

## Qian Mu's Criticism of Monotheism and Alienation in Modern Life\*

(钱穆对近现代一神论与异化的批判)

Gad C. Isay (伊塞)\*\*

**Abstract:** Qian Mu was not unappreciative of Western and modern ideas but he was also critical. According to him, a major deficiency inhibited the modern mode of living, which he associated with alienation. He traced the origin of this deficiency to the monotheist religion that to him dominated the culture of the West. The present essay analyzes Qian's criticism of monotheism and especially its dichotomized view of life and world as seen in the differentiation between the creator and the created. According to Qian's criticism, the modern expressions of the conception of God as existentially different from the world are indicated in mistaking appearance for actuality, in the race for power and material wealth, glorification of struggle, and in the capitalist and imperialist quests.

**Keywords:** Qian Mu, monotheism, religion, culture, alienation, modernity, progress

As he witnessed the increase in cultural relations between China and the West since the beginning of the 20th century Qian Mu 钱穆 (1895–1990) was particularly concerned lest Chinese society be infected by alienation<sup>1</sup> that to him characterized monotheist religion. His criticism of alienation that anticipated the communist era in China drew mostly from the Confucian tradition. With the current ascendance of capitalism in China and at the same time the renewed interest of the Chinese in their tradition, Qian's criticism is singularly relevant. It represents a genuine Chinese criticism of the problem of alienation in modern life.

The larger part of the following account discerns Qian's critical ideas from his more constructive endeavors.<sup>2</sup> A major argument in this essay is that a similar pattern permeates Qian's references to both the modern striving for progress—which is to him the cause for alienation in modern life—and the belief in a monotheistic God. Radical dependence on both

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\*\* Lecturer, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (E-mail: gisay@research.haifa.ac.il)

<sup>1</sup> Alienation in the sense of being estranged from the world and from society in which one lives.

<sup>2</sup> For Qian's constructive ideas, see Gad C. Isay, "A Humanist Synthesis of Memory, Language, and Emotions; A Philosophical Reading of Qian Mu's *Quiet Thoughts at the Lake*," *Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy* VIII.4 (December 2009), forthcoming.

progress and God alienate the person from the present and from reality and unsettle his or her mental state. The life that results from this dependence is altogether tragic.

The discussion is confined to Qian Mu's ideas as he articulated these in his *Quiet Thoughts at the Lake* which he wrote in the spring of 1948.<sup>3</sup> The *HSXSL* and the important criticism at a crucial time of Chinese history which it contains, has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention.<sup>4</sup> Whereas Qian Mu's scholarly works, before and after 1949—of periods, schools, and specific issues in Chinese history and history of thought—are extensively discussed and referred to in contemporary studies,<sup>5</sup> the works where he introduced his own philosophical ideas are barely noted.<sup>6</sup> The *HSXSL* is unique among Qian's works for the variety of topics discussed in it.<sup>7</sup> Philosophically, it reveals Qian's own ideas more directly than any other source before the year 1949. As indicated in the author's introduction, he self-consciously wrote it in a rather unsystematic style.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, as I found much inspiration in the work's content, I ventured to go beyond his original intention and introduce his ideas in a more systematic form.

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<sup>3</sup> Qian Mu 钱穆, *Hushang xiansilu* 湖上闲思录(Quiet thoughts at the lake) (Taipei: Lantai chubanshe, 2001), hereafter *HSXSL*.

<sup>4</sup> In a recent paper, Prof. Chen Chi-yun discussed *HSXSL*. Chen Qiyun (Chi-yun) 陈启云, "Qian Mu shi de Zhong-Xi sixiang wenhua bijiaolun—lishi zhuyi lunshi" 钱穆师的中西思想文化比较论——历史主义论释(A comparative discussion of master Qian Mu's cultural thought—A historicist examination), paper presented at "Qian Mu sixiang xueshu yantaohui" 钱穆思想学术研讨会 (Symposium on the Thought of Qian Mu), Soochow University, Taipei, Oct. 31 and Nov. 1, 2003. Courtesy of the author.

<sup>5</sup> Yu Ying-shih 余英时, *Youji fengchui shuishanglin: Qian Mu yu xiandai Zhongguo xueshu* 犹记风吹水上鳞: 钱穆与现代中国学术 (Reminiscences of the Wind Rippling the Water: Qian Mu and Modern Chinese Scholarship) (Taipei: Sanmin shuju, 1991); Guo Qiyong 郭齐勇, "Zhongguo minzuxing yu Zhongguo wenhua jingshen—Qian Mu lun lishi, minzu yu wenhua" 中国民族性与中国文化精神——钱穆论历史、民族与文化 (Qian Mu's discussion of history, the nation and culture in his *The Chinese National Character* and *The Spirit of Chinese Culture*), in New Asia College, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, ed., *Qian Binsi xiansheng bailing jinianhui xueshu lunwenji* 钱宾四先生百龄纪念会学术论文集 (Proceedings of Academic Conference in Memory of Master Qian Binsi's 100th Birthday) (Hong Kong: New Asia College, 2003), pp. 111–132. Tu Wei-ming, "The Ecological Turn in New Confucian Humanism: Implications for China and the World," *Daedalus* 130.4 (Fall, 2001): 243–264.

<sup>6</sup> Here I have in mind sources such as Qian's *Rensheng shilun* 人生十论 (Ten discussions on life) (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1993), and *Wanxue mangyan* 晚学盲言 (Deluded words of old age scholarship), 2 vols. (Taipei: Lantai chubanshe, 2001).

<sup>7</sup> Chapter titles of the *HSXSL* are: (1) Humanity and Nature; (2) Spirit and Matter; (3) Emotions and Desires; (4) Principle (*li*) and *Qi*; (5) Yin and Yang; (6) Art and Science; (7) No-self and Immortality; (8) Quality (*chengse*) and Quantity (*fenliang*); (9) The Way (*dao*) and Fate (*ming*); (10) Good (*shan*) and Evil (*e*); (11) Freedom and involvement; (12) Struggle and Kindness; (13) The Rules of Propriety (*li*) and the Law (*fa*); (14) Rush and Leisure; (15) Science and Life; (16) Self and Other; (17) Divinity and Wisdom; (18) Experience and Thought; (19) Spirits and Divinity; (20) The Countryside and the Urban; (21) Life and Consciousness; (22) The Imperceptible and the Perceptible; (23) History and Divinity; (24) Things and Outward Appearances; (25) Human Nature and Fate; (26) The Tense and the Loose; (27) The Deductive and the Conclusive; (28) Intuition and Intellect; (29) The Infinite and the Complete in Itself; (30) Values and the Mind of Kindness.

