

MOSES AS A LEADER TO MODERN CHINESE INTELLECTUALS: 1920S-1940S

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This paper will first discuss a number of changes that the Biblical image of Moses among Chinese intellectuals underwent between the 1920s and 1930s. Then it will demonstrate that in the 1930s Moses was regarded mainly as an ideal leader. Chinese intellectuals were also interested in the God of Moses in the 1930s and a discussion of this is included with an explanation regarding Moses' role as a religious leader. Finally, Moses' relevance to nationalism in the 1930s and 1940s is addressed. Through the discussion of Moses' changing image, the paper attempts to display how the Old Testament became a continuous and important source of inspiration to modern Chinese intellectuals in their fight for China's revival and national rebuilding.

Key words: Moses, leader, Chinese nationalism, modern Chinese intellectuals

From the 1920s and for the next twenty and more years, a common and constant agenda for Chinese intellectuals was how to construct their nation as an ideal society under the leadership of ideal men. To do this, they resorted to different sources of inspiration, among which the OT was an important one. This paper attempts to demonstrate that they found Moses in the Book of Exodus particularly inspiring. A basic assumption is that the image of Moses in the Chinese intellectuals' interpretations was in most cases receptor culture and reader oriented, and the interpretations were adjusted to the urgent concerns of the interpreters. By the same token, modifications were also possibly made to accord with modern Western ideas, which became prevalent in China during this period.

After World War I, in the prevalent disappointment with Western civilization and revival of traditional Chinese culture, many Chinese intellectuals viewed Moses less favourably in comparison with Confucius (551-

479 BCE).¹ Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873–1929) “the foremost intellectual leader of the first two decades of twentieth-century China,”² who had written admiringly about Moses before World War I in the framework of Darwinist nationalism now regarded him as merely one “who had his personal appeal only among his disciples and followers.” In contrast, the appeal of Confucius was felt “among all the Chinese.” In Liang’s geographical interpretation, the important reason was that as a religious founder in a “remote” place like Judea, Moses lived in a world of “naïve humanity and decadent learning.” Even if he could remain pure and noble, he “was like spring water in a mountain flowing beneath the fallen leaves and he could never see the scene of greatness.”³ In Liang’s cultural nationalism after World War I, a hero like Moses, whose impact was limited, was inferior to Confucius who was a prophet of eternal importance to his people.⁴

Probably in 1928, the literary giant Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) expressed his sympathy for a less favourable image of Moses by translating the novelette “Zai shamo shang 在沙漠上” (In the desert),⁵ which contains the gruesome vision of primeval violence raging among the Israelites on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land.⁶ Although neither Lev Lunz (1901–1924) the

¹ This is discussed in greater detail in chapter five of my *Men and Ideas of the Old Testament in Modern Chinese Thought*, Ph.D dissertation, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2009.

² BOORMAN, Howard L. ed., *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China*, Vol. II, p. 346.

³ For the quotations, see Liang Qichao, “Kongzi 孔子” (Confucius), first published in 1920, In *Yinbing shi heji-zhuanji 饮冰室合集-专集* (Collected works and essays of the ice drinker’s studio-works), Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1936, *ce* 10, *juan* 36, 65 and 68–69. For Liang’s earlier and favourable interpretations of Moses, see chapter two of my dissertation. For a study on the impact of Geographical Determination on Liang Qichao, see Ishikawa Yoshihiro, Lori Watt, tr., “Liang Qichao, the Field of Geography in Meiji Japan, and Geographical Determinism,” in Joshua A. Fogel, ed., *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao’s Introduction of Modern Western Civilization to China*, pp. 156–176.

⁴ For a clear explanation on the difference between hero and prophet, see Joseph R. Levenson, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and the Mind of Modern China*, p. 120.

⁵ LUNZ, LEV (伦支), LU, XUN, tr., “Zai shamo shang,” In Lu Xun, *Luxun quanji 鲁迅全集* (Complete works of Lu Xun), Vol. 19, pp. 39–49. The Chinese translation was made from Yonekawa Masao’s Japanese version of the story in 1927 or 1928 and first published in January 1929. See Yonekawa’s Japanese in *Laonong luxiya xiaoshuo ji 劳农露西亚小说集* (Collection of Russian novelettes), 1925, editor unknown.

⁶ GAMSÄ, M. *The Chinese Translation of Russian Literature: Three Studies*, note 203 in page 180.

author nor Lu Xun the translator intended to disparage the OT, the novelette suggests negative images of God, Moses, Aaron, and the Levites. Like other members of the *Serapionsbrüder*, a major literary group established in Russia in 1921, Lunz was not attached to any political party and denied all political ideologies, though he had sympathy with the toiling masses.⁷ According to Lu Xun's quotation of Yonekawa Masao 米川正夫 (1891–1962), Lunz wrote the tale in 1921, trying to interpret the revolution in Russia while rewriting the OT story.⁸ According to some major Western scholars of Lu Xun like Leo Ou-fan Lee and Patrick Hanan, Lu Xun was inclined toward such symbolism or symbolic realism, especially in the early phase of his career. Douwe Fokkema has also argued that Lu Xun was interested in works of fantasy in this period.⁹

In the light of the symbolic interpretation of the tale, the march toward Canaan full of suffering and immorality symbolizes the revolutionary struggle for a utopian society. The golden sunshine, a symbol of the revolutionary ideal, made daytime even more terrifying than night because it killed the human soul. The so-called righteous God, who stood above the Israelites and indicates revolutionary dictatorship, was also the God of slaughter. Between God and the masses of Israel were the sky and Moses. The blue but terrifying sky reflects the society established by the Russian Revolution. Moses, on whom the Holy Spirit relied, instructed the masses and symbolizes the teacher of the revolution. The frightened Israelites, guilty or innocent, all repented and pleaded for absolution. Whenever the suffering and desperate Israelites expressed their suspicion and reluctance to proceed, Moses pronounced a judgement. He would step onto a high altar and communicate with God in a foreign language, inexplicable, and terrifying, which the author considered as the preaching of revolutionary doctrines. Aaron, who stood nearby not as Moses' brother but as the Head Priest, would ask the Levites, who were his relatives, to kill whoever expressed dissent. Aaron and the Levites stand for the lackeys of revolutionary dictatorship, while the Levites' sword represents the state apparatus. After the bloody suppression of dissent, the Israelites were forced to continue on their endless course with their private property confiscated.

