisu and Zhang Guangtian, performed in 2000. Both Suo Sa's article and the *Che Guevara* play provoked intense debate among the Chinese intelligentsia: some considered this a retrogressive evocation of a revolutionary past that had been correctly eschewed by contemporary China; for others, it was a welcome revindication of the struggle for liberation. *Dushu* published several articles from different standpoints, debating the implications of this political symbol within the current context. It would have been very useful to have included these texts in the *Essentials of Dushu*, either in 'Reconstructing Our Image of the World', or in 'A Compelling Gaze'. They provide a good picture of how Chinese intellectuals view the country's revolutionary legacy and the contemporary shift away from it. The editors may have had their own concerns, political or technical, on this subject; but from a reader's perspective, these articles would certainly have added to the value of the selection.

Other politically sensitive pieces have also been left out, including the most controversial article published during this period, 'Writing History: Gao Village', by the sociologist Gao Mobo. The text explored the impact of the Cultural Revolution on the village's development and posed the question: who is dominating the narrative of the Cultural Revolution? *Dushu* published the piece with the aim of opening up plural perspectives on the GPCR and expected to create some debate. But 'Gao Village' was seen as challenging the political consensus between intellectuals and party bureaucrats since the 1980s that the Cultural Revolution had been a complete disaster. Ironically, it was not bureaucrats but liberal

intellectuals who first detected a dangerous whiff, and who wrote, not to criticize Gao's scholarship, but to charge him with 'political incorrectness'.¹² Bureaucratic censors then intervened to forbid further discussion on the topic in *Dushu*. The clear implication is that it was impossible for 'Gao Village' to be included in the *Essentials* collection: the legitimacy of the market-reform era is, to a perhaps surprisingly large extent, based on a negative verdict on the Cultural Revolution; apparently, even a mildly positive picture of that period may seriously threaten to undermine it.

Critical context

Despite these shortcomings, the six-volume *Essentials of Dushu* is still a remarkable collection. The thematic arrangement allows these books to present a more orderly reflection of the journal's intellectual and political orientation during this period. While the authors come from a variety of different political viewpoints, the editors' response to China's current path of development is apparent from the overall agenda. For those who cling to a belief in the virtues of free-market modernization (or its variants), however, the questions that *Dushu* raises inevitably cause offence: within the journal's ambit, the codified criteria of modernization fall apart. Instead of the global market, freedom, democracy, human rights and the sciences going hand in hand, there can be serious conflicts of interest between them. The unitary path of modernization, modelled on the experiences of the West, is no longer viewed as the appropriate prescription for China's pathology. In the 1980s, intellectuals often used this model to criticize both the stagnation of the Chinese Empire and the destructive violence of the Revolution; but such a critique was generally marginalized in *Dushu* under Wang and Huang. The focus shifted to reflections on imperialism, colonialism, the socio-political conditions of the market, and the dynamism of Chinese history. For those who still hold fast to the old consensus, it has been pretty unpleasant to recognize that *Dushu's* agenda-setting power was no longer in their hands.

With this background in mind, it is not difficult to understand why some intellectuals celebrated the end of *Dushu's* 'Wang and Huang era'. Some have openly charged Wang with being against modernization and therefore a 'reactionary', who led *Dushu* in the wrong direction. Others, aware

¹² See the newspaper, *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), 29 March 2001.

that modernization theory is an outdated paradigm even in the West, expressed their discontent more indirectly, on non-political grounds: *Dushu* under Wang and Huang has deviated from its elegant prose tradition and become too obscure to read; it is no longer the 'common space' or 'spiritual home' for the whole intelligentsia. To what extent is this true? As noted, it is the fifth volume, 'Not Only for Commemoration', that contains the most elegantly crafted literary pieces. There is much fine writing in the other volumes, too, signalling the editors' intention to maintain *Dushu's* past style. However, the substance of some of these articles means that they can hardly avoid using the vocabulary necessary to respond to contemporary social, economic and political problems. Unlike the memoirs, these pieces tend to be analytical, and are often quite theoretical.

