

Chinese Definitions of the European – Some Historical Examples

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RESÜMEE

Der Artikel analysiert chinesische Europabilder während des 17. Jahrhunderts und des frühen 20. Jahrhunderts. Hierbei geht der Autor für den ersten Betrachtungszeitraum vor allem auf Meinungsbilder innerhalb christlicher Kreise ein. Für den zweiten Betrachtungszeitraum, insbesondere die 1920er Jahre, werden vornehmlich Stimmen aus dem Lager entschiedener Modernisierer untersucht. Diese werden wiederum mit den Positionen chinesischer Denker verglichen, welche das Ziel einer kulturspezifischen, nachhaltigen Form der chinesischen Moderne vertraten. Unter anderem ergibt der diachrone Vergleich, dass im 17. Jahrhundert – selbst unter chinesischen Christen – positive Europabilder nach konfuzianischen Maßstäben bemessen waren. Anfang des 20. Jahrhunderts wurde die Relevanz des Konfuzianismus im Hinblick auf Europa nicht mehr vorausgesetzt, sondern vielmehr kritisch debattiert.

In recent years, academic research has witnessed a growing interest in the history of the idea of “Europe” and related concepts. Case study after case study has added new facets to our understanding of how the concept of “Europe” varied according to specific situations and historical contexts.¹ Given such an interest in this topic, however, it is rather surprising that research thus far mainly focused on the image of Europe in the eyes of Europeans.² Certainly, quite a number of studies have explored images of Europe emerging from cross-cultural encounters. Yet in most cases, the historical agents under investigation were groups such as European travellers who, when interacting with different

1 For example, H. Kaelble, *Europäer über Europa*, Frankfurt a. M. 2001; K. Wilson and J. v. d. Dussen (eds), *The History of the Idea of Europe*, London 1993; D. Heater, *The Idea of European Unity*, New York 1992; A. Assmann, *Europe: A Community of Memory?*, in: *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 40 (2007), pp. 11-26.

2 See also S. Conrad, *Vorwort: ‘Europa’ aus Sicht nichtwestlicher Eliten*, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 4-2 (2006), pp. 157-180.

world regions, were particularly prone to transgress national identities and express what in their eyes constituted the main contours of the European experience³. Comparatively few studies have investigated how Chinese, Latin American, Middle Eastern, and other historical agents conceptualized “the European” in direct encounters or in other relevant situations.

It goes without saying that also in other parts of the world, tropes of “Europe” and the “European” played a significant role in intellectual, political, social and economic life. In many societies, it was particularly during the age of colonialism and imperialism that concepts such as “the European” came to acquire a meaning much larger than their ethnic or geographical connotations. They could be closely related to tropes surrounding topics ranging from colonial subjugation to prospects of liberty and national awakening. In that sense, the terms “Europe” and “the European” did often not point primarily to a distant world region but rather figured prominently in domestic debates about collective threats and possibilities⁴. For a long time, different political groupings in many parts of the world operated with peculiar images of “Europe” and the “European,” and they used them for their own purposes. Moreover, in many countries advocates of urgent change referred to a necessary, an unavoidable “Europeanization.”

Concepts such as “Europe” or the “European” were only part of much larger sets of images and semantic fields that were accompanying discourses of self-mobilization and impeding transformations. In many societies ranging from India to Korea, concepts such as the “European” were tied to terms such as “modernity,” “newness,” “civilization,” and even “technology.” In addition, the notion of “Europe” was not the only geographically defined term which figured prominently in the debates surrounding concepts such as modernity and civilization. Also concepts such as “the West” or stereotyped visions of single countries like Germany, France or Britain and their alleged national characters played an important role. How images of “the West” and Europe were related to each other in different societies and languages, has thus far been hardly assessed by modern research. The same is true for the associations between particular national stereotypes such as the Romantic Frenchman or the mercantile Englishman, and images of Europe at large.

This article will certainly not be able to fill these rather wide research gaps. It will primarily focus on visions of “Europe” and “the European” in the eyes of some groups of Chinese scholars and students during the first two or three decades of the twentieth century, a time when European imperialism had long been a significant factor in the region. More

3 For example, J. Osterhammel, *Die Entzauberung Asiens. Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert*, Munich 1998; and I. Kamps and J. Singh, *Travel Knowledge: European ‘Discoveries’ in the Early Modern Period*, New York 2001.