⁷ LU, XUN preface to *Shuqin* 竖琴 (The harp), written on September 9, 1932, In *Luxun quanji*, Vol. 19, pp. 7–11.

⁸ See Lu Xun's postscript to *Shuqin* written on September 10, 1932, In *Luxun quanji*, Vol. 19, pp. 243–245.

⁹ LEE, LEO OU-FAN "Tradition and Modernity in the Writings of Lu Xun," In L. Lee, ed., *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, p. 9; and Patrick Hanan, "The Technique of Lu Xun's Fiction," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 34 (1974), p. 61. Douwe Fokkema, "Lu Xun: the Impact of Russian Literature," In Merle Goldman, ed., *Modern Chinese Literature in the May Fourth Era*, p. 94.

Lu Xun was already uncertain about the revolutionary movement's outcome in his student days in Japan and utterly desperate with the 1911 revolution.¹⁰ Dismayed by warlord politics, Lu Xun observed cynically in 1925, "I feel that before the revolution, I was a slave, but shortly after the revolution, I have been cheated by slaves and become their slave."¹¹ During the high tide of the Nationalist "revolution" in 1926 and 1927, as most biographers have pointed out, Lu Xun was shocked by Chiang Kai-shek's 蒋介石 (1887–1975) massacre of Communists in Canton on April 15, 1927, following his coup in Shanghai a few days later. The random arrest of the innocent shattered the hope Lu Xun might have entertained for the "revolutionary men" of the Guomindang 国民党. The very meanings of revolution were most confusing to Lu Xun and the impression on him was negative: the reality of revolution itself was rather a world of total chaos and confusion.¹² In this period until 1929, Lu Xun's ideas were not fully crystallized and he had not committed himself to a proletarian or Marxist point of view.¹³

In 1932 when Lu Xun wrote the "preface" and "postscript" to the book that contains "Zai shamo shang," he was already a Communist sympathizer and his view of Lunz's work should accordingly have changed. The inclusion of the tale in the selected works proved, as Leo Ou-fan Lee pointed out, that the "Russianness" of Soviet literature continued to fascinate him, as he tried to keep pace with the collective suffering of a whole people and social transformation of a nation of the proletariat. The traits revealed in the tale such as terror and despair were in Lu Xun's eyes spiritual hallmarks of the Russian people.¹⁴ The aim of Lu Xun was to establish a mirror for the Chinese people and for literature.

At approximately the same time, Sun Yat-sen 孙逸仙 (1866–1925), the pioneer and leader of democratic revolution in modern China, also considered

¹⁰ LIN, YÜ-SHENG "The Morality of Mind and Immorality of Politics: Reflections on Lu Xun, the Intellectual," In LEE, L. ed., *Lu Xun and His Legacy*, p. 108.

¹¹ LU, XUN "Huran xiangdao 忽然想到" (Sudden thoughts), *Huagai ji 华盖集* (Unlucky star), *Luxun quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 16.

¹² LU, XUN "Xiao zagan 小杂感" (Mini-thoughts), composed on September 24, 1927, *Eryi ji 而已集* (And that is that), *Luxun quanji*, Vol. 3, p. 532 and Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Voices from the Iron House: A Study of Lu Xun*, pp. 138–139.

¹³ Lee, *Voices from the Iron House*, 110–129; Irma Peters, "Die Ansichten Lu Hsün über das Verhältnis von Literatur und Revolution in der Zeit von 1927–1930," *International Congress of Orientalists* 5 (1960), pp. 149–157; and Huang Sungk'ang, *Lu Hsün and the New Culture Movement of Modern China*, pp. 120–122.

¹⁴ Lee, L. *Voices from the Iron House*, p. 168.

the contribution of Moses limited, though he himself was often compared to China's Moses by his contemporaries. As Sun viewed it, although Moses had led the Israelites in the exodus, he failed to make them a truly independent nation before they reached Canaan. The Chinese people were subjected to autocracy of the Manchus for hundreds of years and lived in abject misery as did the Israelites in Egypt. Now the Chinese cast off the yoke of the Manchus just as the Israelites were liberated by Moses. However, like the Israelites, they still needed a Joshua to end their state of disunity.¹⁵ All these ideas were made in the last years of Sun's life. Sun was not completely satisfied with the reality after the 1911 Revolution, which overthrew the rule of the Manchus; however, he felt unable to do as much as he would have liked, especially as far as his ideal of the Three Principles of the People (三民主义), namely Nationalism, Democracy and the People's Livelihood, were concerned. Sun at this moment could do nothing but place his hopes on a successor from the young.

Even Chinese Christian intellectuals at the time discussed the limitations of Moses from a non-theological perspective.¹⁶ According to the Chinese translation of George Barton by the foremost Old Testament (henceforth the OT) scholar Li Rongfang 李荣芳 (1887–1965), Moses was the leader of a group of barbarians, who damaged whomever they conquered. They were saboteurs of culture; therefore, Moses' religion was naïve and underdeveloped. Even Moses' achievement in the exodus was called in question in this translated book because in its words not all the Israelites were in Egypt at Moses' time, Moses led only part of the Israelites out of Egypt.¹⁷

However, despite his ambiguous image and limitations, Moses could still be inspiring and there existed simultaneously favourable comments about Moses, which anticipate the urgent need for a powerful leader in China after the chaotic years of the 1920s and the growing interest in Moses in the 1930s as a great leader of his people. Although sounding self contradictory to his statement that Moses' personal appeal was only felt among his disciples and followers, Liang

¹⁵ SUN, YAT-SEN "Mian zhongguo jidujiao qingnian shu 勉中国基督教青年书" (A letter to encourage Chinese Christian youth), first published in 1924, In *Guofu quanji 国父全集* (Complete works by Sun Yat-sen), Vol. 4b, pp. 1448–1449.

