Introduction

In the 1996 preface to a collection of essays on modern *ruxue* 儒學, Yu Yingshi (Ying-shih Yu) 余英時 recalls that, in the Anhui province village where he lived between 1937 and 1946, “although *rujia* 儒家 culture was in a degenerate state, it nevertheless controlled the activities of daily life: by and large, all interpersonal relationships—from marriage and funeral customs to seasonal festivals—adhered to the *rujia* norms, supplemented by Buddhist and Daoist beliefs and practices.” Like everyone else, he was “an internal participant in *rujia* culture.” This all changed after 1949, however, and today on the mainland no one below the age of 50 can claim to have participated in *rujia* culture. Moreover, he continues, even in places like Taiwan, since the 1950s *ruxue* learned from books has been far more dominant than *rujia* values encountered in everyday living, a situation that has “decisively influenced” contemporary discussions of *ruxue*.

As it happens, since the mid-1980s, Taiwan and mainland China have witnessed the most sustained resurgence of academic and intellectual interest in *ruxue*—variously conceived as a form of culture, an ideology, a system of learning, and a tradition of morally normative values—of the past century. By the mid-1990s, on the mainland this revival was sometimes referred to as “*ruxue* fever,” just as “culture fever” had burned a decade before. This discourse has led to a proliferation of contending conceptions of the historical form and function of *ruxue* (and “*rujia* thought” and “*rujia* culture”), as well as proposals to rejuvenate *ruxue*

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1. The largest popular resurgence of interest in Confucius and his teachings in China came in 1973–74 during the anti-Confucius movement. See Louie, *Critiques of Confucius in Contemporary China*. 
in order to make it a vital cultural and psycho-spiritual (jingshen 精神) resource in the modern world. For Yu Yingshi, however, this discourse on ruxue is little more than empty talk because it is devoid of practice/praxis (shijian 實踐). Yu concludes that the “fundamental difference” between contemporary Chinese discussions of ruxue and discussions from the turn of the twentieth century until the May Fourth period is that contemporary discussions lack any personal, lived experience of rujia culture. Instead, the emphasis is placed on determining just what type of religion or philosophy ruxue is meant to be or on reconstructing the values-orientation dimension of ruxue. He particularly laments that ruxue is no longer relevant to the everyday lives of ordinary people. Rather, it has become a discourse and is no longer lived and experienced in the course of a person’s life on the mainland or even in Taiwan.

In 1987, soon after publishing a study on changing conceptions of the soul and the afterlife in early China, Yu started to employ the image of the wandering spirit or disembodied soul (you hun 遊魂) as a metaphor for the modern fate of, variously, ruxue and “rujia culture.” In 1988, he argued that although ruxue was now freed from the institutional shackles to which traditional ruxue had been tied (and which had also enabled it to be given expression), it was now without a body, a home, a specific identity. Ruxue was thus caught in the dilemma: would it continue to exist as a disembodied, wandering soul or would it need (or, indeed, be able) to “borrow a corpse to enable the soul to return” (jie shi huan hun 借屍還魂)?

2. New Confucianism is a neo-conservative philosophical movement, with religious overtones. Proponents claim it to be the legitimate transmitter and representative of orthodox ru values. (In English, the term “New Confucian” is to be distinguished from “Neo-Confucian,” which refers to certain thinkers of the Song, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, in particular.) The movement is promoted and/or researched by prominent Chinese intellectuals based in China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the United States of America. Elsewhere I have argued that although most of the promoters and sympathetic interpreters of New Confucianism trace the movement to the early part of the twentieth century, in fact, there is little evidence that New Confucianism had attained a degree of integration or coalescence sufficient for it to be recognized and promoted as a distinct philosophical movement, or school of thought, before the 1970s.

