

The “Great War” in Chinese Intellectual History as Event and Narrative

Ady Van den Stock. Department of Languages and Cultures, Ghent University, Belgium

Narrating the First World War in China

There is an oft-quoted saying by the French poet and essayist Paul Valéry (1871-1945) according to which the First World War confronted humanity with the fact that civilizations too are mortal beings (Valéry 1919, p.94).¹ In the context of the intellectual history of modern China, it might be more accurate to say that in the wake of the war, Chinese thinkers learned that Western civilization in particular was mortal, if not already moribund. This at least is how the story was and still is often framed: the postwar period in China was one of national as well as cultural “awakening” (*juewu* 觉悟) (see Wang 2016, pp. 41-48) and entailed a call for nothing less than a “liberation from the West” (Zheng 2011).² Generally speaking, the discourse surrounding the reception of the First World War in China hinges on fluid terms such as “civilization” and “culture” and draws heavily on dramatic metaphors of “death,” “awakening,” and “rebirth.” Perhaps this already indicates that the war does not figure so much as a factual event in this context, but rather as a narrative structure, one allowing for a decoupling as well as recombination of discursive elements from historically and culturally distinct traditions, at least on a more abstract level. Admittedly,

About the Author

Ady Van den Stock, Department of Languages and Cultures, Ghent University (Belgium)

the horror of trench warfare, massive civilian casualties, and unimaginable destruction during the “Great War” may seem to rail against the adoption of such a dispassionate approach. However, we are not in my view merely dealing with a stubborn indifference to the cruelty and contingency of historical events which always threaten to shatter the crystal palace of philosophical abstraction.³ In retrospect, we can clearly see that the brutal reality of armed conflict did not prevent Western as well as Chinese thinkers from approaching the struggle between the great powers as an opportunity for reassessing their respective traditions as well as the prospects for a possible encounter or reconciliation between them. In turn, such a rethinking was seen as a response to very real and pressing socio-political issues. After all, as the historian James Q. Whitman claims, in the modern conception of war, the latter is supposed to deliver a “verdict,” in the sense that “victory in war either proves or legitimates a certain cultural, moral, or metaphysical value” (De Warren 2014, p. 727).

To be sure, the many problems besetting the embattled nations were widely reported in Chinese media (Sachsenmaier 2007, p. 118), even if the First World War seems not to have been primarily approached from a “phenomenological” standpoint focused on the experience of soldiers and civilians on the frontlines by most Chinese thinkers. Travel journals and reports of Chinese living in Europe at the time published after the war contain detailed eyewitness accounts which offer a more personal and lively counterweight to the somewhat dreary and repetitive discourse on the “Decline of the West” often associated with this period.⁴ As Eugene W. Chiu 丘为君 indicates, while the Chinese experience of the “European War” (*Ouzhan* 欧战), as it still sometimes referred to in China, was at first characterized by a certain detachment, the mass of reports and analyses in journals and newspapers allowing the events on the Western front to be approached as a gargantuan “text,” Chinese commentators gradually shifted their attention to the actual living conditions of common people caught up in the war as well (Chiu 2005, p. 94, p. 118). Just as importantly, many if not all intellectuals in China were highly concerned with how the situation in Europe would impact the East-Asian context, especially after Japan (aided by Great Britain) started moving in on Germany’s concessions in Shandong province. As such, they were hardly unaware of the global dimension and broader geopolitical implications of what was, after all, an increasingly worldwide conflict. What is crucial to point out however is that more philosophically minded observers approached the war not so much as a factual occurrence, but rather from a more macroscopic perspective, that is to say, as an epochal event (in a quasi-Badiouian sense) necessitating an

“awakening” and a retrospective insight into its larger historical and cultural causes and conditions. China’s definitive loss of Shandong to Japanese imperialist ambitions following the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919 obviously played an important role in this respect.

As Nicolas De Warren notes with respect to the philosophical response to the war in Europe, it is important to bear in mind that when the First World War broke out, it was also greeted with a certain sense of enthusiasm by some thinkers, as an event harboring the potential for a revolutionization of society and a “destructive renewal” of the world within itself (see De Warren 2014, p. 716).⁵ Likewise, in China, figures as diverse as the radical Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) and the more moderate and reconciliatory Du Yaquan 杜亚泉 (1873-1933) saw the Great War as a tragic manifestation of the patriotism of the citizens of European nations. As such, it was also an opportunity to reflect on what they perceived to be a lack of patriotic spirit among their compatriots and raise the Chinese nation from its state of slumber and stagnation (see Zheng 2011, pp. 70-71 and Zhang 2016, p. 113).⁶ As Du wrote: “the mind of organisms is always stimulated and aroused to action through impressions coming from its surroundings. The same is the case for the people of a country (*guomin* 国民). Our self-absorbed and protective compatriots have remained in a state of stagnation for thousands of years due to a lack of stimuli from the outside world” (Du 1914, p. 187). Additionally, there was a surprising amount of Germanophile sentiment among Chinese intellectuals after the war broke out, at least until China officially declared war on Germany in 1917. Contributors to the flagship journal of the New Culture Movement *New Youth* (*Xin qingnian* 新青年) such as Chen Duxiu saw Germany as a “springtime people” (*qingchun zhi guomin* 青春之国民), whose cultural energy they contrasted with that of older and “decaying” European nations, most notably France, as the birthplace of a revolution that had failed to make good on its promises and normative demands on a global scale (see Zhao 2017, pp. 109-12 and Zhang 2016, p. 112).