<sup>8</sup> Qian's introduction, *HSXSL*, pp. 5–6.

## I. The Historical Context

In the spring of 1948, the Communist takeover of China seemed inevitable.<sup>9</sup> Recent experiences of rectification campaigns in the liberated territories were still fresh in memory. The threat was socio-political and intellectual as well. Leaders such as Mao Zedong 毛泽东 (1893–1976) and Liu Shaoqi 刘少奇 (1900–1969) openly championed utopian images of the future communist society, the radical priority of party over individual interests, and the demise of personality.<sup>10</sup> It is understandable that intellectuals were alarmed about the future of the freedom of expression in China.

According to his own account, Qian Mu wished at the time to remain politically neutral. In 1980 he reflected on the period when he wrote the *HSXSL* and observed that after the Japanese defeat in 1945 order was not yet restored and he decided not to oppose the communists and also not to stand in the way of the nationalists.<sup>11</sup> But he was not about to curtail his cultural and intellectual criticism of Marxism. To him, dialectical materialism is alien to the Chinese mind and untenable. Among the errors of the Marxists were the concept of a linear progress in history, and the emphasis on the material conditions rather than on the spiritual quality of human life.<sup>12</sup>

The advent of Marxism in China was one cause for concern among many others. It is by now well established that during the period from the May Fourth incident of 1919 to the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, Confucian ideas and social norms were attacked like never before.<sup>13</sup> But they were also defended. To be sure, the remaining supporters were reduced to defend the most essential message of the tradition: the definition of what humans should be and how they can become what they should be.<sup>14</sup> The larger intellectual context involved issues such as: Can Confucian society modernize? Are Confucian ethics defensible at a time of enormous upheaval? While the intellectuals themselves experienced a sense of personal and national crisis,<sup>15</sup> their ideas underwent a process of radicalization.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> General Marshal's efforts to mediate between the communists and the nationalists eventually failed one year earlier. Then, in early 1948, the Nationalists' offensive lost its momentum and the Communists launched their counter-attack. The Nationalist forces succumbed to apathy.

<sup>10</sup> David, S. Nivison, "Communist Ethics and Chinese Tradition," *Journal of Asian Studies* 16 (November 1956): 51–74.

<sup>11</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 8. Eventually, however, in 1949 Qian was forced to leave, after Mao Zedong had named him along with Hu Shi and Fu Sinian, as "running dogs of the imperialists," through their representatives in China, the Nationalists. Mao Tse-tung, "Cast Away Illusions, Prepare for Struggle," in *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1969), p. 427.

<sup>12</sup> Chapter 12 in the *HSXSL*, pp. 53–57, criticizes the Marxist view of history.

<sup>13</sup> Cheng Chung-ying observes that this period saw "...a slow demise of Confucian ethics and Confucian society." See his "Confucianism: Twentieth Century," in Antonio S. Cua, ed., *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 164.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 164.

<sup>15</sup> Chang Hao, "Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China in Historical Perspective," In Tu Weiming, ed., *The Triadic Chord: Confucian Ethics, Industrial East Asia and Max Weber* (Singapore: The Institute of East Asian Philosophies, 1991), pp. 325–356.

<sup>16</sup> Yu Ying-shih, "The Radicalization of China in the Twentieth Century," In Tu Weiming, ed.,

Indeed, to its critics, the advent of Marxism in China was associated not only with the introduction of Western learning but also with the weaknesses of Chinese culture. This observation explains Qian's acknowledged shift of interest in the early 1940s from history to culture.<sup>17</sup> It was not a dramatic turn. In his *Reminiscences of My Parents at the Age of Eighty: Miscellaneous Reminiscences of Teachers and Friends* he mentions that since 1904 his great concern was over the question of which culture is the best, the Chinese or the Western.<sup>18</sup> A universalistic concern is unmistakable here, and, indeed, Qian writes that since the beginning of World War II the observer could not hide his will to assist the Westerners who go in what he calls "the useless and meaningless road."<sup>19</sup> But his fundamental belief is that reform should start from within. Hence, he is primarily concerned with the Chinese scene.

It is to be regretted, Qian observes, that his contemporaries lost the true spirit of their tradition. Shallowness, which to him is synonymous with the quest for material benefit, has already spread far and wide. "Modern Chinese... chase the false magic of superficial knowledge, they hurry to compete, and they are fond of utility."<sup>20</sup> According to Qian, contemporary Chinese intellectuals radically and uncritically adopt foreign patterns. On the one hand, he refers to intellectuals who adopt foreign terms to define Chinese thought. On the other, he blames the uncritical followers of foreign philosophical trends, such as dialectical materialism.<sup>21</sup> His contemporaries' weakness is further observed in their inclination to imitate the West: "This exactly is the weak point of contemporary Chinese culture. ...the Chinese flatter utility and seek to imitate the West."<sup>22</sup> Imitation, though, will never equal the original.<sup>23</sup>

Qian Mu's criticism of the contemporary intellectual scene is directed not only at the level of approach or mental orientation but also at the level of content. During the first half of the 20th century, most May Fourth protagonists seemed to want to promote Western philosophy, not argue for Chinese philosophy.<sup>24</sup> Tradition as a whole seemed to pose an obstacle to the much needed modern progress. To be sure, Hu Shi 胡适 (1891–1962), following John Dewey (1859–1952), did principally acknowledge the significance of tradition for the cause of progress. Yet, in several influential writings during that period, Hu and other May Fourth protagonists, such as Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879–1942) and Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936), directed their attacks against the whole framework of the Confucian society and the

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*China in Transformation* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 125–157.

<sup>17</sup> In the 1948 introduction to the *HSXSL* Qian mentioned that after 1939 his attention gradually shifted from history to culture. *HSXSL*, p. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Qian Mu, *Bashi yi shuangqin; Shiyou zayi, hekan* 八十忆双亲；师友杂忆，合刊 (Reminiscences of my parents at the age of eighty; Miscellaneous reminiscences of teachers and friends, Abridged Edition) (Taipei: Dongda tushu gongsi, 1983), p. 34.