3. Yu Yingshi, Xiandai ruxue lun, 1, 4–6 passim.
4. Yu Yingshi, “‘O Soul, Come Back!’”
A third possibility Yu entertains is that a few sincere individuals might offer their own persons as "hosts" for the return of ruxue. He is not, however, optimistic:

This is not a matter of theory; it does not require lofty and profound philosophical theory. If you are incapable of realizing this, then no matter how brilliant [a philosophical theory you might develop about the rujia], that sort of rujia would be quite useless. It would be nothing more than practiced skill at clever talk (zuishang gongfu 嘴上工夫). Although Chinese people talk about practiced skill, the sort of practiced skill the rujia concern themselves with is putting into practice that which one stands for. What is being developed at present is nothing more than practiced skill at clever talk . . . . Mere clever talk is incapable of summoning the soul. Summoning the soul requires individual practice.  

One possibility that Yu did not entertain is that discourse itself might provide the requisite host for the soul’s return; that discourse is, in fact, a type of practice. For example, in responding to the criticism that certain representative New Confucians were simply writers and not practitioners of cultivation (xiuxingren 修行人), Zheng Jiadong 郑家栋 (affiliated with, until 2005, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences [CASS]) maintains: "For Xiong [Shili], Mou [Zongsan], and the others, writing was itself a form of cultivation and could even be said to have been an aesthetic practice. . . . In their straitened circumstances, writing had become a kind of bitter struggle, a fundamental method of pursuing their ideals." Elsewhere, again appealing to the constraints imposed by changed historical and personal circumstances, Zheng considers cultural transmission, rather than cultivation, as an alternative hallmark of the New Confucian incarnation of the rujia:

Against the backdrop of saving the nation from extinction, deep within the thinking of New Confucians, it was perhaps even more important to carry on the flame of national culture than to address the question of where the ultimate meaning of life was to be grounded. A related point is that those who were cultural transmitters were more deserving of the name rujia than were those who were concerned with the moral mind, the moral nature, and sagely cultivation. . . . In a way, they had a fierce sense of cultural mission and a sense of assuming a responsibility (this could also be called a sense of cultural salvation); it was not the pursuit of a thoroughgoing awakening to the meaning of life and a

commitment to that choice that determined they would become ruzhe 儒者 [one who is a ru].

Significantly, however, this disagreement between Yu and Zheng over the characteristics of the ruzhe or rujia underscores one of the most striking features of contemporary academic discourse on ruxue: more than two decades of discourse have yielded fundamentally differing conceptions of just what it is that constitutes ruxue (in both its historical and its contemporary expressions). So long as consensus remains in abeyance, the status of ruxue’s soul will remain contested.

Aims and Background

This book grew out of my earlier work on New Confucianism. The present study is more contemporary in focus and much broader in scope, being concerned with academic discourse on ruxue more generally rather than discussion of one particular subgroup, the New Confucians (although as we will see, that subgroup remains extremely influential). The principal architects of this body of discourse are academic writers in Taiwan, China, North America, and Hong Kong. With the exception of some of Du Weiming’s (Tu Wei-ming) 杜維明 “Singapore writings” of the 1980s, the study focuses on Chinese-language contributions to this discourse. Only by studying the processes—the debates, discussions, and other forms of communication—that contemporary (1980–2000) Chinese academics have employed to talk about ruxue (and closely related concepts such as ru, rujia, and rujiao 儒教) can the discourse defining this subject be isolated as an object of study.

In English, the import of the terms “Confucian” and “Confucianism” continues to be contested and is complicated by the fact that these terms can be used to translate a variety of Chinese terms. Accordingly,