¹⁶ For an example of theological discussion on Moses' limitation, see Frank C. Porter (博富朗), Taijian 太简 (Jian Youwen 简又文), tr., "Lishide yesu yu baoluo de zhengci 历史的耶稣与保罗的证辞" (The historical Jesus and testimony of Paul), *Shengming 生命* (Life), Vol. 5, No. 2 (1924), pp. 17–18. Such discussions were usually based on traditional ideas of Christian theology.

¹⁷ BARTON, G. (巴尔腾), LI, RONGFANG, tr., *Yisielie de zongjiao 以色列的宗教* (The religion of Israel), pp. 3 of the preface by Li, 10, and 29–30. See the original work In George Barton, *The Religion of Israel*.

Qichao claimed that the attributes of such a hero as Moses penetrated the entire society and changed its form and content so that the character of the public could take shape.¹⁸

As a response to the renewed interest in traditional Chinese culture in the 1920s, Moses was considered even by some Christian intellectuals as a Confucian style sage. Chinese tradition values highly the learning of a sage. According to Zhao Zongfu 赵宗福,¹⁹ God sent Moses to enlighten the Israelites just as *Tian* 天 (Heaven) had sent Confucius to the Chinese. Since modern learning referred to Western Learning or New Learning, particularly the natural and social sciences, Zhao emphasized accordingly that, to prepare Moses, God made Moses spend forty years in Pharaoh's palace to be educated in such subjects as astronomy, mathematics, and politics. In addition to sound learning, perfection in behaviour and morality is an equally important attribute of a sage, according to traditional Chinese thought. Since perfection cannot be achieved without suffering, a person charged with important tasks by Heaven must be tried and be physically tempered. For that reason, Zhao explained further, as an impatient and short tempered person, Moses was not well accepted by his people when appointed by God as their leader. Therefore, Moses had to spend another forty years as a shepherd in the wilderness, where he led a hard life in tough circumstances. After those preparations, Zhao no longer mentioned Moses' shortcomings, implying that Moses had become a perfect man like a Confucian sage. Such a sage was surely a brilliant political as well as religious leader who would bring order out of chaos. For this reason, political and religious affairs were united without conflict in Moses' time.²⁰

Liu Tingfang 刘廷芳 (1891–1947), a Christian and professor at Yenching University, admired Moses so much that he compared his hero to Sun Yat-sen. Sun had a strong faith in God and considered himself a messenger sent by God to fight against the devil similar to Moses on Mount Horeb. Sun established the

¹⁸ LIANG, QICHAO "Zhongguo lishi yanjiufa 中国历史研究法" (Method for research of Chinese history), first published in 1922, *Yinbing shi heji--zhuanji, ce* 16, *juan* 73, pp. 113–121.

¹⁹ In this paper, if bio-data are not provided at the first appearance of an individual, it means they are unknown.

²⁰ See Zhao's portrait of Moses in Zhao Zongfu, "Jiuyue de lijie 旧约的礼节" (Etiquette in the OT, continued), *Shenxue zhi* 神学志 (Theological quarterly), Vol. 7, No. 2 (June 1921), pp. 24–27. Yuan Ding'an 袁定安, a Christian evangelist, in the 1930s argued the opposite. Moses was inspired by Jethro and established the Tent of Congregation, which was the beginning of theocracy. In the theocracy of Judaism, religion and politics were separated, which was seen in the role of the priests. Yuan Ding'an, *Youtaijiao gailun* 犹太教概论 (Introduction to Judaism), pp. 30–31.

Republic of China and liberated the Chinese from the shackles of the Manchus like Moses who led the Israelites out of Egypt. Sun devoted forty years to revolutionary work similar to Moses who spent forty years guiding the Israelites in the exodus. Sun did not achieve his goal of a better republic, just as Moses failed to enter Canaan. Sun died with the vision of "a Canaan-like Republic of China flowing with milk and honey" in the future just as Moses saw Canaan in the distance and died. Even Sun's will on his deathbed is similar to Moses' last words on Mount Nebo. To conclude the article, Liu Tingfang attached two poems, one by himself and the other by his wife Wu Zhuosheng 吴卓生, also a Christian, to lament Sun's death. Both poems compared Sun's life to that of Moses.²¹

To explain such positive images of Moses, Christian intellectuals, especially those in the 1930s who encountered less hostility to Christianity in China, naturally resorted to Moses' idea of God. In fact, the interest in the OT idea of God in the 30s was considerable.²² The relationship between God and Moses was recognized and discussed, especially by Christian intellectuals. What the interpreters cared about was Moses' God as a religious phenomenon but also as crucially instrumental to Moses' leadership. Eventually, their interpretation of Moses' idea of God helps explain Moses' role as a religious and cultural leader in their eyes.

According to Liu Tingfang, the history of a religion is an evolutionary process of replacing an old idea of God with a new one and the best example to show the struggle between an old idea of God and a new one is the motif of Mount Sinai. Moses ascended the mountain to obtain a new idea of God. Aaron, without a real teacher's insight, instructed the masses with the old idea. When Moses returned from the mountain, a conflict between the two ideas ensued. At first, the old had the upper hand and the two tablets were destroyed. But the final victory, as usual, belonged to the new idea and the revised Ten Commandments were successfully transmitted through history.²³ Moses with his idea of God represented the new and the new idea was the progressive force in the evolution of history.

To Yuan Ding'an, it was most important that Moses introduced God's name of "Jehovah" and its meaning (Ex. 3:14) to the Israelites because this distinguished God from the gods of others at the transition period from the Zoomorphic Age to the Anthropomorphic Age. The English "I am that I am"

²¹ LIU, TINGFANG "Zhonghua jidutu yu sunzhongshan 中华基督徒与孙中山" (Chinese Christians and Sun Yat-sen), *Shengming*, Vol. 5, No. 6 (1925), pp. 90-94.