4 See for example D. Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton 2000; F. Mallon, *The Promise and Dilemma of Subaltern Studies: Perspectives from Latin American History*, in: *American Historical Review* 99 (1994), 5, pp. 1491-1515; and B. Xu, *From Modernity to Chineseness: The Rise of Nativist Cultural Theory in Post-1989 China*, in: *Positions* 6 (1998), 1, pp. 203-237. About the trans-cultural dimensions of these positions see D. Sachsenmaier, *Global History and Critiques of Western Perspectives*, in: *Comparative Education* 42 (2006), 3, pp. 451-470.

specifically, I will compare images of Europe among some key protagonists of the “New Culture Movement” with voices who were more doubtful of what they interpreted as the key facets of European modernity. In this context, I will particularly focus on some Chinese intellectuals who during and after the Great War argued that the idea of Europe as a global teaching civilization had taken a great hit. As I will further point out, these and other Chinese groups were actually in close contact with Europeans, and in many cases, Chinese images of “the European” actually emerged from transnational networks rather than constituting home-grown concepts and ideas. Before turning to the twentieth century, however, I will provide a brief outlook of images of Europe that were circulating in seventeenth-century China. At that time, encounters between Chinese and Europeans were not yet framed by a colonial nexus of economic dominance and political suppression. In that sense, late Ming and early Qing images of Europe provide a good contrast foil in order to accentuate the implicit and explicit visions of world order in which Chinese notions of Europe were situated during the early twentieth century.

Some Chinese Images of Europe during the Seventeenth Century

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, China and Europe came into more sustained direct contacts with one another. These were not only confined to merchant transactions in a world in which naval trading routes started becoming longer and part of global networks of exchanges. Of great significance were also the new religious and scholarly exchanges between China and Europe as well as, more generally, the growing amount of information about one another on both sides of the Eurasian landmass.

Jesuit missionaries who came in close contact with Confucian literati played an important role in establishing high-level scholarly encounters between the Middle Kingdom and the West.⁵ In their effort to gain converts among the upper crust of Chinese society, Jesuit Fathers studied Mandarin as well as the Confucian classics. While for a long time academic research treated prominent Jesuits like Matteo Ricci as the sole creators of the so-called Jesuit “accommodation method” in China, reality was far more complex and interactive. In fact, the Confucian-Christian synthesis through which the Jesuits tried to find inroads into Chinese society (particularly its upper classes) was the result of a close collaboration between European missionaries and converted Chinese literati. Its overall structure was supposed to navigate between the manifold political and cultural constraints which existed on both the European and the Chinese side of this encounter. The main thrust of the accommodation approach was to interpret ancient Confucianism as a purely secular ethical system which, similarly to Greek philosophy in scholasticism, could be understood as a natural religion and hence was ultimately compatible with the revealed truth of Christianity. In principle, this approach could also be related to Confu-

5 See L. Brockey, *Journey to the East. The Jesuit Mission to China, 1579–1724*, Cambridge 2007.

cian reform movements which sought to return the alleged true teaching during the days of the master himself.

In the pro-Christian literature during seventeenth-century China, images of “Europe” (at the time often transcribed as *Ouluoba*) were being disseminated in many parts of Chinese society. In the Chinese public, they found a rather receptive audience even outside of the circles of those individuals and families who had an interest in the Christian message *per se*. As a matter of fact, information about Europe and other parts of the world was much sought after in seventeenth-century China. For example, a Jesuit world map in Chinese, which was first published by Matteo Ricci in 1602, sold over eight editions within 25 years⁶. Similarly successful were books such as the *Zhifang Waiji* (*Records of [the World] Outside (the Scope) of the Court Geographer*), which was produced by the Jesuit missionary Giulio Aleni in 1623.⁷ Taking note of such tendencies, recent studies have departed even further from the stereotyped depiction of the Chinese literati elite as a culturally introverted upper class that had remained unchallenged by other internal and external forces.⁸

Nevertheless, in contrast to the twentieth century, the concepts of Europe and the European didn't play a major role in the main political and cultural debates during the Ming-Qing transition period. Rather, Europe and its peoples still mattered more as an object of a more general Chinese *curiositas* about other parts of the world. This is not to say, however, that the Jesuits' geographical works and world maps primarily sought to cater to this more general interest within the educated Chinese public. Quite to the contrary, many seventeenth-century works published under the name of Jesuit missionaries or Chinese converts actually disseminated some highly idealized images of Europe⁹, and they did so in order to raise the appreciation of Christianity in parts of Chinese society.

For instance, the aforementioned *Zhifang Waiji* (*Records of [the World] Outside [the Scope] of the Court Geographer*) contain a lengthy depiction of Europe which portrays the continent in the Far West as a harbour of truth and peace, where no dynasty had fallen for a long time, where people did not need to lock their doors at night, and where no one would pick up lost money on the street. The text goes on to mention that the soil of Europe was fertile, the fauna rich, and nature's overall resources so abundant that people could afford to live in palaces, wear precious clothes and eat only precious foods. Other pro-Christian texts portrayed the Jesuits as typical representatives of the European scholarly elite, and they did so by assigning them attributes of the ideal gentleman (*junzi*), a figure frequently evoked in the Confucian classics.

It seems somewhat ironic to read these accounts since they were published around the time of the Thirty Years War, which killed approximately 30 per cent of the entire popu-

6 D. Mungello, *The Great Encounter of China and the West, 1500–1800*, New York 1999, chapter 1.

7 See for example E. Zürcher, *China and the West: The Image of Europe and Its Impact*, in: S. Uhalley/X. Wu, *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, New York 2001.

