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Babbitt in China

## *The Birth of a Chinese Cultural Movement: Letters Between Babbitt and Wu Mi*

Wu Xuezhao

My late father, Wu Mi, had carefully kept three letters written to him by his esteemed and beloved teacher Irving Babbitt. Later I was able to read, in the archives at Harvard University, three letters written by my father to Professor Babbitt. The exchange of correspondence shows Babbitt's care for his Chinese student. It also demonstrates his support of the *Critical Review*, which was published and written by his Chinese former students and other Chinese admirers, as well as his concern for the fate of the traditional Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. This was shortly after the emergence of the "New Culture Movement." The latter's raucous calls of "Down with Confucius" and the attendant discord aroused the concern of Babbitt and other Western scholars.

*Interest in  
Babbitt's  
thought  
stirring in  
China.*

Before the letters are presented, a brief introduction of Babbitt and his work may be useful.<sup>1</sup> In China there is a revival of interest in Babbitt, but certain prevailing views of him—such as the account in *Imperfect Understanding* by Wen Yuanning, translated by Lin Yutang—are unreliable and short on fairness.

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Editors' Note: This article was originally written for a Chinese audience and is published here in revised form.

<sup>1</sup> For a brief summary of the life and work of Irving Babbitt, see the *Minute on the Life and Services of Professor Irving Babbitt* which was placed upon the records of the Harvard Faculty of Arts & Sciences at the meeting of October 3, 1933, not long after Babbitt's death. It was also printed in the *Harvard University Gazette*.

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Irving Babbitt (1865-1933) was a professor of French literature at Harvard University. He graduated from Harvard University in 1889 with flying colors. After teaching at the University of Montana for two years, wishing to further explore the Oriental subjects, he went to France to study Sanskrit and Buddhist scriptures with Sylvain Lévi. Returning to America, he continued studying Oriental subjects under Charles Rockwell Lanman at Harvard and received the Master of Arts degree from Harvard in 1893, at that time still the typical teaching credential for university faculty. Unwilling to work on a doctoral dissertation in the manner of the German school, which in his field emphasized narrowly specialized textual research, he—together with Paul Elmer More, who obtained the Master's degree from Harvard the same year—decided against further formal study. Babbitt started teaching at Harvard while plunging into independent reading and research. Much diligent study and thinking led Babbitt and More to favor graduate work in letters that entailed wide readings in ancient and modern literatures and in history and philosophy as a background for specialization.

*Babbitt and More resisted narrowly specialized study.*

Years of meditation free from the positivism and specialization in vogue led Babbitt and More to the formulation of a humanistic critique of powerful modern trends that they would develop for the rest of their lives. Their humanism would touch upon the main problems of philosophy, literary criticism, education, sociology, politics, and religion.

With the successive publication of *Shelburne Essays* by More beginning in 1908, *Literature and the American College: Essays in Defense of the Humanities* by Babbitt that same year, *The New Laokoon, An Essay on the Confusion of the Arts* by Babbitt in 1910, and *The Masters of Modern French Criticism* by Babbitt in 1912, the contours of the new humanistic criticism of fashionable views and trends became clearer. That same year Irving Babbitt was promoted to a professorship of French Literature, which he made into a chair of comparative philosophy and literature. The breadth and depth of his reassertion of humanism became apparent in 1919 when he published *Rousseau and Romanticism* and still more so in 1924 with the appearance of his *Democracy and Leadership*.

Babbitt's reputation became worldwide. He questioned the soundness of much of the thought prevalent in the world at the time. He dared to write that the Occident had gone wrong on first

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principles. It had fallen into what he called “the naturalistic trap,” confusing the law for man with the law for thing. In 1923 Professor Babbitt was an exchange professor at the Sorbonne. In 1926 L’Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques of the French Institute elected him a corresponding member. He also became a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters and a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He was invited to deliver lectures at Yale, California, Leland Stanford, at the principal universities of the Middle West, at North Carolina, Princeton, Toronto and at many colleges in New England. In 1932 Bowdoin awarded him an L.H.D.

The reception and discussion of the works of Irving Babbitt was a major event in the literary and intellectual history of the United States in the 1920s and 1930s. In 1930 *Humanism and America*, a symposium of essays by his disciples together with one of his own, in which he condensed his principles, precipitated what came to be called “The New Battle of the Books.” Besides numerous reviews, magazine articles, and editorials, a counter manifesto was promptly published in book form and led to further reviews. Unfortunately, like much earlier writing about Babbitt, some of this discussion showed a poor or limited grasp of Babbitt’s doctrines.

