Cultural Construction with Chinese Characteristics: A New Reading of the 1935 Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese Basis

MOTOH, Helena (University of Primorska, Slovenia)
E-mail: helena.motoh@guest.arnes.si.

The Chinese intellectual scene of the 1920's and 1930's was significantly marked by a debate about the issue of »cultural construction«, wenhua jianshe 文化建设, and about what was supposed to serve as its basis. During the Guomindang campaign for the New Life Movement a like-minded appeal was signed by a group of university professors, He Bingsong, Sa Mengwu et al. with the title The Declaration for Cultural Construction on a Chinese Basis (中国本位的文化建设宣言). First, the paper analyses the authors' demand for the preservation of a »Chinese basis« as the core of the construction of a new reformed Chinese culture. This demand is usually read through the words of its most prominent critic, Hu Shi, who accuses the authors of hidden conservatism and of advocating for a futile compromise of the ti-yong type. The paper tries to view this debate from a different perspective: not as a clash between the advocates and critics of the traditional Chinese culture and orthodox Confucianism, but as a debate between two dialectical models: the Declaration authors following the Liang Shuming's idea of the Chinese – allegedly – harmonizing thought and Hu Shi following the Darwinian view on culture and society. Finally, the paper analyses the functioning of this dichotomy within the trend of the contemporary Confucian revival.