8 See for example, J. Waley-Cohen, *The Sextants of Beijing. Global Currents in Chinese History*, New York 1999.

9 See for example N. Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: His Life and Thought*, Leiden 1988.

lation of Central Europe. Still, such portraits of Europe in pro-Christian texts were more than simple inventions. In an extremely complex way, these images were themselves the products of negotiations between the Jesuits and their Chinese literati supporters as social groups from two different cultures who shared a common goal. For example, the aforementioned text segment of Aleni's work in fact paraphrases a passage in a Confucian classic, namely the *Book of Rites* (*Liji*).¹⁰ This passage describes an allegedly ideal state of life in China during the time of the sage kings, which in the Confucian worldview figured as a symbol for the pristine times of China, before the onset of an overall moral decay set in which supposedly interrupted the proper transmission of the Way (*Dao*). Hence in the *Zhifang Waiji*, the image of Europe and the behaviour of the Europeans come close to a portrait of China during the supposedly lost Golden Age in early antiquity. If believed, such a depiction suggested that the revealed truth of God was actually the true and that Christianity was indeed the only teaching that could complement Confucianism, restore its moral authority and hence lead China back to the long-lost, allegedly ideal social conditions of the ancient past. Some Chinese Christians, such as the local literati Zhu Zongyuan, a convert who died in 1660, directly contrasted this idealized vision of Europe with the moral, political, and social conditions in China and arrived at the conclusion that in all respects China fell short of the continent in the Far West.¹¹ For example, in one of his works Zhu Zongyuan provides a whole list of comparisons, and in each and every one he ends with the provocative conclusion that compared to Europe, "the conditions in our China are not as good." He finishes his chapter by stating that "if one regards the spirit and the habits of these people, I fear that it is not *they* who are the barbarians [but us]." Such words openly ran counter to Sino-centric currents of his time which tended to denigrate all peoples outside the Middle Kingdom as morally and culturally inferior.¹²

Certainly, such arguments are indicative of the criticism the idealized images of Europe and the Europeans faced in seventeenth-century China.¹³ After all, calling a distant continent's civilization superior was unusual and often even considered to be politically subversive in the Chinese context. Moreover, a strong number of critics pointed to European colonialism on the Philippines and elsewhere in the region as well as, more generally, to the behaviour of some Europeans on Chinese soil. Still, idealizations of Europe and the Europeans based on Confucian claims were an important trope in the pro-Christian literature in late Ming China, just as similar idealizations of India had been rather common in Buddhist writings as early as about a thousand years earlier.¹⁴

10 Liji, chapter one (Liyun).

11 See D. Sachsenmaier, *Die Aufnahme europäischer Inhalte in die chinesische Kultur durch Zhu Zongyuan* (ca. 1616–1660), Nettetal 2001.

12 Zhu Zongyuan, *Da Kewen* [Answers to a Guest's Questions], ca. 1643, p. 51b.

13 See J. Gernet, *Chine et Christianisme. Action et reaction*, Paris 1982.

14 See for example the "classic" work by E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adaption of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Leiden 1959.

In this context it is important to note that the image of European superiority could be entirely expressed through Chinese concepts. The standards of evaluation, which were necessary for comparing China and Europe as two civilizational realms, were entirely couched in a Confucian language. In many regards, the image of Europe in these pro-Christian texts was at its core a geographical projection of Chinese ideals. Here Christianity was represented as the fulfilment of the trajectories of Confucianism; Europeans were being depicted as living under the same moral and ethico-political conditions as China had during its alleged long bygone golden age. In other words, in these portraits Confucianism's cultural values and utopias were still taken as universal values. They were not yet part of programs to fundamentally change Confucian concepts, ideas, and ways of thinking about China and the world at large. Neither was there a notion that Confucianism was somewhat parochial and not an expression of universal values.

The Early Twentieth Century

About two hundred years later, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the situation had changed dramatically.¹⁵ The new geopolitical and geo-cultural environment no longer allowed for a worldview defining China as a cultural star circled by minor satellites. It was not even possible for Chinese opinion makers to continue assuming that the former Middle Kingdom was a fully equal member in a new international world. A significant part of the Chinese elites regarded China not even as one among many nation states but rather opined that its international standing had degraded to the position of a sleeping giant who was in danger of becoming colonized by technologically more advanced powers. A sense of an imminent and necessary historical discontinuity and of radical changes dominated many debates among Chinese politicians and intellectuals.¹⁶ Even the staunchest defenders of a certain Chinese “cultural essence” did so increasingly in the spirit of mobilizing a counterforce against the overwhelming spirit of the time. In contrast to the seventeenth century, many key agents on China's political and intellectual scene now saw their country as being endangered and confronted by a foreign civilization. In the eyes of many, the ever-growing presence of Western powers seemed to make it necessary to take over essential aspects of this new civilization. Japan, which was often regarded as a successful model of adapting “modernity” to an Asian context and started showing its own imperialist ambitions, was often interpreted along similar lines. Particularly after the crushing defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894–1895, the voices of those grew stronger who demanded that China should follow similar self-transformation programs as Japan had since the middle of the nineteenth century.