<sup>19</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 147.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 66.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>24</sup> Cheng Chung-ying, "Philosophy: Recent Trends Overseas," in Antonio S. Cua, ed., *Encyclopedia of Chinese Philosophy* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 598.

Chinese character itself.<sup>25</sup> Contemporary studies acknowledge the May Fourth leaders' optimistic embrace of a Western-derived concept of modernity as truth without questioning its negative consequences.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, foreign ideas and doctrines increasingly gained ground in China. During the 1940s, Feng Youlan 冯友兰 (1895–1990) reconstructed Zhu Xi's 朱熹 (1130–1200) philosophy in terms of contemporary Western ideas.<sup>27</sup>

Inasmuch as Qian criticizes those who adopted Western ideas and patterns of thought, his criticism of the ideas of those who still found value in the Chinese tradition was no less significant. In the late 1940s the terms that later refer to the New Confucians were still not in use.<sup>28</sup> Yet those who eventually became associated with this name were already rather active. A majority among them tended to develop the ideas of Mencius (371–289 B.C.E.), according to the interpretations of Lu Xiangshan 陆象山 (1139–1192) and Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472–1529) whose interpretations tended to emphasize the mind at the expense of scholarship.<sup>29</sup> Cheng Chung-ying 成中英 recently observed that Xiong Shili 熊十力 (1885–1968) “started by developing Confucianism as an ontology and cosmology of ultimate reality which had its unity in ontology and cosmology, but he ended by describing the state of discovery of the *benxin* 本心 (original mind) as the ultimate reality in oneself.”<sup>30</sup> Qian's criticism in the *HSXSL* of the notion of an original substance can be specifically traced to Xiong's “New Confucian” writings.<sup>31</sup>

On the level of content, Qian's criticism in the *HSXSL* is directed both at the “Westernized” protagonists of the May Fourth movement and to their “Traditionalist” contemporaries. A similar pattern seems to have invited Qian's disagreement, namely the dichotomized view of world and life.<sup>32</sup> Indeed, the *HSXSL*'s emphasis on the dichotomized versus the non-dichotomized differentiation makes it a major foundation of Qian's scholarship. In several places in the *HSXSL* he criticizes dichotomies such as world and God, individual and society, and body and mind, in Western thought. Similarly, a major problem in the thought of his “New Confucian” contemporaries, seems to stem from their overemphasis on mind, which leaves the objectively real too far on the other end of the scale. Qian, on the other hand, considers the non-dichotomized view a major characteristic of Chinese culture. In this sense, his criticism represents his interpretation of traditional Chinese, or rather,

<sup>25</sup> Chow Tse-tsung, “The Anti-Confucian Movement in Early Republican China,” in Arthur F. Wright, ed., *The Confucian Persuasion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1960), pp. 288–312.

<sup>26</sup> Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Introduction,” in idem eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 5.

<sup>27</sup> Cheng Chung-ying, “Confucianism: Twentieth Century,” p. 168.

<sup>28</sup> John Makeham, “The Retrospective Creation of New Confucianism,” in idem ed., *New Confucianism: A Critical Examination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), p. 25.

<sup>29</sup> According to Yu Ying-shih, the New Confucians overemphasized the mind on account of scholarship. See his “Qian Mu yu Xinrujia” 钱穆与新儒家 (Qian Mu and the New Confucians), in *Youji fengchui shuishanglin*, pp. 31–98.

<sup>30</sup> Cheng Chung-ying, “Confucianism: Twentieth Century,” p. 166.

<sup>31</sup> *HSXSL*, chapter 9, pp. 38–42.

<sup>32</sup> More on this below.

Confucian, culture. From this basis he launches a criticism of both Chinese currents—various Confucian ideas, Daoist and Buddhist, as well as contemporary—and the modern West.

The point of departure for Qian's criticism in the *HSXSL* is his understanding of the Confucian tradition. Recently, scholars debated the relationships of Qian Mu to the New Confucians. Methodologically, the scholars are concerned with his entire scholarship and particularly his approach to the 1958 Manifesto.<sup>33</sup> My approach is somewhat different, and I prefer to examine Qian's position specifically in 1948 and the text that he wrote that year. The *HSXSL* favors Confucian thought over Daoist, Buddhist and Western thought, and Zhu Xi's understandings are specified as the correct transmission. In chapter 14 of the *HSXSL* Qian observes how in ancient China the Confucians, unlike the Mohists and the Daoists, avoided radical forms of a life of leisure and utilitarianism and represented the middle way in Chinese society. According to him this authentic Chinese course should not be abandoned due to Buddhist and Western challenges. In chapter 8 of the *HSXSL* Qian criticizes the tendency inherent in the Wang Yangming School to seek an original substance deep in the mind and to subordinate reality to it. At the same time he praises Zhu Xi's attention to the person's need to cultivate the mind by means of learning. Qian labels the Wang Yangming School as elementary education and the Zhu Xi School as advanced education. The priority assigned to Confucian and in particular to Zhu Xi's ideas does not hinder Qian's attempt at an intercultural synthesis.

Qian's criticism of the problem of alienation in modern life highlights, from a philosophical perspective, a major weakness that inheres in foreign ideas and a major strength that inheres in the Chinese cultural tradition. Qian's criticism of alienation is presented in the following as an extension of his criticism of monotheistic religion in the West.

## II. Criticism of Monotheist Religion

Religion is a cultural specific term and therefore a discussion of religion and faith across different cultures is methodologically problematic. During an early stage of the intellectual meeting of China and the West in the late 16th and the early 17th centuries this problem already existed. Europeans of that period used terms such as “true religion” and “false religion” rather than “religion” and “non-religion.”<sup>34</sup> All the same, according to Nicolas Standaert, the Jesuits who arrived in China around that period “found it difficult to call the *ru* (儒 Confucianism) ‘false religion’ or ‘idolatry’,”<sup>35</sup> but they could not accept it as a true religion either.<sup>36</sup> What follows shows that Chinese scholars, too, shared the cultural bias of

<sup>33</sup> Yu Ying-shih, “Qian Mu yu Xinrujia.”