²² For detailed demonstration, see chapter four of my doctoral dissertation.

²³ LIU, TINGFANG "Shende xingxiang 神的形象" (The image of God), *Zijing* 紫晶 (Amethyst), Vol. 4, No. 2 (April 1933), pp. 176-178.

used by Yuan was probably from the *King James Version*, while the Chinese used by him was “我是自有永有者” (I am that I was from time immemorial and that I shall be eternally) from the *Union Version* since both versions were dominant at the time. Different from living beings and not subject to the law of nature, the God of Moses was transcendental. Therefore, Moses’ idea of God was indeed innovative in contrast to the worship of natural objects or phenomena and was a great leap forward. Besides, the God of Moses was holy and pure. The impact of God’s holiness and purity on the Israelites’ ethical life is considerable, as well as on the making of laws, rites, and systems; otherwise the Israelites should acquire bad habits from heathens.²⁴ According to classical Jewish commentaries, nevertheless, the repetition of “I am,” which should be translated literally from the Hebrew *ehyeh* as “I shall be,” signified God’s assurance to Moses at the time of suffering.²⁵

Moses’ idea of God was progressive as well as innovative also because Moses related the religious faith in God to the political responsibility for his people. The bush on fire was explained by Liu Tingfang and Yang Yinliu 杨荫浏, who was a Christian musicologist, as Moses’ imagination when he saw the senna in bloom. The sight reminded Moses not only of God’s glory but also of his responsibility for his people in slavery and danger. God in His glory would not tolerate the fact that the Israelites led such an inhuman life because the world created by God was originally perfect. To worship God is to fight against any damage to that perfection. Therefore, the lesson of the bush on fire is that seeing God is facing His challenges and engaging in service for the oppressed people. Inspired by Moses, Liu and Yang exclaimed, “how can we live in ease and comfort while our [Chinese] compatriots are still groaning bitterly?!”²⁶

Li Rongfang regarded Moses as the most important figure in the history of Israel because of his idea of God, which made him the national leader of the Israelites and the “inspiring man” (启示人) of their faith in Jehovah. The problem that had always bothered Moses during his years in Midian was that he loved his people and was eager to find a solution for their suffering, but he was

²⁴ YUAN, D. *Youtaijiao gailun*, pp. 21–22. Li Rongfang introduced a similar idea that the religion of the Israelites took shape when Jehovah revealed His name to Moses in Exodus 3:14–15. Fleming James (詹辅民), Li Rongfang, tr., *Jiuyue renwu zhi 旧约人物志* (Personalities of the OT), pp. 5 and 7.

²⁵ See the commentaries by Rashi, Nachmanides, Sforino, and Rashbam in A. Cohen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash—The Five Books of Moses with Haphtaroth: Hebrew Text and English Translation with an Exposition Based on the Classical Jewish Commentaries*, p. 332.

²⁶ LIU, TINGFANG and YANG, YINLIU “Huoyan zhong de jingji 火焰中的荆棘” (The bush on fire), *Zijing*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (June 1934), pp. 239–256.

neither powerful nor resourceful enough to achieve that. At last on Mount Horeb, Moses found the answer and realized that God was his comrade in the protest against the power of oppression. The core of Moses' religion was that Jehovah was the God of the Israelites and the Israelites were God's chosen people. Moses' God had mercy on his people and was ever-victorious over the enemies of the Israelites, His chosen people. The First Commandment (Ex. 20:3) laid the foundation of the intimate relationship and the covenant between Jehovah and Israel.²⁷ Li apparently based himself on George Barton. But a careful comparison of Li's translation and Barton's original reveals that Li did not always follow Barton. For example, Barton emphasized the covenantal relationship of God with Israel as a result of God's jealousy (Ex. 34:14), whereas Li highlighted that God was chosen as the only god of Israel.²⁸

According to Li Rongfang's translation of Barton, the unique covenantal relationship between God and Israel was established at a crucial moment in the nation's destiny. Unlike the ties of kinship between Semitic deities and their worshippers, which were thought to be insoluble and from which it was difficult to develop ethics, the covenantal relationship, which could be readily undone, enabled the later Israelite prophets to advocate an ethical and moral covenant with Jehovah, thus distinguishing their religion from others in the world.²⁹ Li introduced uncritically Barton's view and failed to point out the speculative nature of the hypothesis. The vital question about the growth of the ethical element was inconclusive and did not allow for such a positive conclusion.³⁰

In short, behind the attribution of Moses' role to the idea of God are diversified interpretations of Moses' image. Moses' killing the Egyptian who beat an Israelite might be a display of either inexperience or patriotic passion or soaring aspirations of the young Moses.³¹ Similarly, Moses could be portrayed by modern Chinese intellectuals as playing any possible kind of role, being a philosopher, educator, cultural founder, political leader, intermediary between

²⁷ LI, RONGFANG "Moxi de zongjiao 摩西的宗教" (The religion of Moses), *Zhenli yu shengming 真理与生命* (Truth and life), Vol. 8, No. 8 (January 1935), pp. 441–444.

²⁸ BARTON, G. "Chapter IV: Moses and the Covenant with Yahweh," *The Religion of Israel*, pp. 56–73.

²⁹ BARTON, G – LI, R. tr., *Yisielie de zongjiao*, pp. 35–36.

³⁰ ANON "Book notices," *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 53, No. 6 (1919), p. 653.

³¹ See ZHAO, LIUTANG 赵柳塘 "Moxi zhi mengzhao 摩西之蒙召" (Moses' being called), *Shengjing bao 圣经报* (The Bible newspaper), No. 178 (1936), p. 2; Liu and Yang, "Huoyan zhong de jingji," p. 241; and Li Rongfang, "Zongjiao shenghuo de fazhan 宗教生活的发展" (The development of religious life), *Zijing*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 1934), p. 171.

