

PREFACE

This book is an intellectual biography of Lin Yutang, a study of China's search for modern cultural rebirth through the journey of an individual. It came out of my own intellectual search for a "Father." When Chairman Mao died in 1976, I had just entered middle school. That afternoon the whole school stopped to listen to The Central People's Radio for an important broadcast, and the whole class cried at the melancholy announcement of the passing away of our "Dear Father" Chairman Mao. I also cried and panicked at heart: what are we to do now that we don't have a Father? That was a most natural reaction having grown up in the "iron house" of the proletariat dictatorship. However, the post-Cultural Revolution Reform cracked some holes to the "iron house" and some fish were able to leap out of the net. I am one of the lucky fish. I made the first jump from a mundane southern city to Beijing for college education, made the second jump out of the suffocating capital to a new Special Economic Zone, and amazingly, made the third jump to the other side of the Pacific—Berkeley. Once overseas, or before that, my passion has always been about China, about getting to the bottom of the question: why is it a fellow Chinese student said to the Premier at Tiananmen Square in 1989: there is no hope for China! Did China ever have hope? What was China? How did we come to this situation? Undoubtedly, such obsession is very similar to what C.T. Hsia dubbed as the "obsession of China" of the New Culture and May Fourth generation of Chinese intellectuals, except my obsession is on their generation who brought us the New China where I grew

up. On the other hand, carrying on the search “overseas” in the “free world” allowed me to realize how much the West—the vanguard for freedom and democracy—has been responsible for the making of the “iron house,” not to mention the current “rise of China.”

I grew up in the “iron house” without hearing the name of Lin Yutang until the late 1980s when the so-called “cultural craze” swirled the nation. As if echoing the New Culture Movement in the early twentieth century, the “culture craze” in the 1980s was a time calling for “Westernization” and all kinds of “Western theory” were translated and introduced to China—with an underlying urge to find alternative discourses to the orthodox line of Marxism, Leninism, and Mao Zedong Thought. As a fresh college graduate, I also participated in the cultural enterprise by translating the ideas and work of Michel Foucault into Chinese. And I also came across a book titled *Zhongguoren*, the Chinese translation of *My Country and My People*, written in English by a Chinese called Lin Yutang whom I had never heard of. I found a real fresh discourse therein on China and the Chinese but did not yet know what to do about it. Besides, my interest was more in “Western theory,” which I carried forward to Berkeley during the initial years. As my lived experience grew, however, I found it more and more difficult to combine “Western theory” with a growing obsession with China at Berkeley. There ought to be a “Chinese voice” in understanding modern China. Upon my arrival at Berkeley, I had the good luck of finding a Teaching Assistant job at the Ethnic Studies Department, teaching English Reading and Composition classes using Asian American literary texts, and there, I came across Lin Yutang again. Amazingly, in a standard textbook on Asian American literature, Lin Yutang was considered as a pioneering “Chinese American” writer but denigrated at once not merely for his un-American-ness but also apparently for his “political incorrectness,” and the critical tone was not unlike that in the orthodox Marxist line in modern Chinese literary historiography. I went to the Berkeley library and checked out all of Lin Yutang’s books—some placed under Asian Studies and some under American Studies categories. I thought I had found a “Chinese voice” and was discovering what my father’s and grandfather’s generations did to have brought about the New China.

That discovery, however, has taken more than two decades in the making, and has brought some small fruits. My first book *Liberal Cosmopolitan: Lin Yutang and Middling Chinese Modernity* (2011) was an attempt to outline the “liberal cosmopolitan” discourse as an

alternative voice in Chinese modernity studies by highlighting the literary practices of Lin Yutang in the context of modern Chinese literary and cultural criticism. It was more intended as a theory-oriented cross-cultural critique, and certainly not as a biography. But before I had finished that book, I realized I must continue to write a biography of Lin Yutang, this time as a personal case study in modern Chinese intellectual history, which is the current book. In between, I have also successfully organized an international conference on Lin Yutang study and edited the conference volume *The Cross-cultural Legacy of Lin Yutang: Critical Perspectives* (2015).

This intellectual search of mine, though a one man's journey largely against the academic fad of our times, has been most rewarding. Of course, I have been told many times that the so-called "single-author study" is out. Of course, I have seen how easily "Western theory" can combine with speaking on behalf of contemporary China, the result of which has produced a global alliance of the New Left once again dominating contemporary Chinese intellectual scene unabashedly reclaiming Chairman Mao as our "Dear Father." But my discovery is my own little treasure, and nothing is more rewarding for me to uncover a piece of my own history. Moreover, individual as it is, my journey has been blessed with many kinds of support from colleagues and friends—indeed many friendships have come out of this journey. I have great pleasure to acknowledge some of the kindness here.

