Introduction
For the public good

"Serve the People!" This clarion call from Mao Zedong is one of the signature phrases from the Chinese revolution, and particularly the phase of it led by the Chinese Communist Party. But the phrase did not originate with Mao. The sentiment in its modern form pre-dates Communist ascendancy by at least half a century and animates intellectual life in China today. Mao's call, in fact, is but a particular version of the intellectual vocation to serve the public good that is captured in the classical question *weigong ruhe* 為公如何 (how best to serve the public good). The Chinese thinkers and writers we follow in this book all sought to serve the public good (*gong*), albeit according to their own lights. Nonetheless, the phrase "serve the people" captures the ambiguities and changes that have characterized intellectual public service since 1895. The meaning of "service," "the people," and the implied actor—who is qualified to provide this service to the people—changed significantly over the century.

The birth of the long twentieth century

The "long century" from 1895 to the 2010s has confronted China's thinkers and writers with unprecedented disasters and existential threats that became increasingly personal. China in 1890 was not a country, it was an empire, the Qing empire, ruled by non-Chinese Manchus but experienced as Chinese civilization (known as *Tianxia*, "All under Heaven"). This all came crashing down between the Qing's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–5 and the actual fall of the dynasty by 1912 and its replacement by a modern-style republic. This profound political change shaped China's long twentieth century, making it a nationalist century. The Qing empire had perforce become China, the nation-state. For all the changes recounted in the pages to follow, one shared concern animated the range of intellectual activities we shall encounter. It was to identify, preserve, and perfect this new thing—China: nation-state, society, and personal identity.

China's educated elites in the closing years of the Qing Dynasty were scholars: a few scholar-officials serving the state as its privileged administrators and most serving as lettered local elites enjoying life as prosperous landlords and local notables respected in their communities and legally immune from corvée labor and corporal punishment. They studied the Confucian classics in order to pass the state examinations that would certify their elite status. They were generally called *shi*, which amounted to "scholars." Thus the world of China's educated elites was one of explicit moral cultivation, expectations of cultural and ethical leadership in their communities, and the aspiration to public service as government officials. This was the mandarinate that bedazzled early Western sojourners. By 1800 this had been the model intellectual life for some two millennia of otherwise eventful and dynamic history. China then was at the peak of its wealth and power, conquering new territories in inner Asia, supporting massive population growth, and selling its products to the whole world for cash on the nail (silver bullion).[1]

It was also a society in peril from internal forces, most notably the inability of the conservative government to keep up with the massive population growth—the population more or less tripled in the century before 1800, but the government neither increased its revenues nor expanded its services in infrastructural care of dikes and canals or keeping the peace.[2] What is key for our story is that for the generation of 1895—that is, scholars of around at least twenty years of age in that year—their identity, their history, and their social memory through their fathers and grandfathers reached back to these glory days of the early nineteenth century when China really was the center of the world, when Confucianism was the international ideology of record (across East Asia), and where—like Lord MacCartney's mission to Beijing in 1793—one either conformed to China's ways or was shown the door. In fact, things had not been going so well since at least the 1820s, with the progressive immiseration of the lower classes from the previous fifty years finally exploding into revolts and rebellions in several parts of the empire.[3]

[1] William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

[2] The most vivid evocation of these internal developments and strains is given in Philip Kuhn's *Soulstealers: The Chinese Sorcery Scare of 1768* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990); and its implications for Chinese statecraft are covered in his *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

[3] There are several fine survey histories of modern China. Still my favorite is Jonathan D. Spence, *In Search of Modern China* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999); also John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman, *China: A New History*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006); and R. Keith Schoppa, *Revolution and Its Past: Identities and Change in Modern Chinese History*, 3rd edn. (New York: Prentice-Hall, 2011).