In more general terms, a relatively positive appraisal of the intellectual impact of the war is still evidenced by contemporary Chinese observers. The Taiwanese scholar Edward W. Chiu for instance presents the Great War as a veritable catalyst for “Enlightenment” in China (Chiu 2005). The mainland Chinese historian Zheng Shiqu 郑师渠 on his part has argued that these dramatic historical events allowed the West to overcome an arrogant and exaggerated belief in the merits of its own civilization, while at the same time freeing Chinese thinkers from decades of self-depreciation and feelings of cultural inferiority (Zheng

1997, pp. 213-14). Similarly, Xu Guoqi, a historian who has done much to draw attention to the neglected role of China in the Great War, characterizes the latter as a “vehicle for China’s transformation, renewal, and regeneration” (Xu 2005, p. 10). As he puts it, “the war provided the momentum and the opportunity for China to redefine its relations with the world through its efforts to inject itself into the war and thus position itself within the family of nations” (ibid., p. 9). While such arguments are probably intended to be descriptive rather than ideological, it should at the same time remind us of the importance of carefully considering in what sort of narrative the Chinese response to the war is framed and retold. According to Dominic Sachsenmaier, already at the time, “a variety of groups in China, from free-trade liberalists to early Marxists [...] saw the Great War as part of a teleological history.” (Sachsenmaier 2007, p. 120). In Xu Guoqi’s opinion, the ultimate explanation behind China’s apparent eagerness to join the war effort is to be looked for in what he calls the Chinese “obsession” (Xu 2005, p. 2) with joining the ranks of the international order, an attitude which supposedly also conditioned the overall response of Chinese intellectuals to the outbreak of the war. However, if we direct our attention to analyses of the cultural-historical trajectory seen as leading up to the war, specifically those made by culturally conservative thinkers such as Du Yaquan, a less clear-cut picture imposes itself.⁷ More precisely, Xu’s approach seems to underestimate the extent to which reflections on the war were not only about an imagined and long-awaited convergence between China and the West and were not merely focused on the prospect of China finally coming into its own as one nation-state among others, but also gave rise to more ambiguous and at times incongruous reflections on the nature and limits of modernity and its political institutions. How else are we to make sense of something like Zhang Dongsun’s 张东荪(1886-1973) blunt declaration that the war in Europe had proven that “judgement day has come for both nationalism and capitalism, these [forms of culture] cannot be sustained any longer” (quoted in Gao 1999, p. 10)?

The postwar Chinese discourse on science

At the very least, the above observations already indicate that the Chinese response to the Great War, in which China participated as a “forgotten ally” (Alexeeva 2015)⁸ supporting the Allied Forces by dispatching an estimated 140.000 Chinese laborers to the Western Front,⁹ has to be framed in a broader historical

context before we can go on analyzing the position of an event such as war in modern Chinese intellectual history. The two Opium Wars and China's defeat at the hands of Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895 had already made it clear that the waning Qing state needed to adopt modern (especially military) technology. With the increasing implausibility of maintaining a rigid conceptual distinction between a Chinese "substance" (*ti* 体) and a Western "function" or "application" (*yong* 用), the adoption of technology was gradually discovered not be a mere matter of "technique" (*shu* 术) as opposed and inferior to "learning" (*xue* 学), but to involve the appropriation of "science" (*gezhi xue* 格致学, later *kexue* 科学, see Elman 2004) as well. In this context, "science" was understood not so much as a mathematized form of objective inquiry, but rather as a much more generally applicable and socially performative "method" and "spirit" (see Luo 2000, pp. 57-66) that would allow China to successfully achieve modernization and position itself in the world as a sovereign nation. As Wang Hui 汪晖 has aptly put it, science thus took on the form of a "moral imperative" (Wang 1989, p. 23). Moreover, modernization was seen as something that not only had to occur on an institutional and political level, but also on that of individual virtue, not in the least by radically reinterpreting the relation between the "private" sphere of morality and the "public" domain of politics, a view epitomized by Liang Qichao's 梁启超 (1873-1929) call for the creation of a "new citizen" or "new people" (*xinmin* 新民).¹⁰ The growing awareness of the need for science, as blueprint for culture as a whole, is usually understood as coinciding with an increasing loss of the normative power of the Chinese tradition, particularly of Confucianism, as a model for political governance, communal life, and individual conduct. The failure of the newly founded and politically unstable Republic to prevent general Yuan Shikai from restoring the monarchy in 1915, a move that was unfortunately backed by Kang Youwei's 康有为 (1858-1927) Association for the Confucian Religion (*Kongjiao hui* 孔教会) which proposed installing Confucianism as a state religion, further fueled calls for the abolishment of traditions seen as inhibiting the emergence of a "new culture" (*xin wenhua* 新文化) and to what the intellectual historian Luo Zhitian 罗志田 has termed a "worship of the new." (see Luo 2017, pp. 1-60).