Misunderstandings of his ideas were to some extent inevitable. Babbitt was the first to discount the possible value of a popular discussion of his ideas. His most significant influence lay elsewhere. It is evidenced, for instance, in the frequency with which his name reappears when scholars make a philosophical approach to the study of literature. The breaking down of departmental barriers will no doubt remain one of his greatest contributions. “When studied with any degree of thoroughness,” he wrote in *Democracy and Leadership*, “the economic problem will be found to run into the political problem, the political problem in turn into the philosophical problem, and the philosophical problem itself to be almost indissolubly bound up at last with the religious problem.” At the very beginning of his career, he had decided that no serious study of literature is possible except in conjunction with the study of philosophy, not to mention politics and society. In 1912, he wrote, in the preface of *The Masters of French Criticism*: “[W]hether the critic can judge, and if so by what standards, is only a form of the more general inquiry whether the philosopher

*Academic disciplines “indissolubly” related.*

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can discover any unifying principle to oppose to mere flux and relativity." He would have us attack specialized study with a view to advancing a more satisfactory explanation of the real meaning and value of life. He well understood that a single mind cannot encompass all the fields of knowledge, but he hoped for the advent of a university whose members, instead of being what he once called "an aggregation of mutually repellent particles," would have enough interest in and knowledge of fields other than their own to make possible shared understandings and syntheses.

One of the reasons why Babbitt showed great interest in the Orient as well as the Occident was that he looked for the constants of human nature in general as opposed to the peculiarities of time and place. If he seemed harsh in his judgments at times, it was because he could not esteem very highly an author who, no matter how gifted, did not reveal a sense of the abiding reality behind changing circumstance. For him, the great spirits were those who met on the plane of the higher imagination through their intuitions of the universal. "We find in them," he would say, "maxims that are sure to be reaffirmed whenever and wherever men attain to the level of humanistic insight." "We are dealing here," he would add, "with indubitable facts, and should plant ourselves upon them as against those who would exaggerate either the constant or the variable elements in human nature."

*Abiding reality behind changing circumstance was Babbitt's focus.*

Unfortunately, the history of human thought has been too often the history of such exaggerations. Thus in his courses "Pascal," "Chateaubriand," and especially "Rousseau and Romanticism" and "Literary Criticism in France," Professor Babbitt was critical of the mechanical imitation of neo-classicism but also of the individualistic exuberance of romanticism, of those who minimize life's element of change but also of those who would deny the existence of any abiding elements.

And yet, as he would often remark, what he sought to say was in one sense nothing new. He did not want to have his doctrine called the new humanism. For him, there was no new humanism. There was only the age-old opposition between naturalism (or the monistic merging of God, man, and nature, with its consequent denial of a higher law) and humanism. According to the latter, man has a distinct and unique nature. He is a mysterious being in whom the material and spiritual meet, who is responsible to a law superior to his "ordinary" self, a law which he must discover, a

*Man a mysterious being in whom the material and spiritual meet.*

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higher will to which he must learn to attune his inclinations. Babbitt did not quarrel with established religion for interpreting this higher will in special doctrinal ways derived from revelation. On the contrary, he looked to religion for support of humanism. And if, as a philosopher, he felt he could interpret the higher will only as known in actual human experience, as a veto power and sense of higher purpose, he pointed to it as proof of a dualism within the human self without which there can be no genuine religion.

*Babbitt's  
vigorous  
personality  
implicit in  
his writing.*

Some of Babbitt's vigorous personality will survive in his style of writing. His works will continue to reveal the relentless intensity of his pursuit of truth. His students learned from him that truth must be pursued with heroic disregard of consequences.

The first Chinese disciple of Professor Babbitt was May Kuang-ti, who was educated the longest and most profoundly by the professor. Following him were Wu Mi, Tang Yong-tong, Chang Hsin-hai, Low Kuang-lai, Lin Yu-tang, Liang Shih-ch'iu, and Kuo Pin-ho. Among them, "Lin Yu-tang, though taught by Professor Babbitt, was very much against his doctrines"; "Liang Shih-ch'iu wrote several articles extolling and expounding Babbitt's humanism and compiled *Babbitt and Humanism*; whereas Wu Mi and Kuo Pin-ho were the firmest believers in Babbitt's teachings and devoted to spreading them."<sup>2</sup> Tschen Yin-koh and Hu Hsien-su had not formally been Babbitt's students, but had visited the professor at Harvard and were personally taught by him. Hu Hsien-su translated and commented on some of his work. As for Chinese who read his books or were indirectly influenced by him, they are too numerous to mention. A useful source is the doctoral dissertation entitled *Irving Babbitt in China* (1980), written in the State University of New York at Stony Brook (where I happened to read it), by Mr. Hou Chien, who became chairman of the College of Literature at Taiwan University. In the dissertation, Mr. Hou discusses Babbitt and Chinese thought and the *Critical Review*, whose editors and writers he calls Babbittians. Hou's dissertation presents a fair assessment of Babbitt and his relation with China.

