

Preface

The Chinese state has been the subject of fierce debates since the reformers and revolutionaries first fought to redefine it at the end of the Qing dynasty. After the 1912 Revolution, when empire gave way to the idea of a nation-state, the Chinese people sought a modern identity, re-designed their governance system and re-wrote their history. *Geming* as revolution became the source of the legitimacy that the new leaders defended in a world based on state sovereignty. They soon found the task of reconciling their republic with the political culture they inherited extraordinarily difficult. They now sense that theirs is neither empire nor nation-state and seek to renew the Chinese state through a civilization of industry and science fused with the best of their heritage.

In the lectures I gave in honour of Yu Ying-shih at the Chinese University of Hong Kong in 2008, I suggested that this renewal was at the heart of the state rebuilding process that the Chinese struggled with during the past century. Ever since the Qing Empire encountered the modern national empires from the West, its elites have sought to resist domination by seeking a revolutionary path. When that failed, they have also turned to ideas from their heritage to help them maintain their sense of being Chinese. This includes challenging a master narrative of world history that has placed China on its margins.