15 See for example, W. Kirby, *The Internationalization of China*, in: *China Quarterly* 150 (1997), p. 433-458.

16 R. Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution. China's Struggle with the Modern World*, Oxford 2004; and V. Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919*, Berkeley 1986.

In addition to this changing intellectual and political climate, Europeans were no longer rare visitors or restrained foreign dwellers in China; rather, their presence was growing significantly in the coastal cities, treaty ports, and even in the most remote hinterlands.¹⁷ Moreover, due to the series of unequal treaties starting from the Opium Wars, citizens of several European nations enjoyed legal privileges that clearly distinguished them – together with US-American and Japanese citizens – from the Chinese populations as well as almost all other foreign communities in China. Also, the living standards and technological facilities of many Europeans had started to clearly differentiate many European foreigners on Chinese soil from the vast majority of the Chinese population, including much of the country's privileged classes. In addition, technologies that were at least partly associated with Europe changed China: steamships patrolled the Chinese rivers, railways crossed the land, and city-life started to change with daily newspapers,¹⁸ international fashion, and even shopping malls.

In a parallel process, new kinds and amounts of information about Europe and the Europeans were becoming available within China's rapidly changing public spheres. Foreign- and Chinese-owned schools offering education in fields such as English, engineering, or law mushroomed on Chinese soil during the decades around the turn of the twentieth century. As a consequence, Chinese society witnessed a strong growth of young intellectual elite circles who had been primarily trained following a "modern" rather than a Confucian curriculum. In addition, many young professionals and students who had spent parts of their education overseas were becoming a more vociferous group in China. While Japan attracted the largest number of Chinese students¹⁹, most young intellectuals still self-identified primarily with Europe or the United States. Although Japan was often regarded as a successful non-Western modernizer, the growing Sino-Japanese antagonism certainly dwarfed the number of those who referred to Japan as a model for China's future. In this context, terms such as "Europe" or "the European" took a central place on the mental maps referred to in the debates.²⁰

Nevertheless, not many serious advocates of "Westernization" in early twentieth-century China portrayed Europe and the United States solely as harbingers of personal freedom, global peace and joint human progress. In the eyes of many, one also needed to view the contemporary world through the perspectives of Social Darwinism. In the Chinese translation by the scholar Yan Fu, Social Darwinism appeared even more ruthless and merciless than in the original by Herbert Spencer.²¹ For Yan, the "survival of the fittest" was the law of the time, and it seemed to express the actions of the colonial powers in

17 J. Osterhammel, *China und die Weltgesellschaft vom 18. Jahrhundert bis in die Gegenwart*, München 1989.

18 See for example N. Vittinghoff, *Networks of News: Power, Language and Transnational Dimensions of the Chinese Press, 1850–1949*, in: *The China Review* 4 (2004), 1, pp. 1–10.

19 Ye, Weili *Seeking Modernity in China's Name: Chinese Students in the United States, 1920–1927*, Stanford 2001.

20 See Huang Hui, *Overseas Chinese Studies and the Rise of Foreign Cultural Capital in Modern China*, in: *International Sociology* 17 (March 2002), 1, pp. 35–55.

21 Xiao, Xiaosu, "China Encounters Darwinism: A Case of Intercultural Rhetoric", in: *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 81 (1995), 1, pp. 83–99.

the East. The ambivalence of threat and promise, of attraction and estrangement, which characterized the Chinese upper and middle classes' perceptions of the ongoing transformations, made it no longer possible to sustain the traditional Confucian education system: it was abolished in 1905.

From the beginning, the increasing outward orientation of numerous Chinese intellectuals was accompanied by decidedly critical attitudes towards Chinese history and tradition. As a positive or negative benchmark for China, the term "Europe" was used rather interchangeably with "the West" (xifang), "modernity" (xiandai or jinshi) or with "Euro-America" (Oumei), a Chinese synthesis of the main characters of the Chinese terms for "Europe" and "America." For example, in one of his many articles for the journal *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*), a key forum of the New Culture Movement, its founder Chen Duxiu expressed this widely shared sentiment among urban students in the following way:

*There are two radically different types of culture in the world: The Oriental cultures and the Occidental cultures. In essence [the Oriental cultures] have not moved out of the ancient traces of civilization, therefore they are the remains of old civilization. What can be really called modern culture is the Occidental culture uniquely possessed by the Europeans; it is known as European and Western culture. ... The Western culture possesses characteristics that are radically different from those of the ancient cultures and give people a sense of freshness.*²²

Also for Chen the terms "modern culture," "Occidental culture," "Western culture," and "European culture" were closely related if not even identical with each other. Clearly he mainly attributed this culture to Europe by stating that it is "uniquely possessed by the Europeans." While in his writings he certainly included the United States into the orbit of modern Western civilization, he obviously defined Europe as the origin and epicentre of a civilization whose "freshness" left older cultural patterns behind. In that sense, also the "European" had become far more than a citizen of Europe in Chen's account: he or she figured as the representative of a dynamic civilization which had its attractions while at the same time posing an imperialist threat to China as a polity, economy and culture.