The journal the *Critical Review* (Xueheng) was founded by May Kuang-ti, Wu Mi, Liu Yi-zheng, and Liu Bo-ming at Southeastern

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<sup>2</sup> *In Memory of Mr. Babbitt*, Wu Mi. See *Dagong Bao*, Literature Supplement, Dec. 25, 1933.

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University in the early 1920s. In its first issue it set forth four principles: (1) To expound the thoughts of great Chinese and Western thinkers of the past so as to assist learning. (2) To explain and analyze the universal element in world classics and transmit these ideas. (3) That works to be read must be refined and eloquent so as to uphold high standards of literature. (4) That peaceful speech without verbal abuse must be employed so as to elevate the public.

The *Critical Review* devoted much space to translating and discussing Babbitt's works, disseminating his doctrines, and conveying a sense of his character. The journal's editorial style of "manifesting the truth, refusing to follow the trend, inspiring the readers as well as the writers themselves" sought to emulate Professor Babbitt's unique personality and independent thinking and his emphasis on the "inner check." The professor supported and cared deeply about the *Critical Review*.

Critical Review sought to emulate Babbitt.

The ideas and circumstances introduced above were frequently reflected in the correspondence between Babbitt and his Chinese disciples. Irving Babbitt's letters to my father, who devotedly kept them, and my father's letters to him, kept in the Harvard University Archives, provide valuable insight into the relationship between the two men and into their views and concerns.

### *Letters to Wu Mi by Babbitt*

(1)

Jaffrey, New Hampshire,  
30 June, 1921.

My dear Mr. Wu,—I gather from the letter you wrote my wife on June 24th that it is doubtful whether I am to have the pleasure of seeing you again before your return to China. I left Cambridge to come up here on June 22. I am planning to be in Cambridge again about July 10 and supposed that I should see you at that time. I regret greatly that this is not possible but have at least the satisfaction of knowing that you have received your A.M. in regular course after all. I am sure that you deserved the degree on your total record.

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It has been a great pleasure for me to have you as a student. I feel confident that you are one of those who will work most effectively to save what is admirable and wise in the traditions of your country from unintelligent innovation. Do not fail to write me, not only about your personal fortunes, but about the Chinese situation in general. I am especially interested, as you know, in the problem of Chinese Education. If I can be of help to you in any way do not hesitate to call on me.

Please convey my very warm regards to Mr. May. With best wishes for a pleasant journey, in which my wife joins, I am,

Very sincerely yours,  
Irving Babbitt

(2)

Dublin, N. H.,  
17 Sep., 1922

*Elements of  
admirable  
humanism in  
Confucian  
tradition.*

Dear Mr. Wu,—I am one of the poorest and most irregular of correspondents or I should have written you long ago to tell you how much I appreciated your letters of last winter. These, with the letter I have just received, give me a very vivid picture of your personal circumstances as well as of the situation with which you are contending in China. You seem to me to be making a plucky fight personally and have, I am sure, no reason for self-reproach. I hope that the outlook for China is not quite so dark as you seem to think. I do not feel qualified to have an opinion. My impression, such as it is, is that the Chinese are a cheerful, industrious and intelligent folk who have coped with many a serious emergency in the past and may succeed in coping with this one. My special interest, as you know, is in the great Confucian tradition and the elements of admirable humanism that it contains. This tradition needs to be revitalized and adjusted to new conditions but anything approaching a complete break with it would in my judgment be a grave disaster for China itself and ultimately perhaps for the rest of us.

I hear favorable comment from Chinese at Harvard on your new *Critical Review*. It seems to me just the kind of thing that is needed. I wonder whether you are going to have difficulty in recruiting a sufficiently large staff of contributors. It would seem de-

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sirable under the circumstances to coöperate with every one who shares the general point of view in spite of the difficulties and discouragements that you mentioned in your letters of last winter. Is not Mr. Tang likely to prove a useful auxiliary? I had a talk with him on Chinese philosophy just before he left Cambridge for home. He seemed to me better informed in this field than perhaps any other Chinese I have ever met. Would not his article on Schopenhauer and Buddhism in the Chinese Students Monthly (or the equivalent) be good material for your Critical Review? The article by Mr. K. L. Lou on theories of Laughter struck me as a very distinguished piece of writing and might also be presented profitably to Chinese readers. Mr. Tang and Mr. Lou have not perhaps the kind of aggressiveness that seems needed in China just now, but, when all is said, they are very valuable men. Mr. H. H. Chang is just handing in an extremely able doctoral thesis on the Humanism of Matthew Arnold. The last chapter of this thesis—Matthew Arnold and Confucian humanism—contains material that might, in my opinion, be used to advantage in your review. Mr. Chang strikes me as distinctly aggressive. You may have noticed the articles he has been publishing in the Yale Review, Edinburgh Review, North American Review and (N.Y.) Nation. And he is only twenty-four years-old!—I wish, by the way, you could publish notices of John Dewey's last two volumes of a kind that will expose his superficiality. He has been exercising a bad influence in this country, and I suspect also in China. Might not Mr. Tang be of aid to you here?