Arguably, Chinese elites may have been able to deal with these domestic challenges, perhaps through the traditional mechanism of dynastic change. However, at this inopportune moment Western powers returned with a determination and the power to force themselves into Chinese society, and this clash changed everything. Western merchants had hit upon a solution to their problem—that at that time Europe had nothing marketable to export to China other than silver—by promoting the use and purchase of opium. The British turned around the terms of trade between 1800 and 1840 by selling opium from their Bengal colonies to Chinese buyers. The ensuing series of wars with China and resulting "unequal treaties" gave the British a presence in major Chinese cities in privileged treaty ports. These perquisites were soon extended to other foreign merchants and diplomatic personnel, and critically also to Christian missionaries. Together, they brought an unprecedented comprehensive challenge to the Chinese polity. This commercial and cultural challenge was backed up by Europe's new military power. China had always been connected to the world through trade, and foreign merchants—generally Central Asians but also Muslims from Southeast Asia—had long been present in some Chinese cities. China had also embraced foreign faiths, most particularly Buddhism, which arrived from India in the early centuries of the current era. And China had been invaded by foreign military forces, and, indeed, conquered. After all, the Qing Dynasty itself was not Chinese; it was Manchu. But earlier religious influxes had either been relatively small (as in the case of Nestorian Christian, Jewish, or Muslim) or, in the case of Buddhism, which was a major cultural challenge in the medieval period, did not come with an army. Equally, military invasion had not brought alternative political or cultural models that challenged the Chinese Confucian pattern. The Mongols had conquered China in the thirteenth century and the Manchus had done so in the seventeenth century, but both invaders became Chinese dynasties in the sense of adopting the already existing Confucian emperorship, the study of Confucian classics, and, of course, the use of the Chinese language in most official and all public statecraft.

By the 1880s the triple punch of Western treaty port economics and technological prowess, military presence and meddling in local politics, and Christian missionaries and their cultural challenge, on top of major domestic rebellions, began to take its toll. Urban Chinese began to read the new Chinese-language newspapers, modeled on the European example, to supplement their long-standing networks of bookshops and personal contacts among the scholar elite. And the news for this particular public, the world of intellectual life among what

we would call leading intellectuals, was disheartening. The Qing Dynasty was repeatedly humiliated either by failing to respond to depredations and perceived insults by foreign powers or by losing badly when it attempted to use force to resist further inroads. A sense of crisis emerged in these circles. The responses, naturally enough, drew primarily from the traditional resources of Confucian statecraft theory. Despite the picture given by Western merchants and diplomats at the time, and repeated too often in scholarly studies until recently, the "tradition" from which China's leaders and intellectuals drew was neither moribund nor uniform. Chinese statecraft in the nineteenth century had a dynamic history with many practical successes and contained the contentious variety we would expect of any developed political tradition.[4]

Drawing from Chinese statecraft, leaders devised what became known as the Tongzhi Restoration in the 1860s and 1870s. They sought to adapt the best of Western technology, particularly armaments, to the service and preservation of their Confucian dynasty. Some scholars proposed reactionary solutions—a sort of Confucian version of fundamentalism and family values and "just say no" to all modern innovations brought by the foreigners. Other scholars drew from the practical traditions of "realistic statecraft" (*jingshi*) to adapt selected bits of Western models and techniques to strengthen the economy as well as the state. Finally, some—most famously represented by Kang Youwei beginning in the 1880s—found Confucian precedents for radical change to save China.

Modern China was born in the three decades of political reform and innovation from the 1860s to the 1890s. This new world was increasingly shaped by the social changes that modern technology brought from the West (such as steam engines in boats and trains, newspapers, and telegraphic communications) and the model of "modern life" presented by Europeans in treaty port society from Shanghai to Guangzhou to Tianjin. This was the context that shaped the response of China's thinkers and writers to the twin challenges of domestic unrest (particularly the dire consequences of the major mid-century civil war, the Taiping Rebellion) and foreign intrusion. We will enter that world in Chapter 1, but how can we make sense of the turbulent history of the twentieth century and the role of China's intellectuals in it?

[4] See particularly the first section in Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State*.

The map: ideological moments, social worlds, and enduring ideas

We can sharpen our understanding of the intellectual in modern Chinese history through three lenses to bring the activity of intellectuals into focus: *ideological moments*, *worlds of intellectual life*, and *enduring ideas*. This includes making sense of what happens to ideas when they cross cultural or discursive divides through a set of examples of how people have dealt with challenging foreign ideas, both to understand the experience of Chinese intellectuals over the recent century and to make their example available for us today, as we, too, must engage challenging foreign ideas and find compelling local solutions.

