

Mill and Chinese Enlightenment in the Early 20th Century

At the beginning of the 20th century, Western theories of liberty, equality, and democracy, and the Western scientific method, were introduced to China. These became powerful weapons against despotism, and prepared China for the 1911 revolution that overthrew China's last emperor and the New Cultural Movement that began approximately in 1915 and ended in the early 1920s. John Stuart Mill's *On Liberty* and *System of Logic* were among very few Western philosophical works that were translated into Chinese during the first five years of the 20th century. Yan Fu (1854-1921), a great Chinese enlightenment thinker, was the translator of Mill's works. He was the first Chinese who pointed out that the lack of liberty was the fundamental problem of Chinese society. It was through Yan's works and translations that the Chinese learned about Mill and his philosophy. It was through Mill's philosophy that the Chinese Enlightenment thinkers for the first time obtained a systematic explanation of liberty. This paper is intended to show how Mill's theory of liberty played a role in the early 20th century Chinese enlightenment and why his theory was understood in the way it was by Chinese enlightenment thinkers during that period.

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