10. For his Chinese-language writings, I use pinyin to romanize his name; for his English-language writings I have followed the romanized form of his name provided in those publications (either Tu Wei-ming or Tu Weiming). In the Works Cited, all these works are found under “Du Weiming” in order to group all his writings in the same location.
11. For example: ru 儒, ruren 儒人, rusbeng 儒生, ruxian 儒先, rulin 儒林, rumen 儒門, rukua 儒科, ruke 儒科, ruye 儒業, ruliu 儒流, rushi 儒士, ruzhe 儒者, rujia 儒家, ruxue 儒學, ruxue 儒術, rujiao 儒教, Kong jiao 孔教, Zhou Kong jiao 周孔之教, Kong Meng zhi jiao 孔孟之教, Kong-Meng zhi xue 孔孟之學, mingjiao 名教, li-
I have chosen to transliterate the various Chinese terms conventionally translated as “Confucian” and “Confucianism” to reflect more accurately just how contemporary Chinese scholars employ terms such as ru, ruzhe, ruxue, rujia, rujiao, and so on. In the writings under study, the most commonly employed of these terms is ruxue, which can variously refer to “the learning of the ru” and to “ru studies” more generally. The scope of ruxue is so broad that it often subsumes “rujia thought” within its semantic field.

The term ruxue has enjoyed a growing currency over the past century; it also seems to have been employed considerably more frequently than in previous periods. The appearance of the xue'an 學案 genre in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries may have had some indirect influence on twentieth-century notions of ruxue. According to Zhu Honglin’s study, in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the word xue in the title of works in this genre consistently referred to ruxue. Zhu’s findings suggest that at that time the scope of the “learning of the ru” was broad, embracing doctrines and “case studies” concerning methods of cultivation and practice, explanatory accounts of particular moral principles, glosses of sayings attributed to pre-Qin ru, and critiques of various scholarly interpretations. The broad scope of ru learning is also evident in earlier meanings associated with ruxue. In its oldest use, the term referred to the doctrines and learning (particularly in relation to classical studies) of the rujia. We find examples of this usage in such early texts as Shiji 史記 (Records of the Historian) and Hanshu 漢書 (History of the Han). Later, the term was also used to refer to men of learning who specialize in the writings associated with the rujia, hence the “biographies of ruxue” in official dynastic histories such as Jiu Tang-shu 舊唐書 (Old history of the Tang dynasty), Xin Tangshu 新唐書 (New history of the Tang dynasty), and Yuanshi 元史 (History of the Yuan dynasty). Thus, by the twentieth century, there was sufficient precedent to treat the term as having a broad scope of application.
Introduction

This study aims to show how ruxue has been conceived and represented in academic discourse in China and Taiwan from the mid-1980s until the early years of the new millennium, in order to assess the achievements of ru-focused intellectual enterprise over this period; to identify which aspects or areas of putative ru thought and values academics in Taiwan and China find viable at the beginning of the third millennium, and why they find them so; to highlight the dynamics involved in the ongoing process of intellectual cross-fertilization between academics in China and Taiwan made possible by the shared discourse of ruxue; and to examine the relationship between the discourse on ruxue and resurgent cultural nationalism in “cultural China.”

In terms of volume and compass, Chinese-language discourse on ruxue since the 1980s is a huge topic. This study does not attempt to provide an exhaustive chronicle of the history and scope of that discourse, nor does it address specialist scholarship on historical ruxue (for example, studies on Zhu Xi or particular texts) other than to comment on the influence of ruxue revivalism on scholarly trends, such as the methodological-cum-ideological issues arising from contemporary uses of recently published texts recovered through archaeology (the subject of Chapter 10).

The book consists of fourteen chapters divided into four parts. Part I provides information on trends in ruxue-focused discourse in Singapore, Taiwan, and China during the 1980s and 1990s. This historical and contextual information serves as a background for more detailed analyses and discussions developed in later chapters. The main focus of the detailed analysis is the decade from the early 1990s to the early years of the new millennium. Part II critically examines the writings of academics who have contributed to the influential thesis that the core or essence of Chinese culture is ruxue. Part III analyzes the various forms in which the prescriptive paradigms of intellectual orthodoxies (Mou Zongsan’s thought; contemporary reconstructions of classical ru thought and “school” genealogies) and political orthodoxies (political authority; Chinese Marxism) have impacted ruxue-centered discourse. Part IV examines the contemporary academic debate on the issue of whether rujiao is a religion and the activities of individuals and nonofficial organizations seeking to promote ruxue beyond the academy.

