

The Project of the Dialogue:

The China Critic and T'ien Hsia Monthly in 1928-1946

Darya Hirhel

Faculty of Journalism, Belarusian State University

Abstract

The China Critic (Zhongguo ping lun zhou bao 中國評論週報, 1928-1946), was a weekly founded on 31 May 1928 by a group of Chinese intellectuals who had studied in the United States. This was the first weekly magazine in English, produced and edited by a group of Chinese liberal intellectuals. Its content mainly focused on current events and politic comments, concerned literature and culture criticism. T'ien Hsia Monthly (tian xia yue kan 天下月刊, 1935-1941) was published in Shanghai, with the auspices of the Sun Yat-sen Institute for the Advancement of culture and Education. Its editors – John C.H. Wu, Wen Yuan-ning, Lin Yutang, and others – mostly came from The China Critic, persuaded an independent editing idea. This journal was dedicated to introducing and interpreting Chinese literature and art for the West and promoting understanding between East and West. The authors of these two English periodicals advocated the idea of cultural interchange, tried to build cultural communication platform and to seek multi-cultural identity of west modern and national culture.

Analyzing The China Critic and T'ien Hsia Monthly, I turn to the theory of dialogue of M. Bakhtin (1895-1975). I suggest that the philosopher's theory of dialogue, the Other, "the false other," monologism can be applied both for the analysis of transcultural ways of thinking of liberal cosmopolitans' and for the analysis of the political, cultural context of China in the 1920s and 1930s.

The possibility of dialogue has a great deal of significance for discourse of Chinese modernization. Why dialogue was needed? What was the advantage of dialogue over monologue? This is my attempt to explore in detail how liberal intellectuals understood different aspects and problematic of the phenomenon of the dialogue – the dialogue between China and the West, the dialogue between Old China and New China. I conclude that China in the process of the modernization was thrown into the space of a monologue-dialogue, had two paths – the path of monologue and the path of dialogue.

Liberal intellectuals assessed risks of the monologue during China's transition to modernity. Being a group of intellectuals whose "modernized" subjectivity was the result of East-West creative dialogue they contrasted their creative, dialogic approach to the dogmatic, monologic approach of conservatives and anti-traditionalists, offered the alternative path of dialogue as they believed that China's transition to modernity should be evolutionary. Though they did not have the political resource to become the dominant discourse in 1920s and 1930s liberal intellectuals of The China Critic and T'ien Hsia Monthly played the role of champions of dialogue in Chinese culture. And since 'to be' is to communicate dialogically, liberal intellectuals broadcasted the values of dialogue, helped the Chinese to understand Old China so that New China could be built on what

had stood the test of time in China's cultural heritage.

I would like to finish with the quote of Aleksey Ukhtomsky: 'as long as the person is not separated from his Double, he, in fact, has not Interlocutor, but speaks and raves to himself, and only when he penetrates the shell and put the center of gravity on the face of another person, he will for the first time get Interlocutor. The interlocutor, as the face of another person, is being revealed to me as I deserved him by all my past and what I have now.' The China Critic and T'ien Hsia Monthly tried to be the Other, the interlocutor for the world and for China, Old and New.