*Babbitt offered suggestions for Critical Review.*

I have been having a very strenuous year. During the first half year I gave a graduate seminar at Yale in addition to full work at Harvard and Radcliffe. During the second half of April, I took a Western trip, travelling about seven thousand miles and giving four lectures at Leland Stanford Un., one lecture at the Un. of California, one at the Northwestern Un. and one at the Un. of Chicago. This summer I have been getting visited and working on Democracy and Imperialism.<sup>3</sup> It goes forward slowly, but I hope to have it finished in three or four months. It is the hardest job I have ever undertaken. I have accepted an invitation to go during the second half of this coming academic year as exchange professor from Harvard to the Sorbonne. I have not yet decided what

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<sup>3</sup> The title later was changed to *Democracy and Leadership*.



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courses it is advisable for me to give at Paris or whether I had better give them in French or English,—I am sending you an article in *La Revue hebdomadaire* on my writing that I thought might interest you. Professor Mercier seems to me to have made a very intelligent summary.

Tell Mr. May that I sent the photograph and two volumes of Mr. More I promised him and hope that they reached him safely.—Remember that it is always a pleasure for me to hear from you and that I stand ready to help you in any way in my power.

Sincerely yours,  
Irving Babbitt

(3)

6 Kirkland Road, Cambridge,  
24 July, 1924

*Babbitt  
believed the  
West needed  
a better  
interpretation  
of Confucian  
humanism.*

Dear Mr. Wu,—Some time ago I sent you a copy of my new book “Democracy and Leadership” and trust that it has reached you safely. If not, let me know and I will send you another copy. I was much interested in your last letter and also greatly appreciated your kindness in sending me a copy of the *Critical Review* containing the translation of M. Mercier’s article. The value of this kind of translation is that it may open the way for coöperation between those who are working for a humanistic movement in China and those who are interested in starting a similar movement in the Occident. In the meanwhile the West needs a more adequate interpretation than it has yet received of the Confucian humanism and this is, as you know, a task that I am fond of urging upon you and other Chinese who know their own cultural background and have at the same time a good knowledge of English.

*Wu Mi  
praised for  
“pluck and  
persistency”  
in editing  
Critical  
Review.*

I have admired at a distance the pluck and persistency you have displayed in editing the “*Critical Review*” in the face of what must have been great difficulties. I fear that the whole situation has been still further complicated by the upheaval at Nanking of which Mr. H. H. Hu tells me. I am in no position to form an opinion as to the academic politics involved but I cannot help feeling much regret at the breaking up of your particular group. I understand that you are going to the Northeastern University. I hope that this change will not involve too great a sacrifice. Mr. May, I

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am told, is to come to Harvard as a teacher of Chinese. I did not know anything about this appointment until it was actually announced. He will of course be able to give me very full information about the situation at Nanking.

I recently made a trip to Princeton to visit Mr. P. E. More. He sailed for Europe on July 12. He is planning to be abroad about a year, spending the latter part of the trip in Greece. He has been extremely active in a literary way of late. He has published two books this year—"Hellenistic Philosophies" and "The Christ of the New Testament." I do not like the trend that appears at the end of this latter book towards dogmatic and revealed religion. Personally I am more in sympathy with the purely psychological method of dealing with the religious problem that appears in Buddha and his early disciples.

Have you any recent word of Mr. Chang? When he last wrote to me some months ago, he spoke appreciatively of the salutary influence that "The Critical Review" has been exercising. I wonder whether you take a more favorable view of the present situation in China and whether the young people seem to you to be growing a little less superficial. Give my kind regards to Mr. Tang and Mr. Lou and also inform them that I have sent them complimentary copies of "Democracy and Leadership."

Sincerely yours,  
Irving Babbitt

*Letters to Babbitt from Wu Mi*

(1)

Southeastern University,  
Nanking, China.  
July 6, 1923.