Key Themes and Arguments

Four key themes and arguments are developed across the various chapters. First, since the mid-1980s, the ongoing process of intellectual cross-fertilization and rivalry between scholars in China and overseas
Chinese scholars (particularly those based in Taiwan) has served as a key impetus sustaining academic interest in discourse on ruxue. Second, contrary to conventional wisdom, party-state support on the mainland for programs to promote patriotic education and “traditional virtues” does not underpin the phenomenon of the continuing academic discourse on ruxue. The widely held view that the promotion of ruxue in contemporary China is orchestrated by the party-state and its functionaries is untenable. Third, cultural nationalism rather than state nationalism better explains the nature of contemporary discourse on ruxue. And fourth, academic discourse on ruxue in China and Taiwan provides little evidence of a sustained or robust philosophical creativity in ruxue philosophy.

In looking for evidence of cross-fertilization and rivalry, I have paid particular attention to the role of publications (journals, books, and conference volumes) and publishing houses; professional societies and academic departments; and conferences. The issue of cross-fertilization also bears on the question whether the ruxue revival of the 1980s and 1990s in China and Taiwan represents the beginnings of a genuine philosophical renaissance or whether the revival is better explained by appealing to a range of political and cultural factors. For example, in China the topic of “New Confucianism” was funded as a major project of philosophical research under the seventh and eighth national five-year plans for the social sciences (1986–90, 1991–95). This official support facilitated the organization of large-scale cooperative research activities (some involving fifty or more scholars at any one time) and resulted in voluminous book and journal publications, conferences, the establishment of research centers, and postgraduate training. Although this financial support did not lead to a burst of philosophical creativity, a number of scholars outside China have commented on the role played by state funding in shaping ruxue discourse to facilitate the deployment of ruxue as “an instrument to counter Western influence.” Others have asserted that “the Confucian tradition has been revived by the authorities as an important cultural resource from which a new national identity can be constructed.” Another pervasive view is that the state has supported ruxue because it sees ruxue as compatible with neo-conservatism and a rising

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state nationalism. In assessing these claims, I have first sought to ascertain which particular authorities have been involved and to identify whether there are policy documents and programs that promote the idea of an officially sanctioned “Confucianized” national identity. Of the latter, I have found none.

Alternatively, is it perhaps “global capitalism”—rather than the party-state—that has found in ruxue an “ideology to correspond to its apparently new decentered structure” and so sustained ruxue’s discursive revival? In referring to “a resurgence in recent years of fundamentalistic nationalisms or culturalisms” opposed to “EuroAmerican ideological domination of the world,” Arif Dirlik relates that “the Confucian revival among Chinese populations” is used to argue that the “Chinese success in capitalist development” shows that “the Confucian ethic is equal, if not superior to, the ‘Protestant ethic’ which Max Weber had credited with causative power in the emergence of capitalism in Europe. A ‘Weberized’ Confucianism in turn appears as a marker of Chineseness regardless of time or place.” For Dirlik, “what makes something like the East Asian Confucian revival plausible is not its offer of alternative values to those of EuroAmerican origin, but its articulation of native cultures into a capitalist narrative.” His 1995 article “Confucius in the Borderlands: Global Capitalism and the Reinvention of Confucianism” makes a strong case for the applicability of these views to the 1980s and early 1990s. As I relate in Chapters 1 and 2, for the 1980s in particular, the popularity of the rujia capitalism thesis is consistent with Dirlik’s claims. By the early to mid-1990s, however, the growth of discourse on ruxue was no longer predominately parasitic on the rujia capitalism thesis. The capitalist narrative thesis neither explains the phenomenal wave of research on New Confucianism during the first half of the 1990s nor helps us understand subsequent multiple developments in broader discourse on ruxue in cultural China, including those developments animated in part by their opposition to “EuroAmerican ideological domination of the world” or committed to finding an alternative value stance from which to reflect on Western modernity.