Within this familiar synoptic account, the period following the First World War is usually interpreted as signaling a shift away from such "worship of the new" and a naïve celebration of all things Western toward a more conflicted and at times syncretistic approach to what became known as the "problem of Eastern and Western culture" (*dongxi wenhua wenti* 东西文化问题). As far as Du

Yaquan for instance was concerned, the war had endowed the seemingly straightforward yet highly changeable and indeterminate terms “old” and “new” with a completely different sense. In his view, the “new,” which had previously more or less meant imitating the West, now had to give way to a different kind of “novelty,” that is to say, to the creation of a genuinely “new” form of culture and civilization that would not simply coincide with the one-sided emulation of the West, but combine elements of the “new” and the “old” within itself (see Du 1919b, pp. 401-02). Just as importantly, after the war, “the West” ceased to be seen as a consistent totality, but instead began to appear as a force-field of contradictory if not antagonistic forces (see Luo 2017, pp. 250-51). The spectacle of advanced technology being put to the service of relentless slaughter and destruction had caused science to be “put to shame by the cruelty of its applications” (Valéry 1919, p. 97). In turn, the continuity between “science” and “democracy,” as symbols for the epistemological and institutional requirements of modern society (and quasi-religious objects of faith in the discourse of the New Culture Movement, see Wang 1989, pp. 22-23) was ruptured, in the sense that scientific and technological reason had clearly failed to translate into a rational organization of individual societies and the international order as a whole (see Han 2017). Instead, a gaping chasm had opened up between “force” (*li* 力) and “principle” (*li* 理) (Zhang 2016). The reputation of the sort of social Darwinism previously embraced by many Chinese thinkers suffered considerably in the process (Xu 2018, p. 163). Additionally, Western philosophers associated with German militarism became symbols of the malaise of modernity and prominent targets of critique.¹¹

In a lecture entitled “The Crisis of European Culture and the Direction of China’s New Culture” (*Ouzhou wenhua zhi weiji ji Zhongguo xin wenhua zhi quxiang* 欧洲文化之危机及中国新文化之趋向) from 1922, Zhang Junmai 張君勱 (1887-1969) went so far as to claim that continuing to slavishly emulate Western nations after the war would signify the end of culture (*wenhua* 文化) as such, since there would no longer be any “patterns/refinement” (*wen* 文) or “transformation” (*hua* 化) (Zhang 1922, p. 238) to begin with. To be sure, although it is tempting to be carried along by the sweeping statements many intellectuals made at the time, some nuance and restraint is necessary in this context. This much Zhang Junmai actually indicates himself a little further on in the text of the same speech, when he argues against making simplistic overgeneralizations concerning Western and Chinese culture. A similar caution should be displayed when it comes to the supposed discrediting of science in postwar China. It is often claimed that the destruction and suffering brought on by the war put a

definite end to the optimistic belief in science, the most well-known example undoubtedly being Liang Qichao's call to awaken from the "dream of the omnipotence of science" following his tour of Europe between 1919 and 1920 (see Zheng 2006). However, what Wang Hui has called the "community of scientific discourse" (*kexue huayu gongtongti* 科学话语共同体) - a community extending beyond the "scientific community" in the narrow sense, thus including all intellectuals who invoked concepts derived from scientific reasoning or articulated their views by appealing to the logic of the discourse of science - managed to far outlive such largely rhetorical attacks. Wang argues that the two world wars did not end up undermining the authority of science, quite to the contrary: "this competitive world scene reinforced sovereign states' demands for science and technology, further guaranteeing the development of science and technology, professionalization, state control of science and technology, and the dominant position of the scientific worldview" (Wang 2008, p. 131). In his view, this dominant position is also reflected in the influential "debate on science and metaphysics" from 1923, a debate in which "metaphysicians" such as Zhang Junmai and Liang Qichao argued for maintaining the proper boundaries between scientific and humanistic modes of reasoning and cast doubt on the applicability of a scientific outlook to the domains of "existence," "morality," "culture," and "politics," as distinct fields of knowledge and action irreducible to "science." As Wang Hui emphasizes, the position of the "metaphysical" camp was thus not that of an outright rejection of science, but rather reflected an implicit acceptance of the scientific attempt to arrive at a rational division of labor and functionally differentiated taxonomy of knowledge across fields of learning which could no longer be reconstituted into a coherent whole or an unmediated continuum (see Wang 2008, pp. 132-37).

