Although most of the promoters and sympathetic interpreters of New Confucianism trace the movement to the early part of the twentieth century, in fact there is little evidence that New Confucianism had attained a degree of integration or coalescence sufficient for it to be recognized and promoted as a distinct philosophical movement or school of thought before the 1970s. Crucially, up until that time, the “New Confucians” did not have a sense of group identity that distinguished them from other Confucian-inspired thinkers. I will argue that a differentiation needs to be made between Confucian revivalism—a conservative cultural phenomenon that has taken on a variety of forms throughout the twentieth century—and a distinct philosophical movement with its own self-identity, which promoted itself as, and became identified as, New Confucianism. I will further argue, against the conventional view, that this latter development did not occur until the early 1980s. Over the next decade, the movement matured rapidly. I will begin by examining the genesis and early uses of the term xin Rujia. It was Feng Youlan 馮友蘭 (1895–1990)—himself later identified as an early New Confucian—who seems to have been the earliest twentieth-century figure to use the term xin Rujia. Thus, in his famous Zhongguo zhexueshi 中國哲學史 (A History of Chinese Philosophy; 1934) he used it to refer to Song and Ming dynasty daoxue 道學 (learning of the way) philosophy or the Cheng-Zhu (Cheng Yi 程顥 [1033–1107] and Zhu Xi [1130–1200]) tradition of “Neo-Confucianism” as it has become more widely known in the West (following Derk Bodde’s 1937 English translation of Feng’s famous book). In his 1941 essay, “Rujia sixiang zhi kaizhan 儒家思想之開展”
(The New Unfolding of Confucian Thought), He Lin 賀麟 (1902–93) also used the term *xin Rujia*. Unlike Feng, he used it to refer to a new form of Confucianism, not the *daoxue* Confucianism of the Song and Ming periods. He does not, however, employ the term with reference to specific thinkers or to an actual historical movement, but to an amorphous and yet to be realized goal. This goal was also predicated on a thorough understanding of Western culture.

In his widely cited 1976 essay, “New Confucianism and the Intellectual Crisis of Contemporary China,” Hao Chang (Zhang Hao 張灝) explains that *xin Rujia* (New Confucianism) is the popular term for a “brand of Chinese conservatism” that can be traced to the May Fourth period, and which since 1949 was associated particularly with “four prominent intellectuals outside Communist China”: Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (Carsun Chang, 1887–1969), Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909–95), Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909–78), and Xu Fuguan 徐復觀 (1903–82). In personal correspondence, Professor Chang informed me that:

Professor Chang is, of course, referring to the English rendering of *xin Rujia* as “New Confucian.” As his 1976 article makes plain, the Chinese term, *xin Rujia*, had already been in popular circulation for some time. Writing in 1980, the Taiwanese scholar, Cai Renhou 蔡仁厚, similarly maintains that the term *dangdai de xin Rujia* had been used during the previous twenty or thirty years, by scholars generally, to refer to those scholars based in Hong Kong and Taiwan who promoted Confucian scholarship.

It is perhaps impossible to determine just when the term *xin Rujia* (or one of its variants) was first used to refer specifically to those who today are widely recognized as New Confucians. Nevertheless, mainland scholar, Luo Yijun, has shown that the term can be traced to at least 1963. He has identified the following two examples from the Hong Kong journal, *Rensheng* 人生 (Life) 229(1963). The first is an article by Li Zhen 李震, entitled “Wushi nian lai Zhongguo sixiang zhi...”