19. Ibid., 92.
Witness, for example, the following comments by Liu Dong 刘东 in regard to Dirlik's 1995 “Confucius in the Borderlands” article:

[He] does not deal with the *substance* of Confucianism's contemporary appeal or with its intellectual significance. ... The problem with Dirlik's critique of contemporary Confucianism is that he fails to engage in a substantial and meticulous way with the circumstances of Confucianism's decline prior to the 1980s. ... [H]e fails to see that there has always been an undercurrent of Confucianism that has nurtured this cultural-spiritual tradition throughout the modern century of its relative isolation. ... [The New Confucians] developed comparative cultural frameworks for discussing Confucianism that helped us define civilizational differences between China and the West.\(^{20}\)

What is remarkable is not Liu’s failure to address Dirlik’s central arguments, but the fact that the author—a prominent Beijing University academic and editor of the influential academic journal *Zhongguo xueshu*—should offer this heartfelt apologist defense of “Confucianism” in the first place. Yet, as I hope to establish in this study, even more remarkable is that, already from the mid-1990s, similar views were being embraced and defended by increasingly larger numbers of the mainland academy. Central to this development has been the role of cultural nationalism.

**Cultural Nationalism and *Ruxue***

The concept of cultural nationalism—the conviction that the unique culture associated with the nation constitutes the basis of national identity—has proven useful in drawing attention to the widely held view that *ruxue*, rujia thought, and rujia culture constitute a form of cultural expression integral to Chinese identity. Although this is only one of many themes to emerge in contemporary Chinese discourse on *ruxue*, the sheer pervasiveness of cultural nationalism in this discourse across a wide spectrum of participants—academic and official, mainland and overseas-based—warrants a fuller account of how I understand and deploy this concept. The following excursus begins with an account of “culturalism” and various conceptions of the notion of “cultural China.” I argue that, as a concept, culturalism fails to convey adequately widespread contemporary views about the connection between *ruxue* and Chinese national identity. I then examine the relationship between

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culturalism and nationalism by examining critical responses to Joseph Levenson’s culturalism-to-nationalism thesis. Finally, I introduce the notion of *ruxue*-centered Chinese cultural nationalism and its various expressions, some of which problematize the mechanical application of definitions of cultural nationalism based principally on studies of nationalist movements in Europe.

**Culturalism and Cultural China**

At first blush, it might seem that views affirming the significance of *ruxue* to Chinese identity express a type of consciousness known as culturalism: the conviction that cultural identity “trumps” or is more primordial than political or even ethnic identity. (Nationalism, by contrast, is an ideological movement that posits the nation as the touchstone for community identity.) Culturalism thus understood has been persistent among culturally conservative (and neo-traditionalist) Chinese intellectuals throughout the twentieth century and has remained a fundamental article of faith for New Confucian partisans. A more contemporary expression of this thinking is the concept of “cultural

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21. The concept of nation is difficult to define, as evidenced by the range of characteristics suggested by various theorists: a sense of solidarity; shared historical memory; notions of common descent; the possession of physical territory; and “primordial qualities” such as “congruities of blood, speech, custom.” Connor Walker provides a definition that has the advantage of drawing a distinction between “ethnic group” and “nation”: “A nation is a self-aware ethnic group. An ethnic group may be readily discerned by an anthropologist or other outside observer, but until the members are themselves aware of the group’s uniqueness, it is merely an ethnic group and not a nation. While an ethnic group may, therefore, be other-defined, the nation must be self-defined” (cited in Hutchinson and Smith, eds., *Nationalism*, 45). Anthony D. Smith (*National Identity*, 20) provides the following definition of an ethnic group/community (*ethnie*): a type of cultural collectivity that exhibits six main attributes: a collective proper name; a myth of common ancestry; one or more differentiating elements of a common culture; an association with a specific “homeland”; and a sense of solidarity for significant sectors of the population. Accordingly, I adopt the following working definition of nation in this study: a self-aware cultural collectivity that exhibits these six characteristics. I also follow Smith’s (p. 73) understanding of nationalism: “an ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or a potential ‘nation.’”
China” (wenhua Zhongguo 文化中國), which first started to gain currency in “overseas” Chinese-language publications in the mid-1980s.22