Dear Professor Babbitt:

Your kind letter of September 17 last year has remained unanswered, and I am very sorry for it. Mr. H. H. Chang has just returned to China from Europe; he was here yesterday and, to our great delight, told us about his meeting with you in Paris and

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about your lectures at the Sorbonne. Mrs. Babbitt, he told us, was accompanying you in your lecture trip to Europe. I hope both you and Mrs. Babbitt are very well, and Mr. Drew too.

Thank you very much for sending me the copy of *La Revue hebdomadaire*, which I received in last April. Upon receiving it, I had allowed myself the liberty of translating M. Mercier's article (L'Humanism positiviste de Irving Babbitt) into Chinese, and of having the translation published in the 19th issue of our *Critical Review*, with your photograph (taken from the original you sent to Mr May) and the picture of Sever Hall (your lecture room) as frontpieces. The volume containing the translation and the pictures will be out in a few days; and I will send you a copy respectfully as soon as it is issued. You may not approve the idea of having your picture as frontpiece; my excuse is that the same liberty had already been taken by the French review, and that our frontpiece is bigger and more distinct than the one in that review.

*British  
magistrate in  
Hong Kong  
visited  
Critical  
Review,  
shared  
Babbitt's  
views.*

In the later part of May, Mr G. N. Orme, British Magistrate in Hongkong, paid us a special visit (having been introduced by Mr. R. F. Johnston and having seen our Review) here. Mr. Orme's ideas in many respects coincided with yours, and his views (having lived for 20 years and more in this part of the world) on Chinese affairs and especially on Chinese education agreed with our own. We had a very good talk with him and asked him [to] lecture to our students. Then I wrote a letter of introduction for him (he was returning to England by way of America), and he said, if circumstances allowing, he would certainly go to pay you a visit at Cambridge. I hope he could have fulfilled his promise.

Mr. H. H. Hu is one of our best friends and one of the few men working most earnestly and persistently for the *Critical Review*, and has written as much as any one since its publication. He was also the man who translated your article in *The Chinese Students' Monthly* (Humanistic Education in China and the West) into Chinese for an earlier number of the Review (which I remember I sent you). Mr. Hu is a student of Botany and had studied in the University of California for some years. Since then he has been professor of Botany in this University; and now he is coming to Harvard to make special studies in Arnold's Arboretum. He is to sail in two weeks, and will stay for two years at Harvard. Although he has never seen you, he is, I may say, as good as one of your personal pupils. He has read all the books written by you,

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and Mr More, and Mr Sherman. He has a very competent knowledge of Chinese literature and a superficial acquaintance with Western literature. What I am trying to say is that he is coming to pay his respects to you, and wishes to receive frequent advices and inspiration from you. I did not give him a formal letter of introduction, but I beg to state the case in detail here. Moreover, he will be better able to tell you about the conditions in China and about ourselves than I could inform you in a short letter.

The conditions in China went from bad to worse in the last two years since my return. The country is just now facing an extremely serious political crisis, both internal and foreign. I cannot but be grieved to think that the Chinese people has decidedly degenerated, so that the observations on our national character drawn from history and our past excellencies do not at all fit with the Chinese of today. And I believe, unless the mind and moral character of the Chinese people be completely reformed (by a miracle or a Herculean effort), there is no hope even for a political and financial regeneration in the future. Of course we must work to make a better China; but if no success, then the history of China since 1890 will remain one of the most instructive and interesting pages in the history of the world, with reference to national decadence.

*Wu feared  
bleak future  
for China  
owing to  
decline of  
national  
character.*

In the midst of such circumstances, our private lives have been very happy. Messrs May & Tang and I have been teaching here peacefully. My salary has been increased from \*\$160 to \$200 this year, and will be \$220 next year, counting monthly. (The purchasing power of money is much greater in China than in America). Apart from my teaching work, all my time is devoted to the work of the *Critical Review* which has been coming out steadily every month. The effect of the *Review* is faint but encouraging; for if we could get many able hands to write, the consequence will be decidedly felt and will be for good. At present I am still trying to seek for contributors. Mr May wrote only one article in the last twelve months. Mr. Tschen in Berlin did not respond to our call. But Mr. Tang has been doing good service; and Mr. K. L. Lou is to arrive from Europe in a week or so, and we hope to retain him in this school and make use of his cooperation. Mr. H. H. Chang is going to teach at the National University of Peking, which has

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\* Chinese currency

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been the headquarters of that movement the effect of which we are trying to oppose and remedy.

Thank you for your kind intentions. You can help us in one way which means most to us. That is, if any new book is published by you (like "Democracy and Imperialism") or by Mr More (like "Greek Tradition" Vol. II) or by Mr S. P. Sherman, or if you happen to see any new book (in English or French or German) that you think is expressing ideas similar to yours and therefore very useful for our cause, please drop a note to Mr H. H. Hu at Arnold's Arboratum or to me, only suggesting the name and the publisher of the book, then Mr Hu or I will be able to get the book ourselves. That book will serve as material for translation or digested account in our Review.