Crucially, questioning the "omnipotence" of science in the context of the postwar "awakening" to its limitations and pathological consequences almost never came down to a straightforward call for the restoration of traditional forms of knowledge, but rather entailed a shift toward an assertion of the importance and autonomy of other, equally novel fields of knowledge, such as "philosophy."

¹² This much becomes apparent in the following passage from an article Zhang Dongsun published in Liang Qichao's journal *Xuedeng* 学灯 (*The Lamp of Learning*) in 1919 in response to Chen Duxiu's continued pleas in favor of the authority of "Mr. Science" (*Sai xiansheng* 赛先生) and "Mr. Democracy" (*De xiansheng* 德先生):

And now that we have just experienced the anguish and suffering of the war, everyone feels the need to invite Mr. Philosophy [*Fei xiansheng* 费先生, *fei* being the abbreviation for earlier transliterations of the term “philosophy” such as *feilusufeiya* 费禄苏非亚 and *feilusofeiya* 斐录所费亚 before the adoption of the Japanese neologism *tetsugaku/zhexue* 哲学] back in to provide us with a fundamental and peaceful solution. This is because Mr. Philosophy can be of great help in allowing Mr. Science to reach his goal. Moreover, if we as human beings want to attain a more exalted state of existence, we have no choice but to rely on Mr. Philosophy. In sum, if the previous ten years can be described as a dictatorship of Mr. Science, we have now entered the era of a commonwealth of Mr. Science and Mr. Philosophy. (Quoted in Dai 2009, p. 145.)¹³

Here, “science” and “philosophy” have already become universally applicable categories of knowledge that are no longer constrained by geography, culture, or time and are explicitly framed in relation to the equally universalist desideratum of social freedom (a “commonwealth” instead of a “dictatorship”). Following the abandonment of traditional Chinese taxonomies of knowledge and its concomitant normative expectations, it would be these universalized terms that would serve as vehicles for the reassertion and renegotiation of cultural particularity. Additionally, we should bear in mind that, at least to some extent, Chinese postwar critiques of science and “Western materialism” echoed the Romantic self-critique of many European intellectuals at the time (see Zheng 1997, p. 213, Sachsenmaier 2007, p. 111, and Fröhlich 2017, p. 23). As such, they should not be confused with indiscriminate assaults on Western culture as a whole, but can rather be seen as creative appropriations and reconceptualizations of such auto-critiques.¹⁴ The postwar European interest in Chinese “wisdom,” or the “wisdom of the East” in general, undoubtedly influenced the attitude of Chinese intellectuals toward their own tradition as well.¹⁵ What is also important to remember is that such reappraisals of the value of Chinese culture were not always met with a warm welcome in China. Someone like the liberal pragmatist Hu Shi 胡适 (1891-1962) feared that the protests directed at Western power politics and the perfectly justified critiques of the atrocities of the Great War would degenerate into a renewed Chinese sense of “arrogance” and “complacency,” the Orientalist admiration for China expressed by some Western scholars in his view merely counting as a “temporary psychopathological state” (quoted in Zheng 1997, p. 210).¹⁶

Concluding remarks: the shifting boundaries of the “new”

As the title of Zhang Junmai’s lecture quoted in the above indicates, what was at stake for Chinese thinkers in their reflections on the war was both the “crisis” of Western culture as well as the development of a “new culture” for China. The adoption of a civilizational discourse in which a wedge was driven between “novelty” or “modernity” on the one hand and “the West” on the other was a means of articulating this ambiguous and unstable position. In the process, “conservative” critics of “Western” modernity tried to wrest equally “Western” ideologies such as Marxism and socialism from their cultural confines and redefine them as truly universal political projects that could draw on or be reconciled with the Chinese tradition. As Du Yaquan for one insisted, after the war, “the old” Europe had to give way to a new civilization propelled by the rebirth of the “old” culture of China in combination with a “new” (i.e. non-militarist) Western culture. It is not so surprising then to find the “conservative” Du Yaquan declaring the lower classes of all countries to be the true subjects and victors of the war and greeting the rise of international socialism with much enthusiasm. In his view, it is only from the perspective of the “old world” of militarism where “right is might” that the end of the war and a farewell to its “instruments of misfortune” (不祥之凶器) could count as defeat instead of a liberation. (Du 1919a, pp. 206-208). Du believed the abolition of class differences and economic inequalities to be the only sure means to put an end to war once and for all (see Du 1914, p.191 and Du 1918, p. 458). His position thus hardly shares anything in common with a straightforwardly conservative withdrawal into already discredited political and ethical models without any regard for the structural features and ideological discourse of modern societies.