According to Arif Dirlik, “in the idea of a 'cultural China' that has been promoted by proponents of a Confucian revival, cultural essence replaces political identity in the definition of Chineseness.”22 Others, such as Marxist intellectual historian Fang Keli 方克立, maintain that the concept reflects the idea that the identity of Chinese people is tied not to physical characteristics but to a shared “national cultural-psychological formation” (a concept borrowed from Li Zehou 李澤厚):

China (Zhongguo 中國) is not disunited but united because Chinese (Zhonghua 中華) culture is united. Viewed historically, the disunity of China’s political territory was only ever able to be temporary because the concept of “cultural China” has a long-lasting, even eternal, significance. . . . There were many periods in Chinese history when the political territory was disunited, but culturally China has always been united. It is this cultural unity that has been an important element in helping to bring about China’s political unity.

Fang acknowledges that although the concept was first formulated by “overseas scholars,” it still has great value in serving to promote the unity of China’s political territory, and he recommends that it be widely adopted as a slogan for “united front” activities.24

Tu Wei-ming’s particular rendering of the concept has been the most influential. According to Tu, cultural China embraces “three symbolic universes”:

The first consists of mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Singapore—that is, the societies populated predominantly by cultural and ethnic Chinese. The second consists of Chinese communities throughout the world. . . . The third symbolic universe consists of individuals, such as scholars, teachers, journalists, industrialists, traders, entrepreneurs, and writers, who try to understand China intellectually and bring their conceptions of China to their own linguistic communities.25

What is distinctive about the third of these “universes” is that it includes commentators who are not ethnically (or [ironically] even “culturally”) Chinese, such as Western China scholars. Thus, as Paul

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A. Cohen notes, the substantive sense of the concept “refers to clusters of values, behavior patterns, ideas, and traditions that people agree to define as in some sense ‘Chinese,’ and to which, speaking more subjectively, those who identify themselves as ‘Chinese’ feel themselves to belong.”

It is this “subjective” dimension—a cultural identification—that best expresses the idea of culturalism. Closer analysis of culturalism, however, reveals that the concept does not adequately convey widespread contemporary views about the connection between *ruxue* and Chinese identity, in particular, the ideas that *ruxue* (or *rujia* thought) has blended into the national character of the Chinese people; has created the national character; is the principal component of “the Han nation’s cultural-psychological formation” (*wenhua xinli jiegou*); is the Chinese people’s national spirit; is the foundation of the Chinese nation’s (*Zhonghua minzu* 中華民族) identity; is the inner soul of the nation; and is the manifestation of the unconscious collective archetype of the Han nation. What, then, is the relation between culturalism and nationalism?

**Levenson’s Culturalism-to-Nationalism Thesis**

Joseph Levenson’s thesis that the early part of the twentieth century marked a transition among Chinese intellectuals from the idea of culture as identity (culturalism) to nation-state as identity (nationalism) has been variously criticized. Prasenjit Duara, for example, characterizes Levenson’s notion of culturalism as “a natural conviction of the superiority that sought no legitimation or defense outside of the culture itself.” Duara argues that Levenson was mistaken “in distinguishing culturalism as a radically different mode of identification from ethnic or national identification.” For Duara, culture—“a specific culture of the imperial state and Confucian orthodoxy”—is no less a criterion for defining a community than is nationalism or ethnicity.

James Townsend maintains that Levenson himself recognized two difficulties with the notion of culturalism as identity, in particular the problem of distinguishing between “culturalism as identity” and what

Townsend calls “culturalism as movement” because “culturalism as identity easily slides into culturalism as movement”:

In one context, loyalty to the culture and belief in its superiority is so profound that bearers of the culture recognize no competition. This is culturalism as identity, an unquestioned worldview that cannot conceivably be lost or proven wrong. The other context involves awareness of competition, hence the prospect of choice among alternatives and the need for some defense and legitimation of the culture, even by those—especially by those—who believe most intensely in its superiority. This is “culturalism as movement,” in which conscious argument and action become necessary to defend a culture under threat.29

Townsend’s critique of “culturalism” as a category focuses on “culturalism as movement’s” reversal of a key condition of “culturalism as identity,” thus exposing the concept’s incapacity to demarcate distinct phases of a genuine historical process (viz. culturalism to nationalism).