<sup>34</sup> Nicolas Standaert, “The Jesuits DID NOT Manufacture ‘Confucianism’,” *East Asian Science, Medicine, and Technology* 16 (1999): 128; T. H. Barrett, “Chinese Religion in English Guise: The History of an Illusion,” *Modern Asian Studies* 39.3 (2005): 512.

<sup>35</sup> Standaert, “The Jesuits DID NOT Manufacture ‘Confucianism’,” p. 128.

<sup>36</sup> Yu Liu, “Seeing God Differently: Chinese Piety and European Modernity,” *History of Religions* 45.1 (August 2005): 29–45.

extolling the virtues of their own culture. A thoughtful answer to the seeming incommensurability of religions is suggested in the writings of Wilfred Cantwell Smith who identified the locus of the religions in persons rather than in systems and things. Accordingly he proposed a shift in focus from religion as a system of faith to the subjective individual experience of being a participant in that system: “[The] religiousness [of religious traditions] lies not in themselves, but in the orientation that persons have to them.”<sup>37</sup>

Unaware of this observation, Qian Mu shared the above-mentioned cultural bias.<sup>38</sup> For the reason that he did not fully explore the complexities of monotheist religious experience his was not a fair judgment. His appreciation of Chinese culture was equally charged with emotional preference. Accordingly, his comparative discussion of religion highlighted what he saw as the distinguished humanist insight of Chinese culture in contrast to prevalent negative tendencies in the culture of the West. According to Qian, the major difference in the cultural orientations that developed in China and in the West can be traced to the tendency of the latter to dichotomize the two qualities of existence and the tendency of the former to avoid this dichotomization. The following summarizes Qian's argument about the concept of Creation and the distinctive character of Chinese culture:

The Chinese... held that the myriad things in the universe are one happening (*shi* 事), with no beginning and no conclusion, just one happening. What did they mean by “happening”? Chinese thought used for that purpose the word “motion” (*dong* 动). The myriad things in the universe... are nothing but motion. This motion could be portrayed as change (*yi* 易). Change is transformation in motion (*bianhua* 变化). As far as visible events and appearances are concerned, the myriad things, from beginning to end, are nothing but transformations in motion (*biandong* 变动), nothing but changes, [and] these transformations in motion harbor a dynamic (*youwei* 有为). But this dynamic does not require anything to cause it (*wei er wei* 为而为), hence there was no necessity to articulate the idea of creation by God (*Shangdi* 上帝). Moreover, these transformations in motion apparently are not for any purpose (*wu suo wei er wei* 无所为而为). Therefore, Chinese thought disregards the question of the purpose (*mudi* 目的) of the world, the hope for the End of Days (*zhongji xiangwang* 终极向往), and the wish for attaining the final rest (*zhongji guisu* 终极归宿). The argument goes that the beginning of the world is one motion, and the conclusion is, equally, the same one motion. This motion was also called change. These motions and changes are but one phenomenon. [Whether] there is

<sup>37</sup> Wilfred Cantwell Smith, “Philosophia as One of the Religious Traditions of Humankind,” in John W. Burbidge, ed., *Modern Culture from a Comparative Perspective* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 31–32.

<sup>38</sup> This observation will stand both for Qian's 1948 *HSXSL* and his discussion of Chinese religion in the early 1980s. Qian Mu, “Luelun Zhongguo zongjiao” 略论中国宗教 (Discussing Chinese religion), in *Xiandai Zhongguo xueshu lunheng* 现代中国学术论衡 (Evaluative studies of Contemporary Chinese scholarship) (Taipei: Sushulou wenjiao jijinhui, 2000), pp. 1–10.

or there is not an underlying original substance (*benti* 本体), this question did not occur to the Chinese. Another name the Chinese applied to these transformations in motion was “*zaohua*” (造化). A deeper analysis of this phrase allows that *zao* is the manufacture of being out of nothingness and *hua* is the transformation of being into nothingness. The *zao* and the *hua* join in a correlative process. Hence there is no mention of an original substance underlying all phenomena, no talk about a soul (*linghun* 灵魂) underlying life. Accordingly, in Chinese thought the concepts of God, soul, and original substance, are not denied; these concepts are rather conceived as part and parcel of the framework of the appearances and events [as they are].<sup>39</sup>

This quote agrees with the view according to which Chinese thinkers view the divine, (*shen* 神)<sup>40</sup> and the human as one and the same sphere that is immanent and transcendent and has no other sphere beyond it.<sup>41</sup> Their sources of meaning are inherent in the human condition.

The core of Qian’s criticism of monotheist religion is the duality that other critics associate with the Western belief that the world was created by an act of God’s will, in a specific moment in time, as a something out of nothing.<sup>42</sup> The basic assumption underlying this belief—the idea of the reality of a God who transcends space and time—implies a dichotomy between two qualities, different in kind: the Creator and the created; God and the world. Using ideas that sometimes converge with those raised by such scholars as Karl Marx (1818–1883), John Dewey, and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), as well as sources of Chinese tradition,<sup>43</sup> Qian argues that in modern life this dichotomous pattern has an impact on both the personal and social levels and is best described as alienation. The term alienation is not invoked as such, but, as I shall argue, it is the main concern of Qian’s *HSXSL*. The text has terms such as *gebiede* (各别的) and *weili* (违离) that convey separation and difference.<sup>44</sup> In the following I will refer to the problem of alienation in terms that are closer to his own words, such as the diversion of the person from the path of genuine existence, the decrease in the person’s hold on reality, lack of authenticity, estrangement from concrete reality, and disorientation in or remoteness from the present. Qian’s discussion of alienation rests on two

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<sup>39</sup> *HSXSL*, pp. 38–39.

<sup>40</sup> In chapter 17 of the *HSXSL* *shen* is identified as non-human, transcendent, absolute, all encompassing, and as creator of all beings and things. Since the traditional Chinese view is above all non-anthropomorphic, *shen* is translated as the divine rather than God.

<sup>41</sup> A critical examination will show that exceptions to this view were heard both in China and in the West. See Yu Ying-shih, “Cong jiazhi xitong kan Zhongguo wenhua de xiandai yiyi” 从价值系统看中国文化的现代意义 (The modern significance of Chinese culture from the perspective of a system of value), in his *Zhongguo sixiang chuantong de xiandai quanshi* 中国思想传统的现代诠释 (The modern interpretation of traditional Chinese thought) (Taipei: Lianjing, 1987), p. 12.