Again, this change in style needs to be understood with reference to the disciplinary differentiation that has taken place in China over the past decade. In the 1980s, intellectuals read all kinds of books without much consciousness of disciplinary boundaries; by the 1990s, the latter could no longer be ignored. Compared to literature, the new social sciences appeared to have a much higher knowledge threshold: the language of economics can be forbidding to a lay reader and there were many newly translated terms. Consequently, it has been hard to maintain the same level of literary elegance. In the recent debate, critics of Wang and Huang have interpreted this stylistic difference as symptomatic of the two editors' break from *Dushu's* classical prose tradition. In fact, the complaint about readability was first made in the mid-1980s, when *Dushu* began to introduce Western theories. To keep up with the rapid intellectual changes of the time inevitably taxed old reading habits. But there is also the undeniable factor of generational difference: most intellectuals of Wang and Huang's generation did not receive a systematic education in the Chinese classics, which had been abolished after 1949. Some older intellectuals, like Fei Xiaotong, attended universities in the West, but because they had a thorough training in the classics before they went overseas, they were still able to write in elegant Chinese. The younger generation does not have that background to counterbalance the sudden influence of Western languages. But this is a structural constraint, within which the editors are obliged to labour. On the evidence of these volumes, it seems more accurate to say that Wang and Huang tried their best to make the journal more readable without lapsing into a populist style. *Dushu* rarely publishes highly specialized research

papers, and encourages scholars to write in ways that will be comprehensible to the general reader. Analytical articles tend to be balanced by memoirs or other short pieces.

Quietism?

A further form of criticism has also been voiced by liberal Chinese intellectuals, most forthrightly by those outside the PRC: that although *Dushu* has taken a strong line against the CCP's inegalitarian neo-liberal economic policies, the journal has been much more cautious in advancing a political critique of the repressive character of the government. From the perspective of these critics, the first task of the intelligentsia should be to fight for intellectual autonomy from the regime. Unfortunately, while all may agree in principle on the desirability of such autonomy, even some of those now calling for it still seem to have the regime-centred mentality of inviting the bureaucracy to strike down their intellectual opponents. *Dushu* appears to have been a victim of this type of approach.

On the broader question at stake, it is quite true that Wang and Huang's editorship was in some respects politically cautious: the exclusions—Che, 'Gao Village'—from *The Essentials of Dushu*, noted above, are further illustrations of this. However, it would be wrong to say that Wang and Huang's *Dushu* has played no part in the critique of autocracy. The powerful liberal critic Qin Hui, for example (interviewed in NLR 20), has been an active contributor to the journal under their editorship and his work is included in the selection, as are texts by prominent liberals such as Qian Liqun (a historian of Chinese literature), He Qinglian (a reporter, now a political exile), Xu Ben (a US-based writer working on Hannah Arendt) and the late Li Shenzhi. After Wang and Huang's dismissal, Qian Liqun announced his regret in a symposium and called for intellectuals to unite in the struggle for free speech.

To summarize here inevitably involves flattening a highly variegated intellectual landscape: there are many subtleties and overlaps at play in this debate, which happily far exceeds the 'new left versus liberalism' label applied to it in the late 1990s. But it would be fair to say that Wang and Huang's *Dushu* has focused principally on exposing the political-economic logic of the alliance between capital and the oppressive-developmental state. Many of the journal's critics believe that the state is problematic, but capital is fine. From their perspective,

therefore, *Dushu* has criticized capital too much, the state too little; this is the source of that line of argument.

The notion that *Dushu* was once known as the ‘common home’ for the entire Chinese intelligentsia is also a recent construction. As noted above, in the 1980s, *Dushu* was not the only platform for discussion, and quite a few other journals were equally influential. But here again, the relationship of the intelligentsia to changes in the wider society has to be taken into account. The 1980s consensus on modernization has broken down, and *Dushu* can no longer be based upon it. To reiterate: the journal did continue to publish articles by authors of different persuasions, including the free-market economists who answered He Qinglian’s charges. The point that rankles among such critics, perhaps, is not that pro-market writers cannot be published in *Dushu*, but rather that over the past decade they have not been able to set its agenda.