In another article, Chen argued that Western culture cherished freedom and self-expression, whereas Oriental culture was hierarchical and authoritarian, and that while Western technology was continuously pushing for new territories, Oriental culture would aim at preserving the status quo. He drew the conclusion that if China did not overcome its ancient civilization, it was doomed to disappear from history. Noting his highly critical attitude towards Chinese culture, one should pay attention to some of the key concepts with which Chen Duxiu evaluated the alleged shortcomings of China. Posing Chinese or Oriental culture as polar opposites of Western dynamism and the forceful character

22 Chen Duxiu, *The French and Modern Civilization*, in: *Xin Qingnian* 1 (1915).

of Europeans and Americans, his method of evaluating China's backwardness emanated from his specific interpretation of "the West." In Chen's portraits, China appeared to be a suppressive apparatus stifling creativity and individual fulfilment, thus paralyzing the society as a whole. Europe and the Europeans figured as an essential part of a "West" which Chen saw as dynamic on an individual and on a collective level.

Also the Great War, which certainly was quite a publicized event in Chinese newspapers,²³ did not significantly change the attitudes of most New Culture Movement protagonists to what they defined as Chinese customs and traditions.²⁴ A closer look at some journals such as *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*), *Eastern Miscellaneous* (*Dongfang Zazhi*), or *Young China* (*Shaonian Zhongguo*) reveals that many authors continued referring to the alleged superiority of Europeans when making postulates for a new China. For example, in an article written for *Shaonian Zhongguo* in 1921, Wei Shizhen, who had recently travelled in Europe, compared the Europeans and the Chinese in the following way:

*The Europeans are big and well-built while the Chinese are extremely small. The Europeans are energetic while the Chinese are lethargic. Without mentioning other aspects, the physical difference alone can doom the Chinese to fail when they compete with the Europeans. Thus, if the Chinese are seeking to fight for survival, trying to improve our race becomes an important task.*²⁵

In the same article, he continued praising the positive effects of European life, marriage patterns, and different methods of education as well as even baby care. This led him to the conclusion that China needed to adopt such aspects of European culture if it wanted to grow stronger. Along similar lines, Hua Lu interpreted the Great War more or less as a confirmation of European superiority in a world governed by warfare and struggle. As late as 1924, he argued that the war had heightened national sentiments among Europeans, which is why it rallied whole nations to stand together, providing them with the necessary strength to survive in a merciless world.²⁶ According to others, the West remained superior because of its revolutionary energy, its individual commitment, and its scientific, progressive culture that generated material advantages. For example, in the liberal camp, intellectuals such as Hu Shi, Cai Yuanpei,²⁷ or lesser-known figures like Tao Lü Gong basically followed the official French, English, and American interpretation of

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

24 See for example D. Sachsenmaier, *Alternative Visions of World Order in the Aftermath of World War I – Global Perspectives on Chinese Approaches*, in: S. Conrad and D. Sachsenmaier (eds), *Competing Visions of World Order. Global Moments and Movements, 1880–1935*, New York 2007, pp. 151–180.

25 Wei Shizhen (and Wei Siluan), *Lude riji* [Diaries during my trip to Germany], in: *Shaonian Zhongguo* 11 (1921), pp. 29–40. In other parts of this series, Wei refers to Spengler and implicitly argues that each culture has to mobilize its own resources.

26 Hua, Lu, *Lessons and Warnings derived from WW1*, in: *Dongfang Zazhi* 21 (1924), 14, pp. 17–22.

27 Cai, Yuanpei, "Ouzhan yu zhexue [The European War and Philosophy]." *Xin Qingnian* 5 (1918), 5, pp. 491–6. See also W. Meissner, *China zwischen nationalem 'Sonderweg' und universaler Modernisierung: Zur Rezeption westlichen Denkens in China*, München 1994.

the war as the triumph of democracy and cooperative internationalism over militarism, authoritarianism and imperialism.²⁸

In any case, hardly any advocate of the New Culture Movement aimed at Westernization in the sense of China mimicking European or Euro-American civilization. Most of the movement's main advocates opined that China needed to find its own way to modernity but that it would need to do so after an inevitable process of profound cultural self-criticism and civilizational learning. In the eyes of many key thinkers of the New Culture Movement or the May Fourth Movement, Western civilization was only partly the outcome of old European traditions. Rather, Western civilization was first and foremost conceptualized as the outcome of a historical rupture which, based on modern individualism and scientism, had left earlier traditional constraints behind. In a certain sense, they demanded that China learn from what they regarded as Europe's historical discontinuities rather than its cultural continuities in the sense of traditions.