<sup>42</sup> A review of Qian’s relevant writings indicates that to him monotheist religion was Christianity and perhaps sometimes Islam. Apparently he was less familiar with Judaism.

<sup>43</sup> Qian was familiar with writings and ideas of Marx, Dewey, and Freud. For the Chinese sources, see Confucius’ reluctance to discuss that which is beyond present existence (spirits and death), in *Analects* 11:11, and the Mencian linkage between mind, human nature, and Heaven, in *Mencius* 7a:1.

<sup>44</sup> *HSXSL*, pp. 25, 91.



other distinctions: a temporal one, between the future, on the one hand, and the past and present, on the other, and an ontological one, between appearance and actuality. Both distinctions can be traced to the religious dichotomy mentioned above.

Critics of the claim for two existential qualities have expressed their views since antiquity both in China and in the West. In Greece, Heraclitus (544–484 B.C.E.) said that “everything is in flux.”<sup>45</sup> More recently, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900), and Sigmund Freud, argued for the absence of divine providence. Zhuangzi 庄子 (fl. 4th century B.C.E.) rejected the idea of a beginning and established the view of a world that constantly transforms, there being no other quality of existence. Zhu Xi in his discussion of principle (*li* 理) and vital force (*qi* 气) added something like an unmoved mover to the discussions, without, however, stipulating a dichotomous development. With the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in China in the late 16th century and early 17th century, the monotheist dichotomy between two qualities of existence, and cultural differences between China and the West began to be discussed. During the second half of the 17th century Yang Guangxian 杨光先 (1597–1669) explained, “Beyond principle there is no other principle, and beyond Heaven there is no other Heaven [i.e., Lord of Heaven].”<sup>46</sup> In the early 20th century, Zhang Taiyan 章太炎 (1869–1936) wrote his critical essay on monotheist religion, “Atheism” (Wushenlun 无神论). God, he argued, cannot be different from the world, and therefore, Christian monotheism misrepresents experienced reality. Qian Mu made this point the touchstone of his criticism of modern life.<sup>47</sup>

The claim of monotheist religion for the reality of God, different in kind from the world, diverted man from the authentic mode of existence. By authentic Qian Mu refers to man preserving his original affinity with nature and being true to his humanist nature.<sup>48</sup> According to Qian, the monotheist believer separates being into two existential qualities, “Those who believe in God think that beyond this world exists another world.”<sup>49</sup> And, “Within the religious agenda, a major condition for the internal mind experience is the existence of an external divine level or an external divine power.”<sup>50</sup> Qian argues that the priority assigned by the modern individual to the transcendent has an isolating effect on the quality of his life within the community. In the present world, he says, finite man faces a transcendental power, different in kind. He confronts this state, not together with his community, but alone. “In the West, a lone individual faces an infinite past and an infinite future,” wrote Qian and

<sup>45</sup> Plato, *Cratylus*, 402a. Cited from Karsten Friis Johansen, *A History of Ancient Philosophy: From the Beginnings to Augustine*, trans. Henrik Rosenmeier (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 32–33.

<sup>46</sup> Yang Guangxian, *Budeyi* 不得已 (I could not do otherwise), trans. John D. Young, chapter editor David E. Mungello, in Wm. T. de Bary and Richard Lufano, comps., *Sources of Chinese Tradition*, Vol. II (2nd ed.; New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 152.

<sup>47</sup> For Qian's non-dualistic view see quote associated with note 39 above.

<sup>48</sup> *HSXSL*, chapter 6, pp. 23–28; chapter 20, pp. 90–93.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

sensitively reflected: “This is too much to bear.”<sup>51</sup> In consequence of this gap between the monotheist believer and God, present existence is deficient.

To be sure, it is not the dichotomous world view in itself that is to blame but rather the priority a person accords to the sphere of existence he himself does not belong to. The following eleven comments briefly illustrate and explain some of the deficiencies that pervade the monotheist mode of living. The first four comments (A–D) tackle the ontologically and temporally based dichotomy between qualities of existence, and its relation to the decrease in the person’s hold on reality, or, alienation.

(A) The monotheist apparently lives simultaneously in two worlds. “Man prays to God, asking for comfort and courage and at the same time considers himself living in the present (*xianshi rensheng* 现实人生).”<sup>52</sup> Actually, we talk about the presence of the believer in this world and his linkage with the transcendent sphere of God, when he is not really present or linked with either. According to Qian, the difference in kind between the monotheist believer and God motivates the believer to assign the highest priority to his relations with God so that his social life and personal autonomy become negligible.<sup>53</sup>

(B) The monotheist approach transfers the core of existence from the present world to another world (*bie yi shijie* 别一世界), which is a realm where existence cannot be realized.<sup>54</sup> In several places Qian mentions in this regard the province of God, the Heavenly State (*tianguo* 天国), and the biblical term “The End of Days.” Unrealizable as it is, the final goal cancels the significance of the present.<sup>55</sup> God’s supremacy, namely, the otherworldliness of God, His absolute status, and the future that is promised in his name, transfers humanity to a path that is not its own and reduces the value of present life.

(C) Monotheist religion negates the human capacity for creativity. Belief in God causes a person to attribute everything to God and not to himself. “Assuming that on his own he [the person] cannot grasp [what is in] another person’s mind, the person [who believes in God] attributes the capacity [to grasp it] to a divine presence within his mind,”<sup>56</sup> that is the soul that inhabits his mind. This approach causes the person to attribute creativity in life to a foreign power. It neutralizes free will, the human capacity to act autonomously and to create. The co-existence of a powerless, God-dependent humanity, and a transcendental origin to creativity, undermines the sense of human autonomy.<sup>57</sup>

Qian Mu is saying that true creativity requires correlativity. According to the law of causality, the finite and caused (world) is conditioned by that which is beyond time and is

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., pp. 105–106.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 74–75.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., pp. 17–18.

uncaused (God). As a result of the monotheistic world view, a temporal distinction between the Creator and the world makes causal relations inevitable. Accordingly, true creativity on the part of the former is impossible. Assigned a passive role, man becomes (or was he always?) a mechanical device in a deterministic world.

(D) From the point of view of social relations, the believer assigns a higher value to his relations with God than to those with his fellow men. Directing his emotions exclusively toward God he neglects his associations with other people. Believing that his social life is lived in the presence of God, he becomes estranged from concrete reality.<sup>58</sup> The believer's tendency to assign a priority to an imaginary reality alienates him from the actual experience of human life.