The postwar “problem of Eastern and Western culture” gave rise to heated debates between radical iconoclasts and more moderate thinkers who still believed in the viability of certain aspects of the Chinese tradition. However, both shared a mistrust of the Western powers following the “betrayal” of the Versailles Peace Treaty, which led to student demonstrations and strikes across the whole of China, ushering in what became known as the May Fourth Movement. As such, they shared a common concern over “culture” (*wenhua* 文化, *Kultur*), and not merely “civilization” (*wenming* 文明, *Zivilisation*), that is to say, a form of “awakening” and “enlightenment” that would, in one way or another, reflect and serve the particularities of China as a nation, regardless of whether these particularities were understood in a culturally determinate or a more universalist

sense. After the Versailles “betrayal,” cultural conservatives had to abandon the notion that Woodrow Wilson’s League of Nations counted as an incarnation of the age-old Confucian idea of datong 大同 (“great unity”) (see Xu 2005, pp. 253-54). Nor could Chen Duxiu still speak, as he had done in the period of short-lived enthusiasm immediately following the German defeat, of a “victory of universal principle over power” (公理战胜强权, or, more colloquially: “the victory of right over might”) (quoted in Gao 1999: 9). Instead, Chen had come to terms with the fact that “universal principle” always remains dependent on the support of political and military power, without which it would remain an easy prey for the powers that be (see Chen 1919). Clearly then, following the war, both radicals as well as conservatives were engaged in a pursuit of the “new,” that is to say, a different kind of “novelty,” the semantic horizon of which had expanded considerably in the meantime.

Notes

- 1 What is usually ignored however is that Valéry’s melancholy diagnosis is followed up by a celebration of the “European genius” in the second part of his text.
- 2 More precisely, Zheng Shiqu 郑师渠 understands such “liberation” as coinciding with an end of the normative appeal of capitalism and the rise of historical materialism, as if the social reality of the war had opened up the cracks in the ideological superstructure of the New Culture Movement necessary for Chinese Marxism to impose itself. The question remains however if culturalizing this “liberation” in terms of “Chinese and Western culture” can adequately describe the historical reality of global capitalism to begin with.
- 3 That being said, a mere decade after the Second World War, even as gentle a soul as the Confucian philosopher Tang Junyi 唐君毅 (1909-1978) already showed little or no qualms about endowing what he called “military consciousness” with a moral-metaphysical significance. In his opposition to materialist and naturalist forms of philosophy seen as lying at the root of most socio-political problems, Tang’s main concern had become that of arguing that warfare cannot simply be analyzed in functionalist terms, since “military consciousness” entails a quasi-religious liberation from any attachment to the contingency of life. His line of reasoning is worth reproducing at some length: “The cruelty resulting from warfare is not tantamount to cruelty on the level of the soldier’s consciousness. When a soldier kills an enemy on the battlefield, he seems to show no love for the other person’s life and to take leave of his own humaneness. However, on a spiritual level, the soldier has already confronted the possibility of losing his own life without fear and overcome his attachment to life. If this form of consciousness is directly universalized and extended to the enemy, the soldier will naturally come to regard the enemy as someone

equally capable of overcoming the attachment to life. Therefore, on the level of the soldier's consciousness, killing the enemy is not contrary to humaneness (*ren* 仁)." (Tang 1958, p. 354).

- 4 Professor Jing Chunyu 景春雨 at Shanghai University's Department of Literature is currently involved in a study of Chinese accounts (by figures as diverse as businessmen and novelists) of their wartime experiences in France.
- 5 As De Warren argues: "Philosophical discourse became transfigured into the pursuit of war by other means much as the war became an occasion for philosophical thinking by other means." Ibid. Several scholars believe that the First World War played a considerable role in the already emerging rift between continental and analytical philosophy and served as a catalyst for the closely related decline of British Idealism after the latter's German Idealist sources fell into disrepute. See Vrahimis 2015, pp. 84-93 and Morrow 1982.
- 6 A few months after the armistice, Du wrote a short article outlining the various "benefits" (利益) China had gained during the conflict in predominantly pragmatic terms (Du 1919b).
- 7 See the author's forthcoming text, "Beyond the Warring States: the First World War and the Redemptive Critique of Modernity in the Work of Du Yaquan (1873-1933)". For studies on the impact of First World War on Chinese intellectuals, specifically on cultural conservatives, see Zheng 2002, Zheng 2008, and Sachsenmaier 2007. To date, one of the only analyses of the relation between the war and the emergence of "New Confucianism" in particular is Lei 2015, but I was unfortunately unable to gain access to this source.
- 8 Incidentally, this is also the title of Rana Mitter's 2013 book reappraising China's role in the Second World War (Mitter 2013). For Olga Alexeeva (2015, p. 44), the fact that the design for a grandiose mural entitled "Panthéon de la guerre," commissioned by the French State while the war was still ongoing as a celebration of all allied nations and their contributions to the envisaged victory, originally included Chinese laborers, only to be replaced by the figures of American soldiers in the final version, symbolizes the fact that the Chinese contribution to the war was consigned to oblivion in Western historical consciousness.
- 9 See Xu 2005, pp. 114-54. The Republic of China adopted a strategy known as "laborers in the place of soldiers" (*yi gong dai bing* 以工代兵), laborers which were recruited and dispatched to Europe through the intermediary of private companies, thus allowing China to retain a semblance of neutrality while still supporting the Allied forces against Germany. This strategy was devised by Liang Shiyi 梁士诒 (1869-1933), a cabinet minister and a close confidant of Yuan Shikai. Liang, sometimes dubbed the "Chinese Machiavelli," had already started arguing for the strategic importance of China entering the war at the side of the Allied Forces in 1914. He saw it as a strategic means for realizing China's interests and gaining full recognition as a nation-state, not in the least through a return of German concessions in Shandong. See Xu 2005, pp. 82-83, p. 87, pp. 90-91. Ironically, most of the Chinese laborers sent to the frontlines were recruited from