Although we are no longer in your classes, we are still deriving constant inspiration and precept from you. With humble personal regards to you and Mrs. Babbitt,

Yours pupil  
Mi Wu

P. S. M. Sylvain Levi had been in China, & was lecturing in the University of Peking in last April; we tried but failed to get him to come down to Nanking & lecture in our school.

(2)

Southeastern University, Nanking, China.  
July 4, 1924

My dear Master:

We are exceedingly grateful to you for having sent to each of us a copy of your long expected book "Democracy and Leadership." Please be assured that, though we are now in another hemisphere, we have constantly been reviewing your ideas in our minds and reading your books (both old and new) with much more seriousness and attention than when we were sitting in your classroom in Sever Hall. Whatever we do and wherever we go, you will always be our guide and teacher in more than ordinary sense of the word. I especially will strive to make more and more

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Chinese students in their home land benefited by your ideas and indirect inspiration.

On receiving your book "Democracy and Leadership", I immediately set to reading it, and then at once translated its "Introduction", with a summary of the whole book, and had these published in the 32nd Number of *The Critical Review*. That Number will appear in August, and I will send you a copy upon its publication. I trust that the 19th Number of *The Critical Review*, which contains your picture and Mr. Mercier's French article in Chinese translation, had safely reached you in last August.

*Mercier's  
French article  
on Babbitt  
published in  
Chinese.*

Lately there have been many changes in the life and work of your pupils in China. Mr. K. T. May is coming to Harvard as Instructor in Chinese Language; he is sailing on August 22; and upon his arrival, he will tell you of our experience in detail. Briefly, Mr. K. L. Low was appointed Head of English Department in this university last September. The bad teachers of the Department organized a mean and petty opposition against him (for the only reason that he is the acquaintance of Mr. May). In November, the Vice-President (who is the only important man here who can appreciate literature and like us) died. Since then things changed fast. In April of this year, Mr. Low was obliged to declare his resignation, and to accept the offer of Nankai College, Tientsin, (where Mr. May taught in 1919-1920) as head of English Department. In May, Mr. May, apprehensive of coming disaster, resigned and accepted the offer from Harvard. Three days later, the University illegally incorporated the Department of Western Literature (of which Mr. May was Head and I a member) into the English Department—and thus practically killed the latter. The leader of the above-mentioned opposition to Mr. Low, a rascal, was to be the Head of the incorporated Department. I was therefore forced to go. I am going to be teacher of English at Northeastern University, Mukden, Manchuria; and will be there by the 10th of August. The Southeastern University is rather glad that Low, May and I are all gone. Of the teachers (old and new) for the incorporated Department, Mr. C. S. Hwang, I think, is the only one fitted to be a teacher. Mr. Hwang had been in your "English Literary Criticism" class at the Sorbonne in 1923, and he wishes me to convey to you his respectful remembrances.

Please pardon me for repeating to you that we are living at a crisis of a great decadence in the history of China. Everything in

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*Wu's life  
"inglorious  
and painful."*

China is corrupt to the last degree. Personal disappointment and misfortune are nothing compare[ed] to the national disaster and universal darkness.

Of the group of your Chinese pupils, Mr. H. H. Chang (at the University of Peking) seems to be the only one who is successful, bright, and happy. Mr. K. L. Low is serene and aloof; people all respect him; and he is not unduly enthusiastic about anything. Mr. K. T. May is generally recognized as an Epicurean with a refined taste, and a genius full of whims and temperamental indulgences. (My dissatisfaction with him is that he did not at all work hard—for example, he has not written a single article for *The Critical Review* for the last 22 months). Mr. Y. T. Tang (Head of the Department of Philosophy here) is similar to Mr. Low, but much more tactful and popular, and comparatively successful. My own life is inglorious and painful. I have been working, with very little cooperation and assistance, to maintain the *Critical Review* (which appeared in every month); the work is very labourious, though the result is far from satisfactory. For this and other work, I have sacrificed my rest, contentment, and the kind of social intercourse which is necessary in China in order to keep a man in his position. So I am going to Mukden, from which place I shall write to you my next letter.

I have already ordered from the booksellers Mr. More's "Greek Tradition II: Hellenistic Philosophy". I had bought last year Mr. Sherman's "The Americans". Kindly send me a brief list of the most excellent books that have appeared recently which you think I must do well to read.

With best wishes to you and Mrs. Babbitt and Mr. Drew,  
Your humble pupil  
Mi Wu

(3)

TSING HUA COLLEGE  
PEKING

August, 2, 1925.