The next two comments (E–F) illustrate the consequences of this pattern on a person's mental state and on his moral behavior in society.

(E) More than anything else the believer aspires to what is called divine revelation (*jiangling* 降灵), a state described by Qian as verging on mental disorder and insanity. He argues that the mental experience of religious revelation is nothing but a conversion of the original state of mind to an order borrowed from outside. As a result of over-stress, the original order collapses and is replaced by an imagined order.<sup>59</sup>

(F) The monotheist believer who in his behavior and his thoughts elevates his relations with God over his other relations is distracted from real living. Denial of internal autonomy is connected to the use of prayers: "Prayer is converted into a practice."<sup>60</sup> As an imposed pattern of behavior, prayer replaces genuine emotions.<sup>61</sup> The consequences are critical in the sphere of morality. Inasmuch as morality bases itself on considerations that prioritize a supreme (God's) will, socially related considerations are only secondary. Hence, "religion necessarily is superior to morality."<sup>62</sup> Qian Mu suggests a distinction between morality that is imposed by religious authorities, and moral autonomy. The morality that is imposed by religion allows only limited space for maintaining an autonomous life.

From Qian Mu's perspective, because God is not accountable, the relationship between the believer and God is a one-way relationship. Whereas the believer always knows his part of this relationship, God's part is forever obscure. As reciprocal linkage is not possible, loss of mental balance and imposed patterns of behavior follow. The next four comments (G–J) juxtapose the monotheist claim for two existential qualities and the impossibility of reciprocity to a sense of inferiority that necessarily imbues the believer's consciousness.

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 119–120.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 118.

(G) The believer seeks to elevate himself ever higher, to maintain a reliable relationship with the transcendent.<sup>63</sup> The aspirations for ascendance eventually end in frustration. According to Qian, by appealing to God, man in reality reduces himself.<sup>64</sup> The believer is committed to his relations with God, yet God's commitment exists only in the believer's will (*yizhi* 意志).<sup>65</sup> On the part of the believer, relations between man and God are based on an acknowledged difference in kind. In these relations the individual commits himself to God regardless of God's commitment toward himself. Any possibility of reciprocity is ruled out. Instead of living his own life the individual lives the life of faith and eventually the life of will which divert him from the present.

(H) In the absence of reciprocity between God and man, the individual who submits to faith yields his autonomy and relinquishes it to God. His expectations from God may be disappointed.<sup>66</sup>

(I) The believer's one-sided devotion encourages expectations for a reward, and a call for compensation.<sup>67</sup>

(J) Debasing himself, yielding his autonomy, and, in turn, asking for compensation, the believer assumes a contemptuous position.<sup>68</sup>

So far the comments introduced the decrease in a person's grasp of reality, the effort to try and cling to an imagined reality, and the sense of inferiority that follows. This is the threefold pattern in Qian's claim for the alienating effect of monotheist religion. The first four comments (A–D) indicate the linkage between the monotheist claim for a two-qualities-world and man's loss of touch with reality as it is. The following two comments (E–F) introduce the believer's imaginary life as loss of the internal order, and loss of moral autonomy. The next four comments (G–J) indicate the relation between the monotheist claim and a sense of inferiority that accompanies the life of the believer. According to comments A–G, faith alienates the individual, leaving him to maintain the imaginary and not the real. Comments H–J discuss the failures that result from the loss of authenticity in life. The last comment (K) is a conclusion of the preceding arguments; here Qian contends that the life of the believer is tragic.

(K) Due to monotheism the individual's life is tragic. The life of the follower of the monotheist faith is tragic because his expectations are false and cannot be realized. False as

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., chapter 3, pp. 10–13.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 10–11.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 13. Compare with Sigmund Freud on original sin in *Moses and Monotheism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

they are, these very expectations that occupy such a vital place in his daily life divert man from the path of authentic life and lead to an inferior self image.<sup>69</sup>

### III. Alienation in Modern Life

Qian's criticism of religion applies to problems of modern life as well, and both criticisms share the same underlying pattern.<sup>70</sup> The distinction between God and His Creation and hence the decrease in a person's grasp of reality corresponds to Qian's criticism of modern life in two significant forms. The first is the distinction between the temporal modes of the future, on the one hand, and the present and past, on the other. The second is between the ontological modes of appearance and actuality. As in the case of religion, the problem is not with the distinctions themselves but rather in the priority assigned to the spheres of the future and appearance, which are other than the spheres occupied by the observers. Referring to the culture of the modern West, Qian portrays an alienated self, a self that is radically individualized and remote from the "true" context of life.

Progress, which in a variety of forms assumes the place of God in the modern world, is understood in terms of a radical divorce of the present from the past. The abyss that separates the believer from God exists similarly between the modern contender of progress and his ideal of the future. The effect assigned to the concept of the End of Days of the religious believer is introduced into the modern context through the relations between the utopian ideal and the life of the community.<sup>71</sup> According to Qian, expectations of a perfect future encourage radical modes of behavior and readiness to sacrifice whatever stands in the way of progress toward achieving that perfect future. "Those who count on an ideal that is distant from reality are ready to give up everything in order to continue [their pursuit]."<sup>72</sup> I will return to Qian's admonitions of a disaster that will befall humanity as a whole, but let us first concentrate on the individual person.

Overemphasis on the future attainment of a purpose, which devaluates past and present events imprinted its mark on man's identity.<sup>73</sup> According to Qian, shifting the focus of being into the future dissociates the person from his roots and turns present existence into a mere transient stage. Devoid of any solid point of reference, either in the past or in the present, the person cannot exist in the full sense of the word. His identity is emptied of its content. The

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<sup>69</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> Marx wrote in his "Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law, "...[C]riticism of religion is the premise of all criticisms." See Jon Elster, *Karl Marx: A Reader* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 301.

<sup>71</sup> When Qian refers to utopian ideals, he might have had in mind the positivists' (or scientism's) ideal of perfect knowledge, the Nazi's Third Reich, or the Communist End of History.

<sup>72</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 146.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter 3, pp. 10–13.

forward striving person, who shifts his existential identity toward an unknown future, deceives himself about his own identity and seeks the unattainable.