Shandong province, which was later ceded to Japan at the Paris Peace Conference.

- 10 See in particular the chapters *Lun gongde* 论公德 (On Public Virtue) and *Lun side* 论私德 (On Private Virtue) in Liang 1902-1906, pp. 16-22 and pp. 161-94.
- 11 It appears that the wartime and postwar discrediting of Nietzsche as a philosopher of militarism, not in the least by British propaganda efforts which managed to spread the appealing myth according to which every German soldier carried around a copy of *Also Sprache Zarathustra* in his backpack instead of the Bible (see Vrahimis 2015, p. 86), seems to have influenced Chinese thinkers as well. See for example Cai Yuanpei's 蔡元培 (1863-1940) text *Dazhan yu zhexue* 大战与哲学 (The Great War and Philosophy), Cai 1918, pp. 200-201.
- 12 For more background on the relation between the fields of “science” and “philosophy” in modern Confucian philosophy in particular, see Van den Stock 2016, pp. 197-215.
- 13 In a similar vein, Mou Zongsan 牟宗三 (1909-1995) would later castigate proponents of the New Culture Movement for having forgotten about “Miss Morality” (*Mo guniang* 莫姑娘). See Mou 1979, p. 252.
- 14 Henri Bergson (1859-1941), one of the thinkers most often invoked by the “metaphysicians” in their critique of scientism during the 1923 debate was himself involved in propagandist denunciations of “the mechanization of spirit” (Bergson 1915, p. 36) he associated with Prussia/Germany and in drawing binary distinctions between the “*élan vital*” of the French people and the mechanistic materialism of Germany. Similarly, on the German side, the vitalist philosopher Rudolf Eucken (1846-1926), another favorite of the Chinese “metaphysicians,” approached the war as a means for the liberation of Germany and German culture.
- 15 One anecdotal indication for this surge of interest is the fact that no less than 8 different German editions of the *Daodejing* 道德经 appeared in the years following the end of the war. See Zheng 1997, p. 208. For an analysis of the historically determinate content of the foggy concept of “wisdom” in the context of modern Chinese philosophy, see Van den Stock 2018.
- 16 Interestingly enough, in a diary entry from 1922, Hu described America and Asia as places of refuge for Western culture after its “suicide” during the war, and likened this flight from Europe to the United States and China to the southward migration of dynasties in times when the North was overrun by “barbarians” during Chinese history. See Zheng 1997, p. 220.
- 17 A reference to chapter 31 of the *Daodejing*: “Weapons are instruments of misfortune, such things are always detestable, that is why one who possesses the Dao does not involve himself with them (夫兵者,不祥之器,物或恶之,故有道者不处).
- 18 For more background concerning this distinction in German Enlightenment discourse as well as modern Chinese intellectual history, see Xu 2018, pp. 156-58. As Xu Jilin puts it pointedly: “The agent of civilization is humanity, it is universal, abstract human nature. By contrast, the agents of culture are concrete individual nations or ethnic groups.” (ibid., p. 159).