A questioning voice

One might argue that Wang and Huang could have done more to accommodate the taste of those who held fast to the previous consensus. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that *Dushu* would have been able to maintain the image of a ‘golden age’ without sacrificing its critical quality, in the context of the wider intellectual polarization. For the past ideological consensus relied upon some ir retrievable conditions: first, the unprecedented unity between Party bureaucrats and intellectuals brought about by the fresh memories of the Cultural Revolution; second, the undifferentiated interest structure of Chinese society. Today, a large section of the workers and peasants who have been marginalized by China’s current path would themselves no longer subscribe to this ideological consensus. In this context, for *Dushu* to continue to operate according to 1980s values would inevitably mean losing sight of contemporary changes. It is in this situation that *Dushu* has chosen not to maintain the impossible ‘unity’ of the intellectual class, but to raise new questions for the whole society.

In fact, many of the issues *Dushu* has raised have become matters of common concern and even influenced public policy. The ‘efficiency first’ doctrine was officially revised in 2004, and sustainable development was given greater formal salience under the party’s new slogan, ‘scientific development’. Expenditure on health and social security has been

increased, as have budgets for rural infrastructure; agricultural tax has been abolished. This is not to say that the growth in social disparities has been curbed, let alone halted. In many instances, local governments resist or sabotage social policies; for these officials, GDP growth is the most important indicator for their promotion through the bureaucratic system. This turns local government into a profiteering machine. Although top leaders may want to change this, many vested interest groups have come into being in local society, where administrative power and capital go hand in hand. In this situation, social policies can at the most ameliorate the ills of the development path but cannot cure them. Nevertheless, it would be fair to say that the dangers of social inequality have been more widely recognized, and the former priests of the 'efficiency first' doctrine are no longer considered unassailable. In Chinese cyberspace, neo-liberals are fiercely charged with having mismanaged reforms, resulting in enormous social inequality. The glowing image of the capitalist global market and political order has been brought into question, especially since China's exports have encountered trade protectionism in the US and Europe in recent years. This has enabled many people to see that the world is not flat. Liberals now tend to clarify that they are not neo-liberals, and tend to take social justice more seriously in what they write. It would be wrong to ignore the impact of *Dushu's* persistent work on all this.

But these changes do not heal the existing cleavage in the Chinese intelligentsia; this is, if anything, deepening. The form of Wang and Huang's dismissal may seem to be non-political; but strictly speaking, it is a depoliticized political process. The technical pretext used by the SDX Publishing Company does not hold water. The true reason must lie elsewhere. Most intellectuals in China have no difficulty in figuring out the political implication of this sudden change. As a state-owned enterprise, SDX is affiliated to the China Publishing Group, which is further supervised by the Central Propaganda Department of the CCP. Bureaucrats have a strong incentive to tame this 'trouble-making' journal; for although *Dushu's* style is very moderate, the ideas it spreads could potentially be dangerous, and neo-liberal intellectuals have long spoken ill of it. We may never know what was going on in the black box; but even before SDX made the announcement, liberal newspapers had spread the news that *Dushu* was to replace its chief editors, and some of its critics had already begun to celebrate their victory.

Unexpectedly, then, this six-volume collection marks the end of *Dushu*'s 'Wang and Huang era'. What course the journal will now take remains to be seen. Initially, it seemed to stay on the same track for several months after Wang and Huang's departure. More substantial changes look to have appeared with the January 2008 issue, which opens with a 'Call for a Market Economy with the Rule of Law'. It seems unlikely that the previous editors would have used an official political slogan of this type as the title for an intellectual discussion. The *Essentials of Dushu* collection remains a window through which the world can see China's social upheavals during this eventful decade, and situate the intelligentsia's thinking within its historical context. The period has witnessed a dramatic reversal: the thinkers and writers once united by an aspiration for modernization are now divided by the bitter process of reform and development. In the face of these painful splits, some cannot help but look back to the unity of the 1980s for consolation. For these distracted minds, the past looks increasingly like a golden age. In an era of nostalgia, the *Essentials of Dushu, 1996–2005* makes for sober reading: the 'golden age' is all the more irretrievably lost, for now even the myth that it was based on dissolves into the air. For China's intellectuals, now is the time to stand on one's own two feet and struggle bravely for recognition.