The disorientation in the present and the unattainability of the future, generates discontent.<sup>74</sup> “Whoever adheres to the view of life that endlessly strives forward, may better consider the troubles he encounters for its sake in the present. He must get accustomed to discontent.”<sup>75</sup> This deficiency entails a need for compensation,<sup>76</sup> which further involves what Qian terms “desire” (*yu* 欲)—the narrow calculation to satisfy the appetite with regard to the future yet to come, at the expense of relations with the past. “Those who elevate sensual desires and do not find competition worthless, are discontented with reality, and yet demand compensation from the same reality.”<sup>77</sup> Desire corresponds to striving forward with no looking back,<sup>78</sup> or, simply, to the will to acquire and possess more and more. Furthermore, those who get carried away by desire: “cause pain not only to themselves; they disturb others as well.”<sup>79</sup>

Desire prompts man to increase self inflicted pressure. Qian indicates that in the pre-modern period moderation prevailed. Owing to the relatively slow rate of living, a sense of intimacy suffused relations among people and between them and the world.<sup>80</sup> Modern man, however, seeks to accomplish too much. With the modern advance of science, the personal center of experience shifts from the emotional level to the never ending race for power and for material wealth.<sup>81</sup>

The ever accelerating speed of experience produced conditions where spatial and temporal pressures prevent the person from holding on to anything, until no room is left for existence itself. In the following quote *ji* (挤) is translated as the verb to squeeze or as the pressure that is brought to bear on every dimension in the individual’s life.

The whole world is transforming; the transformations produce tension (*jinzhang* 紧张); the transformations produce chaos (*hunluan* 混乱). The self is squeezed with other people; others are squeezed with the self. Today is squeezed with yesterday; tomorrow is squeezed with today. Under this kind of pressure, each individual in the world, all squeeze and disperse with nowhere to hold on to. The young, rapidly lose the capacity to sustain the pressure, and resemble wandering souls. Incapable of leaving a trace behind, a trace that will stand on its own, the

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<sup>74</sup> Compare with comment (H) above.

<sup>75</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 146.

<sup>76</sup> Compare with comment (I) above.

<sup>77</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 146.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 146.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

most we can expect, I presume, is a stormy spirit, an evil spirit, and it might even appear in the form of a person!<sup>82</sup>

The linkage between pressure and alienation is unmistakable. According to Qian, lack of space and time prevent the maintenance of strong relations.<sup>83</sup> Relations become shallow, and memory of the past is poor.

Try to imagine, the day will arrive when you will leave this world. Where would the traces of your mental processes remain? Completely lost, without a purpose, our spirit hurries to dissociate [itself] and to vanish; can it still call to other people in different places in the world to remember us again? [If] people did not relate to us as human beings, how will they relate to our spirit?<sup>84</sup>

The most regrettable consequence of modern life exists in the area of human relations. Striving constantly forward represents the modern habit of shifting the center of existence from its actual occurrence toward an unattainable future. The time and the direction indicate the tendency of the subject to loosen relations between himself and his social context. The shifting of the core away from where experience happens toward the unattainable, necessarily reduces attention and the sense of experience of the present and the nearby.

Ontologically, the priority man assigns to the future over the present and the past drives him to live in accordance with appearance (*yingxiang* 影像) rather than according to the actuality (*shizhi* 实质) of life.<sup>85</sup> What is the actuality of human life? Qian agrees that a real purpose is needed: "Without a purpose progress becomes wasted effort. Life without purpose is not real. Logically, progress is conditioned by the existence of a purpose."<sup>86</sup> Two pages later he writes that the human mind seeks both a purpose and content.<sup>87</sup> What is that purpose? What is that content? The possibilities are various. "When art is the purpose, art is the authentic manifestation of life (*shengming zhi zhenshi* 生命之真实). When science is the purpose, science is the authentic manifestation of life."<sup>88</sup> As these examples demonstrate, Qian's foremost concern is neither with art nor with science. No matter what a person does, it must be a reflection of his innermost being, of his authentic self. All doing, therefore, presupposes honesty and integrity.<sup>89</sup>

According to Qian, concern with mental and spiritual growth leads to the sense of contentment (*manzu* 满足) which is the original and true purpose of cultural life. Culture, however, still contains remnants of earlier ways of life, when man was not yet fully human

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>83</sup> Compare with comment (F) above.

<sup>84</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 87. The argument associates alienation from ancestors with social alienation.

<sup>85</sup> Compare with comment (B) above.

<sup>86</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 113.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 115.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., especially chapters 21, 22.

and survival was his major purpose. Unfortunately, the advanced purpose of contentment is contested by the earlier, less mature, purpose, and is not necessarily triumphant. Man's advance toward contentment involved the realization of his power (*qiangli* 强力) of life,<sup>90</sup> which stimulated in him a sense of a celebration of life (*shengming zhi xiyue* 生命之喜悦).<sup>91</sup> Contentment was thus overshadowed by the sense of power. Whereas a person's original purpose was a search for contentment, in time, power—which originally served merely as a means—moved from the margins to the center of his attention and preoccupied him to the neglect of everything else.

When Qian writes “a celebration of life,” we may assume this is a synonym for fetish, that for Freud was the worship of the superficial substitute in place of the real, and which, etymologically and practically, similarly refers to a sort of a celebration.<sup>92</sup> According to him, in modern times, the actual and real, the sense of contentment was gradually replaced by the outward appearance, the search for representations of progress by means of concrete and material achievements. The replacement or appearance was moreover celebrated as if it were the actual and the real. The distinction between the actual and appearance is based on realizing which of these belongs more directly to the human experience of life. Qian observes:

...[T]he celebration of life cannot take the place of contentment in life. Contentment is the actual (*shizhi* 实质), the celebration its outward appearance (*yingxiang* 影像). When contentment is realized, then the celebration of life is realized. But we should not confuse celebration with contentment. Unfortunately, the person who mistakenly substitutes the actual with its appearance, his life is no more than the search for power.<sup>93</sup>

Hanging on to an aggressive mode of life, modern man repeats the pattern that characterized him at the immature stage of life.<sup>94</sup>

This point is made still clearer in Qian's discussion of how power is subsumed to life. According to him, power is mistaken for life itself, when in effect power is one thing and life another. To live, power is needed, but it must not become an end.<sup>95</sup> The process of development that is modeled on the search for power and the forward striving pattern, diverted man from both the content and the purpose of life, and caused him to embark on a path of wasted effort: “Erroneously identifying power as life, man deviated from the straight path and [instead] considered wasted effort an attainment.”<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> The use of the term “power” reminds one of Nietzsche's Will to Power.