"The intellectual" and Chinese thinkers and writers

The definition of intellectuals and the public appraisal of intellectuals has varied over time. Nonetheless, we shall have to be clear about what we mean by "intellectual." In short, "intellectual" is our word, a modern word that only imperfectly fits as a description of Chinese thinkers and writers over the century, but it is in such common use in English-language studies of China that it would be more confusing to change to another term. It is enough to remember that "the intellectual" is a general marker that points to quite different kinds of thinker and writer whom we meet in this story. The key word is *zhishifenzi* (知识分子), an imported term most agree draws from the Russian word "intelligentsia." The dictionary definition for *zhishifenzi*, given in a recent Chinese dictionary, is "educated person; intellectual; the intelligentsia."[5]

The social use of *zhishifenzi* is more important than a dictionary entry. Most scholars writing outside China agree with something close to the formulation offered by He Baogang in his English-language review of Chinese ideas of the intellectual: "An intellectual is one who commands knowledge and cultural symbols and who is able to use reason to go beyond the restrictions of his or her family, class, and locality." To that generic offering, He Baogang adds that the Chinese intellectual "has a mission to defend and develop the *dao*."[6] The *dao*, originally the

[5] *Xin shidai Han-Ying da cidian* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 2000), p. 1988.

[6] He Baogang, "Chinese Intellectuals Facing the Challenges of the New Century," in Edward Gu and Merle Goldman, eds., *Chinese Intellectuals between State and Market* (London: Routledge, 2004), p. 263. He Baogang (who has taught in Australia and now Singapore) gives a thoughtful review drawing on major theorists from Weber to Bourdieu. This general definition with Chinese additions pretty much parallels the definition (based on Shils's entry in David L. Sills, ed., *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*

Confucian Way in earlier Chinese thought, refers to a contemporary Chinese conception of civilized governance. He Baogang cites Wang Yuanhua, a noted post-Mao Chinese intellectual, for a contemporary expression of Confucian courage: "The life of theory lies in courage and sincerity; theory does not bow to power or flatter anybody."[7] Scholars in the People's Republic of China (PRC) writing in Chinese attend to this question in a similar fashion. Zhu Yong, in the preface to *What Should Intellectuals Do?*, gives an account to which most of his colleagues in Beijing would subscribe:

> Intellectuals in the modern sense only made their appearance in China recently, following the eastward flow of Western learning, the opening of China, the entry of Western scholarly disciplines, and the abandonment of the imperial exams, all of which began the transformation of the traditional knowledge community of the *shi* [scholar].[8]

Actual intellectuals begin with the May Fourth period in the 1910s, although, Zhu Yong notes, Lu Xun used the title "On the Knowledge Class" (*Guanyu zhishi jieji*) for an essay in 1927, so apparently the formulation "intellectual" (*zhishifenzi*) was not common even then. Zhu concludes that intellectuals are distinct from traditional *shi*, or Confucian scholar elites, while nonetheless maintaining "thousands of connections" with *shi* traditions. This heritage, Zhu states, defines the specific character and fate of China's intellectuals.

The figures we will meet in the first chapter were not, strictly speaking, intellectuals in this modern sense. They were scholar-officials in the Qing Dynasty, student aspirants, or local notables. The concept or social role and identity of an intellectual, as well as the term itself, did not come into common usage until the mid-1920s. We will trace the specific identities of China's thinkers and writers across the century—from scholar-officials, to independent intellectuals, to intellectual cadres, to professors

(New York: Macmillan, 1968)) that Hamrin and Cheek adopt in *China's Establishment Intellectuals* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1986), p. 4.

[7] He Baogang, "Chinese Intellectuals Facing the Challenges of the New Century," citing in Merle Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), p. 285. Wang Yuanhua is a noted senior scholar in China whose return to an interest in Confucian values has prompted criticism of his turning his back on May Fourth enlightenment ideals. Xu Jilin defends Wang Yuanhua's project as "another kind of enlightenment" in Xu Jilin, *Ling yizhong qimeng* (Another Kind of Enlightenment) (Guangzhou: Huacheng chubanshe, 1999), pp. 325–8.

[8] Zhu Yong, "Xu" (Preface), in Zhu Yong, *Zhishifenzi yinggai gan shenme?* (What Should Intellectuals Do?) (Beijing: Shishi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 1–2; the entire preface, pp. 1–6, is a meditation on definitional questions. Zhu Yong is an essayist on intellectual and cultural topics and an editor at Current Affairs Press, Beijing.

and experts. The common term "intellectual" will have to serve as a general marker for these varied identities and roles.