For key figures of the New Culture Movement like Chen Duxiu it was particularly the realm of mores, norms, values and behavioural patterns which impeded China from transforming itself into a modern society. For him, individualism and other alleged behavioural principles of modern European societies were foundational to building modern and future-oriented countries. Others were more doubtful about referring to European mores, ethics and socio-political values as inspirational examples for China. For example, in an article for the journal *Young China (Shaonian Zhongguo)*, one of its regular contributors, Shen Yi, wrote the following thoughts from his travels in Europe:

*Since I am abroad I realize that there is no other nation in the world as good as the Chinese in regards to morality, tolerance, and love for others. ... Following these great qualities we should be able to contribute to the coming of world peace. The others might be awakened, the path towards the future might still be unpaved, but I firmly believe that the day will come when our nation will be able to demonstrate its own ability and to achieve its ideals.*²⁹

The discourse of a Chinese moral superiority was particularly prominent in the camp of scholars who advocated more cautious paths to modernity,³⁰ which would be based more on continuities than on discontinuities. For this group, which stood somewhat apart from the New Culture Movement's main currents, the Great War became a rather

28 Tao, Lü Gong, Guanyu Ouzhan de yanshuo san pian – Ouzhan yi hou de zhengzhi, [Three Lectures about the European War – Post-War European Politics], in: Xin Qingnian [New Youth] 5 (1918), 5, pp. 470-2.

29 Shen Yi, Zhanhou deguo zhi zhenxiang [The real condition of Germany after WWI], in: Shaonian Zhongguo (1922–1926), pp. 24-34. For a closely related discussion of this subject matter see D. Sachsenmaier, Chinese Debates on Modernization and the West after the Great War, in J. Gienow-Hecht (ed.), Decentering American History, New York 2008, pp. 109-131.

30 Zhang Limin, Wenhua xuanze de chongtu – wusi shiqi dongxi wenhua lunzhan de sixiangjia [Conflicts Among Cultural Choices – Theoreticians Involved in Cultural Debates on East and West During the May Fourth Era], Beijing 1990. Zhang distinguishes three schools of conservatives: a) the Eastern Culture School (Dongfang Wenhua pai) around Liang Shuming, b) a group centred on Liang Qichao and Zhang Junli who later became the so-called Xuanxue School, and c) A group called after the journal Xueheng which included Mei Guandi and Wu Mi.

prominent topos.³¹ For them, the disasters in Europe revealed that some often idealized facets of European modernity carried not only promises but also dangers and destructive potentials. In fact, some major figures of the Chinese intellectual scene such as Yan Fu and Liang Qichao who certainly had been advocates of national self-strengthening programs, now viewed the European experience as a Faustian process that had gotten out of control.³² Rather openly they interpreted the war as the end of a misguided European trajectory. Consequently for them, the Europeans of today could no longer symbolize the world of tomorrow; rather, the East of yesterday could help the Europe of today. Like many others, they started to emphasize that China needed to preserve some of its cultural heritage and even cultivate some of its traditional core values.

Quite a substantial number of intellectuals belonging to this camp were able to acquire personal impressions of Europe in the years after 1918. Some of them were visiting scholars at European universities, whereas others were students or diplomatic delegates. The historian and public intellectual Liang Qichao and the philosopher Zhang Junmai (otherwise known as Carson Chang), for example, were among the cultural delegates of the Chinese mission at the negotiations in Versailles. During their stay, both travelled extensively through various countries and met European intellectuals such as Romain Rolland, René Guénon, or Rudolf Eucken. Zhang Junmai was actually so impressed by the parallels between Eucken's and his own work that he decided to stay in Jena for several years in order to work on several common projects. Zhang and Eucken even co-authored the book, *The Problem of Life in China and Europe*, which was published in Germany and in China.³³ Like other works by Zhang Junmai and by Rudolf Eucken, this joint publication advocated a continued modernization and yet, at the same time, it warned of blindly following the British and the American way. It depicted both nations as unwilling to accept any alternative approaches to modernity, and on this basis, it called for German idealism and Chinese traditionalism to join forces. Since both authors were careful to distinguish between Anglo-Saxon and German nationhood, the term "Europe" did not figure in a foundational way in their philosophical system.

After his return to China, Zhang Junmai followed up on his intellectual agenda. In later writings such as *My Political Impressions During my Stay in Europe From 1919–1921* (1919 zhi 1921 nian lü Ouzhou zhi zhengzhi yinxiang),³⁴ he warned of blindly Europeanizing China and argued that Europeans now, after having suffered heavy blows, had to learn from the civilizations of the East. A similar change of opinions can be observed in the case of Liang Qichao. In his historical writings produced before World War I,

31 J. Osterhammel, Shanghai, 30. Mai 1925. Die chinesische Revolution, München 1997.

32 See for example Tang, Xiaobing, Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao, Stanford 1996; and B. Schwarz, In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West, Cambridge 1964.