<sup>91</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 114.

<sup>92</sup> Fetish, originally a theological term referred to a confusion of substituting the end with the means, or, for instance, God with His material images. With Marx and Freud this term became part of the criticism of modernity in the West.

<sup>93</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 114.

<sup>94</sup> Compare with comment (J) above.

<sup>95</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 114.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113. Qian is aware that chasing after substitutes entices the person to believe that



To Qian, mistaking power for life represents yet another aspect of the same tragedy that distinguishes the believer's life. In modern life man shifted attention from his own capacity to a celebration of his power. "Human beings long to experience authentic life, but they are captured by the image of the celebration of power (*qiangli zhi xiyue* 强力之喜悦)."<sup>97</sup> The tragedy of modern life consists in the gap between sincere human intentions and persistently pursuing, and falsely celebrating, a wrong path.<sup>98</sup>

Torn between the temporal modes of the future, on the one hand, and the present and past, on the other, and between appearance and its actuality, modern man lives an alienated life. However, unlike the alienation that was discussed above in the case of the religious believer, alienation in the modern age, according to Qian, is distinguished for its supplementary sense of false celebration. His reference to a sense of false celebration that joins with alienation introduces a fetishist pattern.

One obvious symptom of the fetishist pattern is contained in the notion of struggle. In the post-Darwinian world, struggle acquired a central place in humanity's understanding of itself. Qian emphasizes, however, that struggle too, is not a value in itself, its role is to serve humanity and not vice versa. Other values permeate the human sphere, such as humanism and peace. Therefore, as a corrective to the Darwinist struggle Qian suggests the values of peace and kindness (*heping yu renci* 和平与仁慈).<sup>99</sup> Inasmuch as survival is not the purpose, struggle without humaneness is not necessary.<sup>100</sup> To Qian, Darwinism introduced life as an empty vessel and Darwin's world turns round in an inhuman circle. "One lives, one disappears. Nature is to him [Darwin] a struggle for power."<sup>101</sup>

The fetishist pattern continues and spreads in the modern age. Capitalism, the search for money, makes man a slave to its acquisition. Imperialism, the search for authority and power, makes man a subject to the images of size and splendor. To be sure, the pretense to attain spiritual accomplishments still reverberates. But in practice life has become materialistic and shallow.<sup>102</sup> The imagined life is indeed outwardly impressive, but empty within. The substitutes—wealth, authority, power, size, and splendor—have become the purpose. These empty ends, that answer the lowest needs of the mind, escalate and oppress humanity.

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progress is endless and, therefore, apparently, significant. But according to him, the emphasis of the Western personality model on individuality excludes endlessness and its value: "The life of power contains a very attractive feature; it produces in the person a[n illusory] sense of endless progress. But because it is constantly directed toward the future, it lacks any real content or purpose. [Although] as a matter of fact, endlessness in itself has an aesthetic value, its accompanying sense of immeasurability is, also unavoidable." *Ibid.*, p. 116.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

<sup>98</sup> Compare with comment (K) above.

<sup>99</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 57.

<sup>100</sup> *Mencius* 6a:10: "I love life, but there is something [righteousness] I love more than life." In Wing-tsit Chan, compilation and annotated translations, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973), p. 57.

<sup>101</sup> *HSXSL*, p. 56.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 115.

#### IV. Conclusion

Qian Mu's *HSXSL* like his many other works affirmed that there is an indispensable value in the cultural tradition of China. The essential attribute underlying what he sometimes refers to as the precious and loveable habits and practices,<sup>103</sup> is the capacity of the Chinese "to accept the world," or "this-worldliness."<sup>104</sup> This is inseparable from their understanding of life and the world as consisting of one existential quality, in other words, their non-dichotomized world view. According to Qian, temporally and ontologically, the Chinese in their tradition did not follow blindly appearances or futurist accomplishments and rather recognized the actual and the present. The Chinese did not mistake the search for progress for the life of the present:

Since the Chinese seek contentment in the [present that is] complete in itself, therefore, in the present actual life they refuse to give up. They dislike the search and they resist the endless striving forwards.<sup>105</sup>

In this respect Qian mentions several Chinese thinkers who were involved in the sinification of Buddhism in China, such as, Zhi Yi 智顓 (538–597) and Hui Neng 慧能 (638–713), who emphasized directness in whatever one does and this-worldliness.

According to Qian's criticism, the modern expressions of the conception of God as existentially different from the world are indicated in mistaking appearance for actuality, race for power and material wealth, glorification of struggle, and in the capitalist and imperialist quests. The priority assigned to the future at the expense of the present and the past leads, not necessarily in that order, to the following sequence of social and personal ills: problems of identity, lack of authenticity, disorientation, sense of discontent, need for compensation, mounting desire, and the acceleration of pace. The over-pressured person who engages in an endless and futile race is ontologically and temporally alienated, from himself and from other people.

To avoid these faults, the Chinese have to be selective in their modern interaction with the culture of the West: "The deeper the Chinese will investigate, the clearer they will see that that which is worthy of adoption is not the restless and uncompromising striving ahead."<sup>106</sup> Indeed, by associating the conceptual error with much earlier, religious, beginnings of Western culture, Qian verifies that he is not critical of modern life itself. He understands, as I have tried to point out, the importance of a modernizing China, but its modernizing process cannot be dictated by Western assumptions.

Qian Mu's ideas establish a linkage between what he considers as a major cultural difference between China and the West and the problem of alienation in modern life. The

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., p. 146.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., p. 147.

cultural tradition of China and its "this-worldliness" is synonymous with non-alienated life. Indeed, his train of ideas establishes non-alienation as guideline for modern progress. What should be avoided by the Chinese in order to avoid alienation is the unconditioned progress that corresponds to the endless striving forward. The distinction is no longer between Western and Chinese, or between modern and traditional, but between alienated and non-alienated life. In accordance with the non-dichotomous view, avoiding alienation should not come at the expense of progress. Qian Mu's ideas suggest that progress should be pursued to the extent that alienation is avoided.