ABSTRACT

The enterprise of China's modernisation came through the controversy between Orientalism and Occidentalism. The defeat in the Opium War (1840) declared the controversy between tradition and modernisation withstanding foreign intrusion. From the initial debate over the introduction of western technologies (器物) and political institution (制度), to the subsequent failures experienced in the process of reformation, Chinese literati began to realise that radical reform on Chinese culture and thoughts should be made before possible progress. With this, launched the battle of the mind. The scope of the current discussion focuses on the differing views expressed by concerned intellectuals in the period 1919 to 1949.

The intellectuals of this period did not recognise the pluralistic nature of culture. They shared a common prejudice in equating modernisation with westernisation. Their conflicting cultural perceptions during this period can be characterised into four stages, each of which is marked either by an influential intellectual or a vigorous controversy. This study intends to critically review and assess their theoretical prejudice and validity in order to provide a reference for future similar discussion.

The findings of this Academic Exercise suggest that although the approach towards cultural modernisation is irrational at that period, it appears to be a key transitional stage on which our present understanding of cultural matters rest.