As early as my dissertation years at UC Berkeley, Wen-hsin Yeh was most generous in her support, and many years later when I visited her at Berkeley in 2009, she was still more than generous in her encouragement of my project. It was Yin Xiao-huang who first alerted me, when I was a Mellon Fellow at Barnard College in 1997, to the existence of the John Day Company archives at Princeton University which turned out to be a turning point in my research, and I have benefited a great deal from his kindness ever since. In New York in 1997, I also met Diran John Sohigian who wrote the first Ph.D. dissertation on the life and works of Lin Yutang in English, and our conversations have since carried us to Taiwan and Hong Kong. In 2009 when I was a Fulbright Scholar at Harvard University, I enjoyed delightful conversations on the life and works of Lin Yutang with Charles Hayford, Jing Tsu, Chen Yong, and Yu Maochun. Hsiang Ju Lin (Lin Xiangru, or Meimei Lin), Lin Yutang's third daughter, also kindly received me for an interview in her apartment in Washington, DC. Shi-ye Liu at the Metropolitan Museum of Art also

warmly received me there and showed me the Lin Yutang family collection of Chinese paintings and calligraphy. And I won't forget my delight at seeing old *The New York Times* clippings of Lin Yutang's articles hanging on the wall of Chih-ping Chou's office at Princeton University—I knew I was in good company, and I appreciate very much the intellectual companionship and encouragement Chou has kindly offered ever since, particularly for the opportunity to present my work in progress at Princeton University in 2014.

During my years at City University of Hong Kong, I enjoyed numerous conversations with Chen Jianhua who was most generous in his encouragement on the project. I also enjoyed conversations with Yang Liu whose dissertation on Lin Yutang's religious life was a major contribution to the field. My project received two university strategic grants with which my colleague Louisa Shi-yu Wei and I were able to trace Lin Yutang's global journey from China to the USA and Europe in a documentary. In 2011, thanks to the generous support by the City University of Hong Kong, I successfully organized an international conference on the cross-cultural legacy of Lin Yutang in China and the USA. It was a most joyous occasion when more than a dozen Lin Yutang study scholars around the world gathered and exchanged ideas that resulted in a critical volume. I benefited a great deal from these exchanges and would like to thank all the participants including Wolfgang Kubin, Chen Zishan, Charles Laughlin, Fang Lu, and Peng Chunlin. Most of all, I owe deep gratitude to my senior colleague Zhang Longxi for his generous and continuous support for my project.

My research has brought me several trips to Taiwan where I also met tremendous kindness. It was very kind of Qin Xianci, the noted scholar in Taiwan on Lin Yutang, to share the most valuable source materials related to Lin Yutang. It was my great fortune to be a colleague with Lung Ying-tai when she was a visiting scholar at City University of Hong Kong, who kindly invited me to be a resident-scholar at The Lin Yutang House in Taipei for a month. I have visited The Lin Yutang House several times over the years, and I would like to thank Chia-fang Tsai and other staff there for their warm hospitality and professional help. Acknowledgement is due for the permissions to use some of the photos of Lin Yutang from the The Lin Yutang House.

While this project started long before I moved to Newcastle University in the UK, I was able to complete it here. I have made several presentations on my ongoing work at Newcastle University, Durham

University, and University of Leeds, and would like to thank new colleagues and friends for their comments and encouragement. I also want to thank the School of Modern Languages at Newcastle University for the School Research Contingency Fund that covered the professional editing service for this manuscript.

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Chapter 4 “From ‘Little Critic’ to ‘Master of Humor’” is a revised version of my article “Discovering Humor in Modern China: The Launching of the *Analects Fortnightly* Journal and the ‘Year of Humor’ (1933)” previously published as a chapter in *Humour in Chinese Life and Letters* (Hong Kong University Press 2011). The discussion on the China League for Civil Rights therein has been rewritten and included in Chap. 5 here.

Chapter 6 “‘My China’: The East Speaks to the West” is a slightly revised version of my previously published “The Genesis and Reception of My Country and My People,” Chap. 8 in *The Cross-cultural Legacy of Lin Yutang: Critical Perspectives* (Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, Berkeley 2015).

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