33 R. Eucken and Chang, Carsun, Das Lebensproblem in Europa und China, Leipzig 1922.

34 Zhang Junmai, 1919 zhi 1921 nian lü Ouzhou zhizhi zhengzhi yinxiang ji wuren suo de zhi jiaoxun [The Political Impressions I arrived at During my Stay in Europe from 1919 to 1921 and the Lessons that I have Learned], in: Xinlu 5 (1928), 1, pp. 19–27.

the great thinker had depicted the basic patterns of the European past as a trajectory of innovations and transformations, both at a social and a cultural level. In comparison to the culture of the Europeans, Liang had argued then, China was not only rather stagnant and isolated – it was also stricken by blindness, since it could not even recognize the common human progress emanating from its epicentre in the West.³⁵ He added that while a mature sociopolitical culture enabled Europeans to sustain modern states and civil societies, the Chinese masses would have to be led slowly towards a culture of liberalism and socially responsible individualism. At the same time, Liang was weary of being too naive about the possibility of a shortcut to European modernity.

After returning home from his travels in Europe from 1919–1920, during which he visited several countries (among them England, France, and Germany), Liang published a book under the title *Impressions of Travels in Europe* (*Ouzhou xinying lu*), which is divided into two parts.³⁶ The first one, *Europe before and after the Great War*, contains an account of his travels in Europe and delivers an analysis of the conditions he observed. The second one, *The Self-Awakening of the Chinese People*, outlines the implications of the new geopolitical constellation for China and its future course. In the first part, Liang provided some rather graphical accounts of how European living conditions had deteriorated during the war. For example, he described his arrival in London in the following way: *As soon as we landed, nothing but images of poverty and destruction opened in front of our eyes.*

Liang goes on to recount that despite the winter season, his hotel room had no heat, and that during breakfast sugar was so precious that the Chinese delegation to which he belonged had to negotiate with only half-empty stomachs at best. Already, these images of hunger and despair in a Chinese description of Europe indicated a revision of an otherwise dominant trope: European superiority in fields like technology and living standards was obviously no longer given. In the same text, he asks his readership:

Who could have imagined [before the war] that America would be able to take charge on the other side of the Atlantic and who would have expected that European countries and their populations would suffer the fate of poverty as we do? And who could have imagined those wealthy English, French, and Germans would also start crying out about their poverty and in their lives would start depending on high-interest loans?³⁷

There was a certain reversal of international hierarchies in Liang's account – Europeans as the formerly privileged part of the global population had sunken down to the state of the disadvantaged ones. In a similar way, one can understand Liang's detailed discussions of widespread pessimism among European intellectuals. He actually regarded the overall dark cultural and intellectual mood among European thinkers as a more severe symptom

35 See for example Tang, Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*. Stanford 1996

36 Liang Qichao, *Ouyou xinying lu jielu* [Thoughts about My Travels in Europe], in: idem, *Yinbingshi heji 7* (repr. Beijing 1989).

37 *Ouyou Xinying lu*, p. 2969.

of crisis than material shortage or war destructions. For him, Europe was a continent out of breath, yet still looking desperately for a new direction. Before the war, he had always praised Europe's endless resources of ambitious energies, its continuous endeavour to discover the new and unknown as a major advantage over China.

In his following reflections, Liang problematized Europe's fate from different angles, though all of these angles led back to a common line of interpretation – a dynamic process that had gotten out of control. According to Liang, Europe's revolutionary restlessness (which he had praised before) was now in the process of dissecting itself into a multitude of national and class-related protest movements, which in essence meant that the revolutionary energy had started to turn against itself. He added that it was mainly this modern belief in systematic scientific doubts that had robbed Europeans of their spiritual strongholds. He further stated that the consequences of a scientific culture such as industrialization, urbanization, and proletarianization had eaten away the communal spirit among European residents. In this context he wrote:

*As a result of the development of science, the organization of industrial production underwent fundamental innovations. Changes were carried out at such a fast speed, with such a sudden force, and on such a large scale, that people were always and everywhere at a loss when they tried to make agree their inner life with their outer life.*³⁸

In the *Impressions of Travels in Europe*, such passages are flanked by descriptions of the social fragmentation of European cities, the growing gaps not only between the social classes, but also between urban and rural areas. For Liang, the consequences of these bundled yet extremely contradictory forces were the spread of Social Darwinism on all levels, especially among social classes, religions, and nations. Like revolutionary energy, Liang had previously admired the implicit cultural logics of Social Darwinism as a major cultural force behind Europe's success.