God and the masses, sage, hero, prophet, preacher, priest, and even a king of ancient Israel.

To the philosopher and educator Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), Moses was also a philosopher and educator. Like the Chinese myth of Pangu 盘古, was the first living being and with whom creation began, OT myths like that of Creation, which were attributed to Moses, aimed to explain man, nature, life, and death. Such myths offered sustenance to philosophy and set limits for man. Moses said he received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai just as China's ancients talked about Heaven's mandate when Yu 禹 (the 21st century BCE) received the Great Plan with Its Nine Divisions (洪范九畴). With the Ten Commandments, Moses initiated the establishment of Jewish religion, which eventually replaced the OT myths. From Moses' religious doctrines to Jesus' revolution is in fact a philosophical development.³² In terms of education, since there was no science in primitive times, Moses with the help of religion answered systematically questions about the world and human beings. Therefore, Moses was also an educator.³³

Like many others, Yuan Ding'an regarded Moses as the founder of Judaism and Hebrew culture. Moses brought the Israelites to Mount Sinai, made the covenant with them by the order of God, explained theology, issued holy laws, made ceremony and propriety, set up the Tabernacle, selected priests, and created order among his fellow believers. Moses thus took care of everything: religion, ethics, politics, education, and hygiene. Moreover, Moses represented cultural progress. He consulted the Code of Hammurabi and other ancient conventions, but he went beyond these and made a superior code. For example, his idea prohibiting all work on the Sabbath caused people to abandon prevalent bad habits of exploitation acquired in Babylon and Egypt.³⁴ The interest in Moses' role of law making was also strong among many other interpreters. Indeed, law making, according to typical Chinese thinking, is a basic function of the religious and cultural founder. However, the nature of Mosaic Law might

³² CAI, YUANPEI "Jianming zhexue gangyao 简明哲学纲要" (A concise outline of philosophy), In Gao Pingshu 高平叔, ed., *Caiyuanpei quanji* 蔡元培全集 (Complete collection of the works by Cai Yuanpei), pp. 460–462. See the motif of the Great Plan with Its Nine Divisions in "The Great Plan," *Zhoushu* 周书 (Book of Zhou), Book 4, 3.

³³ CAI, YUANPEI "Meiyu dai zongjiao 美育代宗教" (Aesthetic education to replace religion), first published in 1932, In Gao Pingshu, ed., *Caiyuanpei meiyu lunji* 蔡元培美育论集 (Cai Yuanpei's works on aesthetic education), pp. 274–275.

³⁴ YUAN, D. *Youtaijiao gailun*, pp. 18 and 26.

differ in the view of the Chinese interpreters. Liu Tingfang and Yang Yinliu considered Mosaic Law as a national constitution.³⁵

Occasionally, Chinese intellectuals interpreted Moses as a prophet. However, their meaning of the term “prophet” differed. To Zhu Weizhi 朱维之 (1905–1999), a Christian scholar of Biblical literature, Moses was a prophet because he was a real and great preacher. Zhu highlighted that Moses was the first preaching prophet in history and had remarkable literary talent.³⁶ Li Rongfang introduced Moses as the first prophet God sent to bring laws to Israel (Dt. 18:15).³⁷ Moses as a prophet implied to Li that he, unlike Adam and Eve, had perfect personal morality (人格) and did not sacrifice the highest good (至善) for the secondary good (次善).³⁸ And, as mentioned earlier, the image of Moses as a cultural founder and a master-like prophet with concern for society and perfect morality naturally made him comparable in the eyes of some to Chinese sages like Confucius.³⁹

However, Moses was most often portrayed as a brilliant leader of his people, whether in a religious, military, or political sense. As a religious leader, in addition to his idea of God already mentioned, Moses was considered unique because he was an intermediary between God and the people as portrayed in the Book of Numbers. Similar to priests and prophets, intermediaries worked between God and men. But whereas a priest worked on behalf of men and a prophet on behalf of God, an intermediary was responsible for both sides. God’s laws were delivered to men through Moses, on the one hand; on the other, Moses prayed to God for men’s sake so that God would desist from punishing them for their crimes.⁴⁰ Accordingly, Li Rongfang introduced the image of Moses who prayed for his people. Even the story of the Golden Calf in Exodus 32 showed not Moses’ anger with Israel but his praying for them.⁴¹

³⁵ LIU, T. and YANG, Y. “Huoyan zhong de jingji,” pp. 239–256.

³⁶ ZHU WEIZHI, *Jidujiao yu wenxue* 基督教与文学 (Christianity and literature), 1992, the original work published in 1940, pp. 188–189. For a detailed discussion of Moses’ literary talent, see pp. 196–197.

³⁷ LI, R. tr., *Jiuyue renwu zhi*, p. 118.

³⁸ LI, R. “Zuide laiyan yu xiaoguo 罪的来源与效果” (The origin and effects of sin), *Zhenli yu shengming*, Vol. 10, No. 1 (March 1936), pp. 12–14.

³⁹ For an example, see Lucius C. Porter (博晨光), translator unknown, “Zhongguo de jiuyue 中国的旧约” (China’s OT), *Zhenli yu shengming*, Vol. 2, Nos. 9–10 (1927), pp. 241–243.

⁴⁰ ANON “Moxi wei zhongbao 摩西为中保” (Moses as intermediary), *Shengjing bao*, Vol. 181, No. 7 (1936), pp. 3–4.

⁴¹ LI, R. tr., *Jiuyue renwu zhi*, pp. 15–16.