Dear Professor Babbitt:

I remember to have written you a letter on the 4th of July, 1924, when the group of friends in Nanking was breaking up & just be-

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fore I started for Mukden. Arriving in Mukden in early August, I read with great pleasure and gratitude your letter that was forwarded to me. Sometime in November, I sent you two volumes of the *Critical Review* (being Nos. 32 & 34), containing the Chinese translation of your writings (the Introduction of "Democracy and Imperialism", and Chapter I of "Literature & the American College"). Aside from those, though I was trying always to write you, I have not done it. I hope you and Mrs. Babbitt, & old Mr. Drew, also Mr. More and Sherman, are in good health and spirit, and you will readily pardon my negligence.

As I always try to look up to you for inspiration and example in all my work and conduct, I feel I must render you the account, at least once in a year, of what I have been doing & what has been happening to me. Of course, you know well our experience in Nanking from your frequent conversation with Messrs. K. T. May & H. H. Hu; & of the conditions in China in general. So I need not dwell upon those aspects. For my own part, I went to Mukden, to Northeastern University, to teach English (very elementary) in August 1924. My feeling was very much like Esther Waters (Excuse the vulgar comparison) who, being a woman servant, went about from one family to another and worked hard, in order to feed and to bring up her beloved child. To be sure I have no right to claim the "*Critical Review*" as my own child; but I mean that the circumstances under which I worked to maintain the *Critical Review*, were made much more difficult and unfavorable by my reluctant transfer from Nanking to Mukden. With our old friends & associates dispersing in the four winds, and with contributions always lacking & insufficient, I had to turn out a volume of 67000 words each month, amidst the journey, the household preparations and disposals, the family demands and problems in the hot month of July (and again in the bleak January). And the Chung Hua Book Co. several times threatened to discontinue and end the publication of the *Review*; and it was only after much wrangle of words and even with the promise of financial compensation to them in the future, that they consented to carry on the publication for another year.

Mukden however turned out to be much better than I had expected. Though the atmosphere in Mukden is unduly conservative and somewhat provincial, it was the only place in China, where educational work was taken up seriously and honestly;

*Wu to Babbitt: "I always try to look up to you for inspiration and example in all my work and conduct."*



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*Wu lectured  
to Japanese  
on Babbitt.*

where the students attended classes regularly and studied their lessons faithfully; where the influence of the so-called "New Culture Movement" was not allowed to creep in, and where those (like myself) who dare to oppose to Dr. Hu Shih etc. might find a refuge and haven. The Dean of the Northeastern University was in sympathy with our movement; and through our friendship, I have recommended more than one of the members of the Critical Review (notably Mr. Lew the old man) to teach there; and I can say, our thought and ideas do actually prevail in that part of China, more than in any other place. In October 1924, I was invited by the Japanese to go to the port of Dairen and Port Arthur for a lecture. I chose to speak (in English) on the "Humanism of Prof. Babbitt" to the groups of Japanese & Chinese educators & teachers, giving them a digest and summary of the ideas in your books. One brilliant young Japanese gentleman, Mr. Shimonoski, served as my interpreter; he was very much taken up with your ideas, he became my friend and thereupon I presented him two volumes of your works.

In early January 1925, I went down to Shanghai, to see my parents, and to manage my younger sister's wedding. In early February, I came to Peking, and since then I have been serving in Tsing Hua College (my alma mater) as the Organizing Secretary of the Research Institute, also teaching one course on Translation. Beginning with September 1, when the organizing part will come to an end and when the work of Research Institute will actually be started, I shall be Dean of the Research Institute. My work is entirely administrative in nature, and I am not expected to teach anything but the Translation course for the College students. And there is a great deal of social intercourse and obligations, both inside and outside of the College, which I must attend and fulfill in my present capacity—which is an unpleasant necessity, rather than a useful pastime. Compared with my past life in Nanking & Mukden, I am now having more physical comfort and material indulgence; and, as I have to run about a great deal and see people, I am now having much less time for reading and writing. This is what grieves me: the quiet and simple and studious life I had had in Nanking and Mukden has already seemed to me a golden age to which I desire but never can return!

What had made me forsake Mukden and come to Peking and to Tsing Hua College, was neither the usual attractions of the

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Capital (opportunities for a political career; beautiful girls of elevated station; first class restaurants and book-shops; etc.) nor the material compensation and physical comfort which Tsing Hua College could better afford, but those points of convenience and advantage which can help me to work better and more efficiently for the Critical Review. I mean, for example, a very good Library; an able assistant paid by the College, but willing to work for the Critical Review in spare time out of mere zeal and friendship; the chances for meeting like-minded people, especially men of letters, and thereby to secure contributions and articles for the Critical Review. Upon the work of the Review, my thoughts and my energy are concentrated; and [for] those things I really care.