Works Cited

- Alexeeva, Olga. 2015. "Forgotten ally: China in the First World War." In *Representing World War 1: Perspectives at the Centenary. Essays from the Humber College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the International Festival Of Authors Conference in 2014*, edited by Daniel Hambly & Lisa Salem-Wiseman, Toronto: Humber Press, pp. 42-77.
- Bergson, Henri. *The Meaning of the War: Life and Matter in Conflict*. London: Unwin, 1915.
- Cai Yuanpei . 1918. "The Great War and Philosophy," In *Cai Yuanpei quanji 蔡元培全集 (The Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei)*, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984, vol.3, pp. 200-205.
- Chen, Duxiu. 1919. "The 20Shandong Problem and Civil Awakening," In *A Concise Sourcebook in Modern Chinese Intellectual History*, edited by Cai Shangsi, Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1982, 1: 49-51.
- Chiu, Eugene W. 2005. "War and Enlightenment: how the 'European War' Enlightened China)," *Guoli zhengzhi daxue lishi bao 国立政治大学历史学报*, 23: 91-146.
- Dai, Qing 戴晴. 2009. *Zai rulaifo zhang zhong: Zhang Dongsun he tade shidai 在如来佛掌中: 张东荪和他的时代 (In the Buddha's Palm: Zhang Dongsun and his Age)*, Hong Kong: Zhongwen daxue chubanshe.
- De Warren, Nicolas. 2014. "The First World War, Philosophy, and Europe." *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie [Journal of Philosophy]*, 76: 715-37.
- Du, Yaquan 杜亚泉. 1914. *Dazhan yu Zhongguo 大战与中国 (The Great War and China)*, in *Du Yaquan juan 杜亚泉卷 (Writings of Du Yaquan)*, edited by Zhou Yuefeng 周月峰, Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2014 (hereafter abbreviated to *DYQJ*), 186-92.
- . 1918. *Dui weilai shijie zhi zhunbei ruhe 对未来世界之准备如何 (How Should We Prepare for the Future World?)*, in *DYQJ*, pp. 458-65.
- . 1919a. *Dazhan zhongjie hou guoren zhi juewu ruhe 大战终结后国人之觉悟如何 (The State of Our Compatriots' Awakening After the End of the Great War)*, in *DYQWC*, pp. 205-11.
- . 1919b. *Xin jiu sixiang zhi zhezhong 新旧思想之折衷 (Reconciling New and Old Ideas)*, in *DYQWC*, pp. 401-07.
- Elman, Benjamin A. 2004. "From Pre-modern Chinese Natural Studies (格致学) to Modern Science (科学) in China," in *Mapping Meanings: the Field of New Learning in Late Qing China*, edited by Michael Lackner and Natascha Vittinghoff, 25-74. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Fröhlich, Thomas. 2017. *Tang Junyi: Confucian Philosophy and the Challenge of Modernity*.

The “Great War” in Chinese Intellectual History as Event and Narrative

Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Gao, Like 高力克. 1999. *Wusi qimeng de kunjing: zai lishi yu jiazhi zhi jian* 五四启蒙的困境；在历史与价值之间 (The Predicament of May Fourth Enlightenment: the Tension between History and Value). *Zhejiang xuekan* 浙江学刊, 2: 5-12.

Han, Han. 2017. “The First World War, Scientific Thought, and Chinese Politics in the 1920s.” *The Journal of East-West Thought*, 7(3): 71-78.

Liang, Qichao 梁启超. 1902-1906. *Xinmin shuo* 新民说 (On the New Citizen). Shenyang: Liaoning renmin chubanshe, 1994.

Lei, Yi 雷颐. 2015. *Yizhan yu “xin rujia” de yuanchi: yi “ke xuan lunzhan” wei zhongxin* 一战与“新儒家”的源起：以“科玄之争”为中心 (The First World War and the Rise of “New Confucianism”: a Case Study of the “Debate on Science and Metaphysics”). In *Yi zhan yu Zhongguo* 一战与中国 (The First World War and China), edited by Wei Gelin 魏格林 and Zhu Jiaming 朱嘉明, Shanghai: Dongfang chubanshe.

Luo, Zhitian 罗志田. 2000. *Zouxiang guoxue yu shixue de “Sai xiansheng” - wusi qianhou Zhongguoren xinmu zhong de “kexue” yi li* 走向国学与史学的“赛先生”——五四前后中国人心目中的“科学”一例 (Toward National Learning and Historiography as “Mr. Science” - A Case Study of the May Fourth View of “Science” in China), *Jindai shi yanjiu* 近代史研究, 3: 59-94.

----. 2017. *Shifts of Power: Modern Chinese Thought and Society*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Mitter, Rana. 2013. *Forgotten Ally: China’s World War II, 1937-1945*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Morrow, John. 1982. “British Idealism, ‘German Philosophy’ and the First World War.” *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 28(3): 380-90.

Mou, Zongsan 牟宗三. 1979. *Wusi yu xiandaihua* 五四与现代化 (May Fourth and Modernization), in *Shidai yu ganshou xubian* 时代与感受续编 (Supplements to “Impressions of the Times”), pp. 251-74, vol. 24 of *Mou Zongsan xiansheng quanji* 牟宗三先生全集 (The Complete Works of Mou Zongsan), 32 vols., Taipei: Lianjing, 2003.

Sachsenmaier, Dominic. 2007. “Chinese Debates on Modernization after the Great War,” in *Decentering America*, edited by Jessica C. E. Gienow-Hecht, 109-131. New York: Berghahn Books.