Although Western commentators have claimed that Moses' role in the military encounters, in which Israelites were involved, is very limited,⁴² Moses was portrayed as a strong military leader with foresight, sagacity, and diplomatic talents by many Chinese interpreters in the years of nationalism. Seeing that most Israelites were still cowardly after he sent some men to explore Canaan, Moses decided to keep them in the wilderness longer so that they could be better trained for the conquest of Canaan. After another thirty eight years of political training and military education, the younger generation was ready. When Pharaoh's army retreated from Canaan, Moses realized that the time had come for the Israelites to enter. He defeated the strong Amorites and conquered a large area east of the Jordan.⁴³

Most discussed the idea that Moses was a great political leader. Some intellectuals highlighted Moses' qualification. Li Rongfang paid special attention to Moses' cooperative and democratic leadership. The story at Mount Sinai showed Moses as a man ready to accept advice and be trusting. That made Moses a pre-eminently successful leader, trusted by his people; they were attached to him and did not protest against him. He managed to unite his people by giving them religious faith and ethics. At the very beginning he had learned to recruit men of worth and he entrusted them with authority. Numbers 11:14, 17, and 29 presented Moses as a man ready to share his responsibilities with others.⁴⁴ Liu Tingfang and Yang Yinliu believed that because of his earlier education, Moses was able to learn wisdom and survival techniques in the desert. The many years he spent in the desert also transformed Moses into a man of courage, resourcefulness, and strong faith, which were necessary for a leader of a large group of urban slaves wandering about in the desert.⁴⁵

The heroic morality of Moses as a political leader was also highly praised. Moses could have voluntarily surrendered to Pharaoh's mercy after he killed the Egyptian. But being a real man, Moses despised that and considered it betrayal of himself and his people. Even in exile, Moses was always ready to defend the weak without considering personal interests, which was the true quality of a

⁴² SETERS, John van, "Moses," In Mircea Eliade, ed., *Encyclopedia of Religions*, Vol. 10, p. 117.

⁴³ YUAN DING'AN, *Xibolai de minzu yingxiong moxi* 希伯来的民族英雄摩西 (Moses: the national hero of the Hebrews), pp. 21–23. Liu Tingfang, Yang Yinliu, and Zhu Weizhi also portrayed Moses as a military man, while Li Rongfang claimed that Moses initiated the era of military leaders. For details, see Liu and Yang, "Huoyan zhong de jingji," pp. 239–256; Zhu, W. *Jidujiao yu wenxue*, p. 238; and Li, tr., *Jiuyue renwu zhi*, pp. 74–75.

⁴⁴ LI, R. tr., *Jiuyue renwu zhi*, pp. 11, 13, 17, and pp. 19–20.

⁴⁵ LIU, T. and YANG, Y. "Huoyan zhong de jingji," pp. 239–256.

hero. His experience as a shepherd, which familiarized him with the life of nomads and conditions in the wilderness, was formative. The forty years of wandering changed Moses from a reckless teenager to a mature leader who kept the general goal in sight while accomplishing daily tasks.⁴⁶

The evangelist Zhao Liutang 赵柳塘 likewise emphasized the impact of suffering on a heroic leader. Only suffering can help a person cast off his old self. All those to whom God assigned important positions grew up in suffering. Moses was born into a world of difficulties and hardships.⁴⁷ Having gone through the test of suffering, Moses devoted himself to becoming a leader and could not be defeated even by the threat of death. When Moses knew that he would soon “be gathered to his people” (Num. 27:13), he did not become despondent. Instead, he worked even harder until he finished all his tasks. Moses died neither of old age nor of any mistake (Num. 27:14) but because he had finished his work. Even the motif that Moses saw Canaan with his eyes was interpreted as a special favour bestowed by God because Moses could then see the fruit of his hard work and feel satisfied.⁴⁸ Unlike the Reubenites and the Gadites, who asked for the land on the eastern bank of Jordan, Moses requested to have a look at Canaan across the river. To Zhao, the Reubenites and the Gadites cared about only immediate personal interests, while Moses was concerned with the long-term interests of his nation. Zhao criticized the many leaders of his time who scrambled for power and profit, while seeking ease and comfort.⁴⁹

Jiang Yizhen 蒋翼振, a Christian scholar and translator of scientific books, particularly valued Moses’ patience and perseverance. When Moses saw the Israelites worshipping the Golden Calf, he angrily smashed the tablets. However, he did not give up, but rather climbed Mount Sinai for the second time and finally got the Ten Commandments carved on stones. In contrast to Moses, Chinese leaders vacillate now to the left, now to the right. They have no insight, are not confident and patient, and do not have fixed aims. As a result, they fail in most matters.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ YUAN, D. *Xibolai de minzu yingxiong moxi*, 9–10.

⁴⁷ ZHAO, L. “Moxi zhi dansheng jiqi shaonian 摩西之诞生及其少年” (Moses’ birth and early years), In *Shengjing bao*, No. 177 (1936), p. 24.

⁴⁸ ZHAO, L. “Moxi zhi wannian 摩西之晚年” (The last years of Moses), In *Shengjing bao*, No. 183 (1936), pp. 1–7.

⁴⁹ ZHAO, L. “Moxi zhi wei lingxiu 摩西之为领袖” (Moses as a leader), In *Shengjing bao*, No. 179 (1936), pp. 6–15.

⁵⁰ JIANG YIZHENG, “Xiandai de lingxiu you ci jianxin ma 现代的领袖有此坚信吗” (Do modern Chinese leaders have so strong a faith?), *Zijing*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (September 1934), pp. 10–17.