Ideological moments

An *ideological moment* captures the intellectual world of a time and place, including the key issue of the day, the cultural order, the language of debate, the competing solutions, and the notable speakers and actors. Ideological moments are shaped by the dominant questions that engage a generation. Ideological moments are the intellectuals' experience of historical context that shapes the questions of the day—created from inherited problems and tools, the facts of geography and economy, and contingent events. In intellectual history we often define "communities of discourse," and we could say "publics," by the questions they share. Republicans and Democrats in the United States are in the same community of political discourse since they share the same questions—how to govern America through the current Constitution—and only differ on the answers. To look to the changing "question of the day" will help us walk through the long twentieth century from 1895 to 2015 in a way that helps us make sense of the experience of China's intellectuals.

This book is organized around six ideological moments and these roughly correspond with different generations of Chinese intellectuals. While each ideological moment is, of course, unique, three key orientations or intellectual moods have characterized ideological moments in modern Chinese history and thus have shaped the world in which each generation of Chinese intellectuals has sought to serve the people: reform, revolution, and rejuvenation. While every ideological moment has examples of all three, generally one intellectual mood dominated. *Reform* is an ideological moment when incumbents of a troubled system seek fundamental renewal by considering far-reaching and controversial change. In the late Qing (1890s) this involved importing alien political ideas and institutions, such as liberal constitutional political forms first as a constitutional monarchy and then as a republic, and in the 1970s and 1980s this involved a fundamental rethinking of state socialism and Cold War politics. *Revolution* seeks to overthrow one system and put in place a new and radically different one. In the 1910s and 1920s this involved a fundamental critique of Confucian family and political values, a search for new political ideologies, and finally an embrace of Bolshevism. In the late 1950s and 1960s revolution involved rebelling against the hierarchies of state socialism and seeking to find the ideal community based on collective labor and pure thought under Chairman Mao. *Rejuvenation* (which includes nation-building) seeks to strengthen the administration

of the state and make coherent the social life and public culture of a system. It has been the enduring project of twentieth-century China and was the dominant ideological moment at mid-century and at its end. Between 1928 and 1955, rejuvenation, under first the Nationalists and then the Communists, competed with revolution as the core issue on the minds of leaders and intellectuals. The nation was the solution that revolution came up with. Indeed, most of the institutions of the new People's Republic—from the Leninist political order to state-owned industry and the organization of labor around the "work unit"—were initiated under the Nationalists' wartime economy in the 1940s. Rejuvenation has returned since the 1990s to supplant the reform efforts of the 1980s. Today, the Chinese state is more powerful than it has ever been, though the challenges of environmental sustainability, economic justice, and regional security are immense.

Ideological moments are not the same as generations in the usual sense. In each ideological moment—whether in 1905, 1925, 1945, 1965, 1985, or 2005—there were new entrants to the public arena as well as older actors who had been active in one or more earlier ideological moments. For example, Liang Qichao was a new entrant in the first ideological moment in our story and was at the peak of his influence as a reformer around 1905, but by 1925 he was considered something of a reactionary conservative and his newer writings were not as widely influential. Later, Wang Ruoshui was a devoted Maoist and radical theorist in the 1960s. Wang was not so influential at that time but he was representative of a radical new generation who found their futures in a sort of faith Maoism. By 1985, however, Wang was a repentant radical and confirmed reformer criticizing most of what he had earlier believed. Wang's writings on "socialist humanism" in the 1980s are his most influential and amongst the most important developments in the history of Chinese socialism. We cannot detail every change of generations or the experience of every intellectual over the various ideological moments, but we will meet enough examples to get the picture.

China's changing public sphere The dominant questions of the day set the agenda for intellectuals, but the nature of the public sphere shaped intellectual expression and participation in public life. Over the course of China's long twentieth century we will see three distinct forms of the public sphere in which China's intellectuals operated. At the beginning of the century, *print capitalism* of newspapers and magazines published by commercial companies helped redefine public debate in China. In combination with the power of the foreign treaty ports (which protected residents in parts of Shanghai and other major cities from Chinese censorship),

these non-state, private media outlets provided a huge new public space for China's intellectuals in which to speak. Alongside the very successful commercial newspapers like *Shenbao* and *Shibao*, intellectuals also published small print runs of specialized and short-lived radical periodicals. These were able to exist because of the norms of free circulation of print capitalism aided and abetted by foreign powers in China.