For Liang Qichao, the rest of the world could no longer learn from the Europeans in a holistic manner; rather they now also needed to draw important lessons from Europe's crisis. This meant that the status of countries such as China as a latecomer in modern development now became at least partly an advantage, a possibility of steering a changing society into more stable directions. Differing from advocates of the New Culture Movement, Liang held that the main indigenous elements, which China needed to maintain or even revitalize, were particularly some of its key values and communal ties. In his eyes, these supposed features of Chinese civilization had the potential to enrich a modern culture based on pure scientism, instrumental reason and progress-oriented mentalities. Through such a synthesis, the forces of modern dynamism would be prevented from turning against themselves and from heading toward an empty space devoid of any sense and meaning.

38 Tang, Xiaobing. *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao*, Stanford 1996, p. 181.

Still, Liang did not simply prophesy the decline of Europe and the Europeans. By contrast, he predicted that European culture would eventually turn around and approach a more cautious, humble, and gentle form of modernity. It would eventually learn to listen to the voices of softer and more moderate cultures. Within this intellectual framework, Europe had not only been dethroned as the only teaching civilization but was placed in the role of the student. Liang Qichao theorized rather extensively about the potential contributions of Chinese values to help Europe rediscover and recreate a stable sociopolitical culture. Such thoughts provided the background for appeals, such as the following call to Chinese students:

Our beloved youth! Please pay attention! March on! On the other side of the great land-mass, in Europe, millions are suffering from the bankruptcy of material culture and are desperately calling for help. They are waiting for you to come and save them.

In passages of this kind, Europeans certainly no longer figured as the representatives of a teaching civilization that had shaken the fundamentals of all other cultures around the world. Rather, in Liang's account it was now the Europeans who had to face the stark choice between a major civilizational change and disaster – a situation that in principle did not differ from the one in which many critical Chinese thinkers saw their own country.

Conclusion

At any stage of history, there was not one monolithic Chinese image of Europe and the Europeans. The perceptions of the continent in the Far West differed between various social, political, and intellectual actors, and as images they were embedded within wider worldviews, value-systems and sociopolitical agendas.

One of the key differences between the discussed images of Europeans during the seventeenth century and the early twentieth century was their underlying notions of normativity, universality and interpretational authority. During the seventeenth century, both Chinese Christians and Jesuit missionaries expressed the alleged achievements of European civilizations in Confucian terms. Consequently, in the pro-Christian literature of that time the moral and social qualities of Europeans were being depicted in a manner that openly referred to China's mythical golden age as it was described in the Confucian classics.

By contrast, during the early twentieth century pro-Westernization forces operated on the assumption that Europe formed the heart of a modern, allegedly universalizable modern culture. In many Chinese accounts from that time period, Europeans tended to figure as the representatives of an advanced world, and their ideas as well as social values were often seen as paradigmatic for China's future. For other camps of thinkers during the aftermath of World War I, however, the notion of universality looked far more problematic and at the same time far less desirable. Many prominent Chinese thinkers regarded the war as the failure of the Enlightenment program and forcefully maintained

that Europeans now had to learn how to learn from other civilizations. In their eyes, it was particularly some ethical standards and social principles which China needed to preserve rather than overcome. However, also thinkers like Liang Qichao, Zhang Junmai or Yan Fu were not inimical to the idea of changing China, and they operated with terms and concepts that were an integral part of China's modernization discourses of that time. However, their views differed from many key protagonists of the New Culture Movement in what they identified as the necessary realms and scopes of China's future transformations.

All of the perceptions of Europeans that I discussed were not generated in a solipsistic manner but were rather disseminated and partly created by translocal communities of likeminded people. This was the case with the Jesuits and their elite converts in Ming-Qing China, and the same was true during the beginning of the twentieth century when Chinese visions of radical modernization were closely tied to globally circulating intellectual currents and political programs. As I have argued elsewhere in more detail, many "Chinese" reactions to World War I were also at least partly the products of transnational intellectual networks that included a significant number of prominent European thinkers.³⁹

Today, the background of Chinese perceptions of Europeans is very different. Long gone are the days when Europe would still be considered the centre of global modernity and a key reference space for intellectual and political debates in China. In the past thirty years it was particularly the United States which figured in the latter role. During that same time period, however, the Chinese intellectual climate has changed. More voices are now calling for a „Chinese model“ as a unique and particularly promising path. In this context, many groups have come to challenge the idea of any Western reference space for China's debates about its domestic future and international roles. Rather, problematizing global hierarchies of knowledge and the West's epistemological dominance has come to be an important element in many academic and intellectual debates in contemporary China.

39 D. Sachsenmaier, Searching For Alternatives to Western Modernity. Cross-Cultural Approaches in the Aftermath of World War I, in: *Journal of Modern European History* 4 (2006), 2, pp. 241-259; and idem, *Alternative Visions of World Order in the Aftermath of World War I – Global Perspectives on Chinese Approaches* (see note 24). Parts of this article are based on these two publications.