Moses' role of servant to his people was also inspiring to Jiang. Although Moses was a person, he was able to hear "God's voice." God's voice, which Moses heard on Mount Horeb, was a "human voice" (人声) because it was made for the sake of humankind. This is vastly different from the noise in the modern world made by those who treated other people like beasts, crushing their bones and chewing their flesh. A man like Moses who refused to be contaminated by evil influences and consented to serve the common people at God's call is surely able to hear the human voice of God. The problem at the present time is not that God keeps silent but that no one hears His voice.⁵¹ A leader like Moses who heard God's human voice was prepared to make sacrifices for his people. Moses was like Mount Tai that carries a heavy burden.⁵² Moses was also as tolerant as an ocean with room for hundreds of rivers. He who wants to be a leader and servant of his people must follow Moses' example. He must willingly and gladly be subjected to every kind of maltreatment and never lose the love for his people. Otherwise, he is destined to abandon the task halfway. Although Moses could not save his own life and died in the wilderness, with his death he saved the lives of thousands of his people. Moses was like a seed that must die for the new plant to sprout. But he was not a born leader and servant of his people. Before Moses determined to devote himself to deliver his people, he was a different person. Selfish, cowardly, and lazy, he hid like a hermit in the depth of a mountain for forty years. Even when God called him in the flaming bush, he was still reluctant and afraid to accept God's command that he go to save his people. Full of suspicion, Moses had no self-confidence and did not believe that his compatriots were worth saving. However, after he had realized his error and repented, he made a fresh start and was no longer his old self.⁵³

Still, the image of Moses as a leader could be less favourable, as in the short story "Xinai shan 西乃山" (Mount Sinai) by Liu Yu 刘宇, which portrayed Moses as a fraud. The short story was adapted from Exodus 19–20, 24, 32, and 34. It deals with Moses and Joshua's actions at Mount Sinai, but does not include the presence of God. As a political leader, Moses was fairly successful

⁵¹ JIANG, Yizheng "Rensheng 人声" (Human voice), In *Zhenli yu shengming*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (November 1932), pp. 58–59.

⁵² Mount Tai was thought to carry a burden probably because of a quotation from Sima Qian 司马迁 (ca. 145–90 BCE), "Though death befalls all men alike, it may be weightier than Mount Tai, or lighter than a feather" (人固有一死, 或重于泰山, 或轻于鸿毛). See Sima Qian, "Bao ren'an shu 报任安书" (A letter to Ren An), In Ban Gu 班固 (32–92), "Simaqian zhuan 司马迁传" (Sima Qian's biography), *Hanshu* (A historical account of the Han dynasty), 1962.

⁵³ JIANG, Yizheng "Xiandai de lingxiu you ci jianxin ma," In *Zijing*, pp. 10–17.

by using fraudulent tricks. He called upon the Israelites in the guise of God, invented the myth of Canaan to strengthen their resolve to leave Egypt, made laws in God's name to restrain them, and forbade them to go up to Mount Sinai so that nobody would expose his lies. However, Moses was a naïve idealist who lacked sober-mindedness, political experience, and iron-handedness. In contrast, Joshua as Moses right-hand man was imbued with the very qualities Moses lacked. By following Joshua's advice, Moses suppressed the traitors led by the ambitious Aaron and headed off the political crisis by destroying their idol, smashing the two imperfect tablets, and killing the traitors. Moses and Joshua added two new commandments and carved them as the first two on the new tablets: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol." By using these high-handed measures, Moses made the Israelites believe in him.

In this short story, Liu Yu created a human and not a superhuman image of Moses. Moses received a lively characterization through details of conversation, behaviour, and psychological traits. He felt relaxed, delighted, and proud when he was about to finish carving the first two tablets. He was puzzled and hesitated to believe Joshua who questioned the loyalty of Israel at the foot of Mount Sinai. He was upset when Joshua reminded him of the Israelites' servility. He first felt stunned, then angry, and finally sad and dejected when he was informed of Aaron's betrayal. He deeply worried when Joshua convinced him that the elders might have seen through the fraud about Mount Sinai. He could not bear to see the worshipers of the Golden Calf killed and questioned the validity of violent suppression. But his cheerfulness was boundless when he succeeded by violent means.⁵⁴

In Liu Yu's rewriting, in spite of the image of a naïve idealist, lack of sober-mindedness and political experience, Moses was a firm patriotic leader. As Liu Tingfang and Yang Yinliu had argued, despite education and life in the Pharaoh's palace, Moses retained his Hebrew identity because of his patriotic passion. It was the same kind of patriotism that united Israel in the Diaspora.⁵⁵ However, as many Chinese intellectuals understood, patriotic passion was not

⁵⁴ LIU, Yu, "Xinai shan," In *Xiandai* 现代 (Les Contemporains), Vol. 3, No. 5 (September 1933), pp. 632–638.

⁵⁵ LIU, T. and YANG, Y. "Huoyan zhong de jingji," pp. 239–256. For other interpretations of Moses as a patriot, see Marie Adams (党美瑞), Pan Yumei 潘玉梅, tr., Liu Tingfang, ed., "Renshi shengjing de jizhong fangfa 认识圣经的几种方法" (Some ways to know the Bible), In *Zijing*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (December 1934), pp. 277–278; and Zhu, *Jidujiao yu wenxue*, pp. 113, 171–172, and pp. 196–197, to name only two.

enough. China was in urgent need of a national hero or a revolutionary like Moses who would take action and bring his people to act.⁵⁶

For many of these intellectuals, Moses exemplified nationalism. One problem that preoccupied Chinese intellectuals was how to save their country from foreign aggression. For the majority, especially the youth, their credos covered a wide range, but nationalism was the common denominator. They were attracted to an intermediate array of Chinese and Western heroes who shared little if anything in common but their success in uniting their nation or defending it against foreign invasions.⁵⁷ The nationalist image of Moses was thus employed as common currency and appealed to a broad, emotionally volatile public. Well committed to nationalism in the 1930s, Yuan Ding'an, though a Christian, believed that it was neither God nor the people but Moses who moved history forward. Once out of Egypt, Moses could not find a destination for his people, hence the forty years of their wandering. During this time Moses managed to alleviate the people's suffering, dispel their complaints, tap their intellectual resources, and develop their talents so that they became increasingly civilized and finally reached Canaan. Because of those efforts, Moses was even greater than Confucius and Socrates. He was not only a cultural founder but also a national hero. Moses to Jewish liberation was similar to Cromwell to British democracy and Washington to American independence.