The research work to be done in the Institute will entirely be confined to the Chinese field—the various branches of Chinese studies. Perhaps it will be devoted, more to searching after facts, than to the discussion of living ideas. And as there is much school politics and as my chief concern is for the Critical Review, I have to take a rather conciliatory and wise course in regard to affairs and direction of the Research Institute. The 4 Professors appointed for the Research Institute are as follows: (1) Mr. Wang Kuo-Wei (excellent scholar, whose name you perhaps have seen in the “Tong Pao”); (2) Mr. Liang Chi-Chao, famous politically; (3) Mr. Yinkoh Tschén, whom I did my best to recommend and who, after much reluctance, had consented to come in next February (the rest are all here ); (4) Dr. Yuen-Ren Chao, who taught Chinese at Harvard before Mr. K. T. May. Besides, we have as Special Lecturer Dr. Chi Li, also a Harvard man. The actual progress of the work I will report to you later on.

I humbly beg to have your constant instruction and advice, both in regard to the work of the Research Institute and to that of the Critical Review. Your words are always to me a great source of encouragement and good influence. I have carefully read your books to the last page of “Democracy & Leadership”, and Mr. More’s books to the end of “Christ of the New Testament.” Please suggest to me, from time to time, the books (either old or new) which you think I should read or I should translate for the pages of the Critical Review. (For the Review has been founded but to propagate your ideas and the ideas of Confucius).

Allow me to make an apology for having translated your books by extracts. I have considered it the sacred duty of mine (as well

Critical  
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Confucius.

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*“New Culture Movement” and Bolshevism seen as the ruination of China.*

as of Mr. K. T. May etc.) to translate your works as much as possible for the Chinese people whom I am sure you must love as much as your own countrymen. I lay in bed with pain for not having administered enough (since 1921) the cup of wisdom from your angelic fountain to the Chinese people who, besides neglecting their own national tradition, are now being ruined by the allied evils of the so-called “New Culture Movement” and Bolshevism. I do these things with almost religious zeal. Even if you should blame me and beat me for making such translations, I am willing to receive your chastisement; but I must do it, so that I can in future die with clear conscience. O, my dear Master, will you understand and pardon me? However, let me give you full assurance of these 3 facts: (1) Whenever I have made any translation from your books, I never fail in sending you the translation in print. (No translation is made without you being informed). (2) All such translations are made by myself, and with greatest amount of care and prudence possible. (See, for, example, “Europe & Asia” in No. 38, or “Introduction” to Democracy and Leadership, in No. 32, of “Critical Review”). Even [if] it should go under the name of another translator, the work was in fact made under my direction and with my own revision so complete that it may be actually regarded as my work. (See, for example, Chapt. I of “Literature and American College”, in No. 34 of C. R.). (3) In China, besides Messrs K. T. May, H. H. Hu, & myself, no one will think of translating your books. No one will do it, even if they are paid. Few will even accept your ideas. Only some faithful adherents to the direct teaching of Confucius are willing to be taught and guided by you. O, my dear Master, this is a sad revelation. If there are others in China interested in translating your books (how poor the translation may be), China would never have fallen into the present abyss of material and spiritual decadence! I have never seen any discussion of your ideas, the appearance of your name, outside of the columns of the Critical Review. No, absolutely none. Please be not afraid of people mis-translating you. (Even [if] such a thing should happen, you can count on at least one of your disciples in China to take up the pen for your defense and correction before you know of it). The rumor you had heard must be from some Chinese student who perhaps had caught a glimpse of my translation in the Review and had gone to speak to you without much indicating the source of his discovery. But because of such

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rumor, I beg to state the case very fully for giving you assurance; and once more I ask for your pardon in this & other affairs.

The greatest pain I always have felt in all my work and attempt, comes from the lack of co-operation among our friends, and the lack of the trait of aggressiveness among good & intelligent people. I cannot describe the case in full. But we expect first of all good writing from Mr. K. T. May. Will you kindly help us by constantly urging Mr. May to send me his writings or translations for the Critical Review?

Of our friends, (1) Mr. K. L. Low has just gone to America, to serve as Secretary in Chinese Legation at Washington, (2) Dr. H. H. Chang is teaching at National University, Peking. He admires John Morley, and is a close associate and friend of Dr. Hu Shih. We saw each other rarely. (3) Mr. Y. T. Tang is to teach in Nankai University, Tientsin.

With best regards, & humblest assurances, I am, as always,  
Yours respectfully, Mi Wu