Whereas for Duara, it is precisely the “hidden form of relativism” underlying the “tacit idea of Chinese universalism” (or “culturalism”)30 that enables cultural identity to function as a criterion for defining a community, for Townsend, it is the failure of “culturalism as identity” to be able to sustain its absolutist claims (“bearers of the culture recognize no competition”) that render it problematic. The problem Townsend identifies really arises only when culturalism and nationalism are treated as radically different modes of identification (a problem both Duara and Townsend identify in Levenson’s account).

When culturalism and nationalism are wedded or synthesized, however, the problem of “slippage” disappears. In cultural nationalism, slippage is avoided because national culture remains the basis for group/community identity even though some in the nation believe that their national culture requires no legitimation beyond itself and others recognize the challenges posed by other national cultures. The fact that a hypothetical cultural absolutist might claim that national culture requires no legitimation beyond itself would not serve to undermine the idea of Chinese cultural nationalism because other nations would still be recognized even if that recognition consisted of the negative claim that other

30. Duara, Rescuing History from the Nation, 57: “The universalistic claims of Chinese imperial culture constantly bumped up against, and adapted to, alternative views of the world order which it tended to cover with the rhetoric of universalism.”
nations lack true culture. After all, even the most chauvinistic cultural absolutist would have difficulty denying the existence of other nations. Both perspectives can be accommodated without risk of one necessarily undermining the other. Whereas the culturalist posits culture, rather than polity or ethnicity, as the principal source of community identity consciousness or “subjectivity,” the cultural nationalist takes the further step of stipulating that it is the unique culture associated with a particular form of community identity—a nation—that constitutes the basis of that identity.

As with nationalism, cultural nationalism is fundamentally an ideology about the nation rather than the state. In his influential 1987 study, The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism, John Hutchinson distinguished cultural nationalism as a movement that is quite independent of political nationalism. Whereas political nationalists are concerned principally with securing “a representative state for their community,” the cultural nationalist perceives the state as an accidental, for the essence of a nation is its distinctive civilization, which is the product of its unique history, culture and geographical profile. . . . The aim of cultural nationalists is . . . the moral regeneration of the historic community, or, in other words, the recreation of their distinctive national civilization. . . . Cultural nationalism is a movement of moral regeneration.  

In 1999 he refined these views: “The primary aim of cultural nationalists is to revive what they regard as [a] distinctive and primordial collective personality which has a name, unique origins, history, culture, homeland, and social and political practices.”

31. Peter Hays Gries (China’s New Nationalism, 8) raises another theoretical problem: “One group of scholars holds that Confucianism and nationalism are incompatible: Confucian universalism, which holds that all peoples can become Chinese if they adapt to a Sinocentric civilization, mitigates against the idea of a Chinese nationalism that defines itself in contradistinction to other nations.” The reality, however, is that no one today seriously espouses a strong form of “Confucian universalism.”

32. For a counter view of how state nationalism has functioned in the case of China, see Fitzgerald, “The Nationless State,” 57, 58.

33. Hutchinson, The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism, 9–14 passim.

34. Hutchinson, “Re-Interpreting Cultural Nationalism,” 394. This revised description was clearly influenced by Anthony D. Smith’s National Identity (see chap. 1, esp. pp. 13–14).
Ruxue-Centered Chinese Cultural Nationalism

Although Hutchinson's characterizations of cultural nationalism are based on studies of nationalist movements in Europe, some scholars have also applied them to East Asia. Generally speaking, these characterizations can be applied unproblematically to ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalism: a movement based on the ideological conviction that ruxue is a cultural formation fundamental to the identity consciousness of the Chinese (Zhonghua) nation. Nevertheless, it should also be borne in mind that there is considerable variation in how that nationalism is expressed. Consider, for example, the following sentiments expressed by Du Weiming:

The revitalization (fuxing 复兴) of the Chinese (Zhonghua) nation should fundamentally be the revitalization of the national culture. The mainstream, core element in the revitalization of the national culture is the revitalization of ruxue thought, the revitalization of ruxue culture. If ruxue thought does not have a new future, if it is not creatively transformed, then the Chinese nation and the national culture will also have no new future, no new development.