The next development was the *propaganda state* envisioned by Sun Yat-sen in the 1920s, fitfully applied by the Nationalist government under Chiang Kai-shek from 1928 until its move to Taiwan in 1949 and fully realized by the Chinese Communist Party, first under its administration in Yan'an and North China from the late 1930s and then nationwide in the new People's Republic of China from 1949. In the propaganda state all forms of public communication are controlled by the party-state in a "directed public sphere" that seeks to make all public life conform to the norms of its ideology. This is what Westerners know as "totalitarianism." Chinese proponents, on the other hand, saw themselves as implementing the pedagogical state envisioned by Sun Yat-sen. The propagandists were intent on "teaching the people to be free." Thus "propaganda state" better captures the complex mix of idealism and compulsion that animated the leaders and many of the participants of China's "directed public sphere" since the 1930s. The propaganda state was only fully realized under Mao and for most Chinese between 1949 and Mao's death in 1976.

In the post-Mao period the CCP has loosened its control over the public sphere considerably. But this has been a change in tactics and not in strategy. The goal remains the same: for the party-state to direct or now to manage public life to move society toward its ideological goals. Since the 1990s this relative latitude has combined with a resurgence of a print capitalism without full legal protections and with a key technological innovation in communication—the Internet. Together these have produced a *directed public sphere* in China today characterized by a social media revolution. China's social media have changed public discourse by bringing in the voices of ordinary Chinese and putting them in contact with each other with an ease and efficiency never seen before (as is also the case for other countries). At the same time, it has extended the reach of China's central and local state through e-governance offerings, subtle propaganda, and pervasive monitoring and censoring of Internet communication. China's citizens can organize street marches, as well as chess clubs, over social media, and China's intellectuals have infinitely more outlets through which to express themselves—in fact, too many for people to read. China's netizens can surf the world, as well, though their main interest is China and their main language is Chinese. These social

media, however, are not fully free. They are managed in the ongoing directed public sphere of China's reformed party-state.

Worlds of intellectual life

Ideological moments—expressed through whatever sort of public sphere—are typically experienced inside *worlds of intellectual life*. These are what Thomas Bender identifies as the "cultures of intellectual life" that shape intellectual work:

> Men and women of ideas work within a social matrix that constitutes an audience or public for them. Within this context they seek legitimacy and are supplied with collective concepts, the vocabulary of motives, and the key questions that give shape to their work. These communities of discourse, which I am here calling *cultures of intellectual life*, are historically constructed and held together by mutual attachment to a cluster of shared meanings and intellectual purposes. They socialize the life of the mind and give institutional force to the paradigms that guide the creative intellect.[9]

These communities, or what I will also call worlds of intellectual life, exist within the broader sinophone universe defined by those reading and writing in Chinese and addressing themselves to issues and problems inside China (whether from Beijing or Vancouver, Guangzhou or Penang). Language and the life orientation of Chinese-speakers divides them from European/American intellectual worlds, but the life experiences among different social groups inside China subdivide the sinophone universe meaningfully across time (ideological moments) and space (regional differences; class, gender, and cultural/ethnic and other differences created from social life).[10]

There are any number of worlds of intellectual life, from as large as the circulation of Chinese newspapers to as small as the members of a religious sect. Our purpose is not to provide a taxonomy, for there is certainly more than one way to name these worlds, but it is to remember the range of intellectual worlds within China without confusing ourselves. So we will start with three: metropolitan elite, those well-known

[9] Thomas Bender, *Intellect and Public Life: Essays on the Social History of Academic Intellectuals in the United States* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), pp. 3–4, emphasis in the original.

[10] Gloria Davies explores the sinophone universe particularly inside China in *Worrying About China: The Language of Chinese Critical Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and I briefly map out the worlds within this universe—inside and outside China—in "China's Intellectuals and the World," in Lionel Jensen and Timothy Weston, eds., *China in and beyond the Headlines* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).