Tang, Junyi 唐君毅. 1958. *Wenhua yishi yu daode lixing* 文化意识与道德理性 (Cultural Consciousness and Moral Reason), Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexue chubanshe, 2005.

Valéry, Paul. 1919. “The Crisis of the Mind,” in *Paul Valéry: an Anthology*, London and

Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977, 94-107.

Van den Stock, Ady. 2016. *The Horizon of Modernity: Subjectivity and Social Structure in New Confucian Philosophy*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.

----. 2018. "The Curious Incident of Wisdom in the Thought of Feng Qi (1915-1995): Comparative Philosophy, Historical Materialism, and Metaphysics." *Asian Philosophy*, 28 (3): 241-58.

Vrahimis, Andreas. 2015. "Legacies of German Idealism: from the Great War to the Analytic/Continental Divide." *parthesia*, 24: 83-106.

Wang, Hui 汪晖. 1989. Yuyan yu weiji: Zhongguo xiandai lishi zhong de "wusi" qimeng yundong 预言与危机: 中国现代历史中的“五四”启蒙运动 (Prophecy and Crisis: the 'May Fourth' Enlightenment Movement in Modern Chinese History), *Wenxue pinglun* 文学评论, 3: 15-25 and 4: 35-47.

----. 2008. "Scientific Worldview, Culture Debates, and the Reclassification of Knowledge in Twentieth-Century China," *Boundary 2* 35(2): 125-55.

----. 2016. "The Transformation of Culture and Politics: War, Revolution, and the 'War of Ideas' in the 1910s," in *China's Twentieth Century*, edited by Saul Thomas, 41-109, London and New York: Verso.

Xu, Guoqi. 2005. *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Xu, Jilin. 2018. "Two Kinds of Enlightenment: Civilizational Consciousness or Cultural Consciousness," in *Rethinking China's Rise: A Liberal Critique*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 155-90.

Zhang, Fan 张帆. 2016. "Li" yu "li" zhi jian: ouzhan yujing xia Zhongguo "kexue" gainian de daode kunjing yu yiyi zhuanxiang "力"与"理"之间: 欧战语境下中国"科学"概念的道德困境与意义转向 (Between "Force" and "Principle": the Moral Predicament and Change in Meaning of the Chinese Conception of "Science" in the Context of the Great War), *Xueshu yuekan* 学术月刊 48(7): 109-22.

Zhang, Junmai 张君勱. 1922. *Ouzhou wenhua zhi weiji ji Zhongguo xin wenhua zhi quxiang* 欧洲文化之危机及中国新文化之趋向 (The Crisis of European Culture and the Direction of China's New Culture). Reprinted in *Zhongguo xiandai zhexue shi ziliao huibian: dongxi wenhua lunzhan* 中国现代哲学史资料汇编: 东西文化论战, edited by Zhong Limeng 钟离蒙 and Yang Fenglin 杨凤麟, 235-239, Shenyang: Liaoning daxue chubanshe, 1981.

Zhao, Bing 赵兵. 2017. *Ouzhan qianhou Zhongguo xin wenhua yundong zhong de "Deyizhi jingshen" ji qi zhuanxiang* 欧战前后中国新文化运动中的“德意志精神”及其转向 (The

The “Great War” in Chinese Intellectual History as Event and Narrative

Notion of the ‘German Spirit’ during the New Culture Movement and its Transformation in the Period of the First World War), *Deguo yanjiu* 德国研究 32(1): 102-17.

Zheng, Dahua. 郑大华. 2002. *Di yi ci shijie dazhan yu zhanhou Zhongguo wenhua baoshou zhuyi sichao de xingqi* 第一次世界大战与战后中国文化保守主义思潮的兴起 (The First World War and the Postwar Rise of Cultural Conservatism in China), *Zhejiang xuekan* 浙江学刊, 5: 38-50.

Zheng, Shiqu 郑师渠. 1997. *Lun ouzhan hou Zhongguo shehui wenhua sichao de biandong* 论欧战后中国社会文化思潮的变动 (Changed Conceptions of Society and Culture in China after the Great War). *Jindai shi yanjiu* 近代史研究, 3: 207-21.

----. 2006. *Ouzhan hou Liang Qichao de wenhua zijue* 欧战后梁启超的文化自觉 (Liang Qichao’s Postwar Cultural Consciousness), *Beijing shifandaxue xuebao* 北京师范大学学报, 3: 49-59.

----. 2008. *Ouzhan qianhou guoren de xiandaixing fansheng* 欧战前后国人的现代性反省 (Chinese Reflections on Modernity Before and After the Great War), *Lishi yanjiu* 历史研究, 1: 82-106.

----. 2011. *Ouzhan hou guoren de “dui Xifang qiu jiefang”* 欧战后国人的“对西方求解放” (The Chinese Search for “Liberation from the West” following the End of the Great War), *Beijing shifandaxue xuebao* 北京师范大学学报, 2: 64-79.