Du is by no means unique in championing these views (nor has he consistently endorsed such a strong form of cultural nationalism). It would, however, be mistaken to assume that the primary aim of all ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalists “is to revive what they regard as a distinctive and primordial collective personality” or to recreate “their distinctive national civilization.” Li Zehou, for example, has produced the most influential version of the thesis that ruxue is integral to Chinese cultural and national identity, yet he argues that precisely because ruxue became the main component in the character of the Chinese people

35. See, e.g., Yoshino, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, 1; and Yingjie Guo, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary China*, 17–18, 72.
37. For example, in 1986, Du (“Ruxue di san qi fazhan de qianjing wenti,” 262) was unequivocal that “the rujia tradition” was but one element—albeit a key element—in China’s (Zhongguo) national culture. Moreover, “the rujia tradition belongs not only to China, it also belongs to Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. If we also consider the values orientation of overseas Chinese communities, then broadly speaking, the rujia tradition also belongs to Singapore, SE Asia, Australia, Europe and America.”
(Zhonghua minzuxing 中華民族性), “it is not something that needs quickly to be saved or rejuvenated and promoted” (Chapter 5).

In fact, for a number of ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalists, only certain aspects of ruxue warrant rejuvenation; hence the distinction Du Weiming draws between “the rujia tradition” and “rujiao China.” Whereas the former is to be encouraged, the latter is a “feudal evil”:

Following the collapse of the autocratic system of government and feudal society, rujiao China also lost its previous form and currently continues to have a presence in the Chinese people’s cultural-psychological formation as an all-powerful lingering feudal evil. This presence can certainly be understood to be a lost soul (youling wanghun 幽靈亡魂) exerting a negative influence on political culture.\footnote{Du Weiming, “Ruxue di san qi fazhan de qianjing wenti,” 259–60.}

As we will see in Chapter 13, Ren Jiyu 任繼愈 supports a similar assessment of rujiao, although the scope of rujiao for Ren is much wider than Du’s conception of rujiao China.

Again, although ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalists seem to be unanimous in endorsing the view that the essence of a nation is its distinct civilization and culture, the issue is complicated by problematic notions such as “East Asian ruxue” and the “Han cultural circle,” which have been used to advance sinocentric claims about the derivative or dependent quality of the cultural-cum-national identity of other East Asian societies (Chapter 4), and philosophically reinforced by Hegelian-like notions of a unique kind of cultural consciousness that acknowledges and affirms the transcendent and absolute nature of the cultural spirit or cultural life of the Chinese nation (Chapter 7). Moreover, although there is no shortage of ruxue revivalists seeking “moral regeneration,” for others such as Chen Ming 陳明 (Chapter 9) and Gan Chunsong 干春松 (Chapter 5), a more pressing goal is institutional regeneration.

Finally, although ruxue-centered Chinese cultural nationalism is a movement, it is a movement largely restricted to academics. Indeed, the movement is dominated by one particular section of that profession: academics employed in philosophy departments in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and the mainland. Although it would be inaccurate to describe the movement as “nascent”—given its historical depth and geographical spread—it has yet to attract significant levels of support from those intellectuals who might transform the ideals formulated by these
academic cultural nationalists into concrete forms of social or political mobilization. The most visible expression of the movement remains a body of discourse. It is my hope that the following chapters will assist readers in forming their own judgment of how adequately this discursive body has succeeded in hosting the wandering soul's return.