Yuan claimed that Moses led a movement of national liberation and did everything due to nationalist ambition. He received a nationalist education in childhood and was aware of the fate of his people. The Egyptian national revolution, which brought about the establishment of the Eighteenth Dynasty, aroused Moses' ambition to be a national hero. Seeing the misery of the Israelites with his own eyes, Moses considered it shameful to seek a good life while his compatriots were suffering. He carried out careful investigations to prepare for future national liberation. With hopes to arouse his people and plot revolution, Moses tried to instill a nationalist spirit in his people. After he was betrayed, Moses fled into exile and waited for an opportunity to resume.

Following the Pharaoh's death, he, though becoming old and infirm, thought the time was ripe for action and returned to Egypt to lead the movement of national liberation. Moses engaged in peace talks with the new Pharaoh in order to win freedom and equality for his people to establish a country of their own with equal international rights. With unrelenting diplomatic efforts as well as the help of unprecedented natural disasters that occurred in Egypt, Moses

⁵⁶ ZHAO, L. "Moxi zhi dansheng jiqi shaonian," 23. ZHU, W. called Moses the earliest national revolutionary in the world. ZHU, W. *Jidujiao yu wenxue*, pp. 196–197.

⁵⁷ For examples, see John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China: 1927–1937*, p. 180.

conveyed to most Egyptians that it was useless and even dangerous to detain the Israelites. At last, Moses considered the time ripe for further action and plotted the exodus.

Aware of strong hostile tribes ahead and his people's low combat effectiveness, Moses made a detour in the wilderness with which he was familiar and during which he had time to train the Israelites. Since they were docile and accepted their fate, Moses' paramount concern was to build up their self-esteem and cultivate their national consciousness. To construct a culture for national education, Moses introduced the ideas of Canaan, Jehovah, and chosen people, thus distinguishing their religion from the polytheism of other nations.⁵⁸

Religion was interrelated with national consciousness. Moses' keen religiosity together with the inspiration of Jethro's pantheistic religion prepared Moses for his return to Egypt to bring about national liberation through missionary work. He realized that the confidence of his people in him would not be strengthened unless they believed that he was entrusted with a mission by God. For that reason, Moses announced that God had seen and heard the suffering of the Israelites and would punish the Egyptians for their cruelty. He was sent by God to deliver and teach the Israelites. Both the Israelites and Pharaoh should obey his heavenly mission. As a result, Israel was granted the unparalleled status in the world of becoming the chosen people of God. Judaism in Yuan's view was a kind of nationalism.

However, in spite of his commitment to nationalism, Yuan as a Christian evangelist was certainly not advocating the nationalism of Judaism at the price of the universalism of his faith in Jesus. Accordingly, an ideal image of Moses should be universalist rather than nationalist. To explain that decline and reconcile the conflict in the two possible images of Moses, Yuan wrote that Moses' ultimate goal of establishing Judaism was to extend it to the whole world in the interest of all humankind; unfortunately, that responsibility has been ignored by Jews and was undertaken by Christians instead. For that reason, Yuan claimed that Judaism pursued nationalism, whereas Christianity advocated universalism. In other words, Christianity is superior to Judaism and is the completion of Moses' goal.⁵⁹

The question Chinese readers are inclined to ask is: why did all these Chinese intellectuals resort to Moses instead of speaking to the Chinese audience about Jesus, as was expected from the Christian intellectuals in particular? The answer is, compared with Jesus, Moses is a lively and more

⁵⁸ YUAN, D. *Xibolai de minzu yingxiong moxi* (Moses: the national hero of the Hebrews), pp. 1, 8–10, 12–17, and 24–25.

⁵⁹ YUAN, D. *Youtaijiao gailun* (Introduction to Judaism), pp. 18–20 and 26.

acceptable image to Chinese readers who lack the traditional faith in transcendental beings. Moses was born an ordinary human being, with both character weaknesses and physical defects. Moses, like many of us, was humble. He had a temperament similar to ours. He was not even a genius and he needed many years of education. He also learned lessons from his own failures and suffering before he became successful. Moses was at once impetuous, timid, shallow, unreliable, had no confidence in himself, arrogant, and impatient. He made mistakes and even tried to disobey God, which made God angry and sad. He was helped not only by God but also by his parents, brother and sister. It was such a man who became great, a hero, and a saviour of his people.⁶⁰

Not surprisingly, those who did not believe in national heroes might argue the opposite. Lu Xun who translated Lunz's novelette "Zai shamo shang" (In the desert) avoided portraying an optimistic heroic protagonist. That avoidance reveals Lu Xun's as well as Lunz's uncertainty about the positive role of revolution and the revolutionary hero or leader in the history of human civilization. But no matter what kind of leader Moses was and what role he played in the eyes of Chinese intellectuals in the 1930s, Moses undoubtedly proved to be a most interesting and stimulating prototype in their arguments. In the light of a different agenda, Moses could also be interpreted as a statist (国家主义者) with a narrow-minded idea of God as shown in Exodus 9:15, and a leader whose religion originated in cruel wars.⁶¹ A statist here is one who advocates complete sovereignty.

Although it is understandable that Moses was attractive to Chinese intellectuals, Western theology does not always interpret Moses as a leader or hero of crucial importance. In the OT, the theme of Israel's oppression is often mentioned elsewhere as the condition of the people from which God redeemed them, often without any reference to Moses. Moses' initial attempt at deliverance (Ex. 2:11-15), whereby he kills an Egyptian for beating a Hebrew, is anti-heroic because it leads only to his flight. This prepares the way for the biblical author to present Moses as a most un-heroic leader, totally dependent on the divine word for each action he takes.⁶² However, as shown by the many discussions, Moses as a historical product was important to modern Chinese intellectuals not because his meaning was fixed or stable or limited to Biblical times, but because, as cultural metaphor of the past of Israel, its significance and potential of application to the Chinese context is generated from a delicate dialectic of ambiguity and invention.

⁶⁰ ZHAO, L. *Moxi zhi mengzhao* (Moses' being called), pp. 1-8.

⁶¹ LI, R. tr., *Jiuyue renwu zhi*, p. 9.

⁶² Van SETERS, J. "Moses," pp. 116-117.

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