

The May Fourth Warning¹

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Abstract

The May Fourth Movement (1919) opened the Chinese doors to modernization, and simultaneously to an unfiltered process of acculturation, which triggered certain responses from intellectuals and a certain resistance. A century later, the Party's slogan 'Socialism with Chinese characteristic' marks a moment when values, consolidated understanding, literature, art, language, music, the amalgam of a whole civilization comes loose. This article aims to reconstruct the cultural relationship between China and the West as an unchanging pattern of imbalance, violence, and complicity.

Keywords: Civilization, Confucianism, Liang Qichao, Lu Xun, May Fourth, the West

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The Open Door Policy, the economic growth, and the magnet of materialism brought together once again Western tendencies and the Chinese ethic.² Accordingly, the coming of age of individualism has started dueling for a living space between the extravagances of different cultural paradigms: economic (capitalism), philosophical (Confucianism), and political (socialism). But while an identity takes shape – a globalized China –, another fades away. In conservative terms, the Han Confucian orthodox culture is in check. China has historically been a conservative nation, more concerned

about enduring than developing, and duration is often synonymous with repetition. I will explain this assumption by referring to the roots of Chinese orthodoxy. When Buddhism arrived in China, it had to adjust itself to an already existing society and a changeable one, at least in terms of geographical borders if not political order.³ My speculation is that because ancient China was not supported by an omnipotent god but transient dynasties, China felt vulnerable before an unpredictable nature. Chinese oil paintings for instance, more often than not, offer a description of a peaceful nature where man's presence is either absent or very small compared to the economy of the landscape, revealing Chinese fear, distrust of nature, and its unpredictable plans. Notwithstanding the impasse, nature had to be stabilized as much as possible. How to do so without a god to invoke? The 5,000 year-cult for the ancestors, the social organization of family clans and kinship, the sense of continuity given by rituals, the dynastic political apparatus, the values that assume a hereditary character as if they were material possessions, the extremely complex bureaucratic arena, and the imperial examination system, are all attempts to maintain China in harmony with itself. In short, repetition of the same brings stability. The May Fourth era and the New Cultural Movement it generated signify a historical turn in which China begins considering itself as no more the centre of the world but as part of it, and 'the rest' no longer as barbarians but an opportunity. Jonathan D. Spence's statement of the issue is representative: "May 4 gave its name to a new epoch in China's history, an epoch in which China's indigenous cultural yearnings were combined with a new international political awareness and a new and wider social consciousness" (142). I would go as far as to say that the May Fourth era should be regarded as the beginning of the socialist revolution, which has reached its zenith today. At this point, we do not need an additional academic manuscript on an event that however important happened more than a century ago; scholarship has already fully dissected that section of Chinese history. My purpose is rather to analyse the cultural encounter between China and the West at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Modernity entered China slowly, and went through different stages of Chinese history, having its first crisis in the Opium Wars (1839–1842; 1856–1860). As a consequence of the defeat, China started importing from the West military and technological knowledge and the awareness of another pattern of thought. The economic weaknesses of the Qing dynasty (1644–1911) and the Japanese victory in the first Sino-Japanese War (1895) meant that China held peripheral place within the international affairs in East Asia. At the onset, China was keen on adapting Western scientific and industrial skills to strengthen the nation, but soon it became evident that new ideas of governance were also needed to prevent foreign domination in the Asian region. Ergo, China imported political institutions and turned into a Republic (1912–1949). But the Chinese society grounded in family clans, mediators, connections and constant civil wars dragged down the emergent institution. As WWI ended, China did not obtain a favorable treatment from the Allies; instead, China lost at the hands of Japan the Shandong province, the birthplace of Confucius and the cradle of Chinese civilization. On 4 May 1919, some 3000 thousand students occupied the streets of Beijing demanding the Chinese government not to endorse the Versailles treaty and to recognize China's sovereignty over Shandong. Nothing much changed, but de facto the Gate of Heavenly Peace was now wide open to the encounter with the West. The May Fourth Movement (1919) – the first step of Chinese modernity, and one of the most defining, had its credo expressed in the political and literary magazine *La Jeunesse* (The New Youth), founded in 1915 by Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), perhaps the most influential writer of his time.⁴ Chen, a returning student who had obtained his high education degree first in Japan and then in France – blamed Confucian philosophy for the lack of individualism in China: “In China, the Confucians have based their teachings on their ethical norms. Sons and wives possess neither personal individuality nor personal property. Fathers and elder brothers bring up their sons and younger brothers and are in turn supported by them” (qtd. in de Bary and Lufrano 353).

To Chen, individualism and political participation were aspects of a modern civilization which China was clearly lacking; consequently, he suggested replacing Mr. Confucius with the shadow of Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy, thus turning a new page in Chinese modern history:

Westerners have gone through great turmoils, and shed [a] great deal of blood, in order to embrace Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy. . . . We now must have firm confidence in them as the cures of China from the political, moral, scholarly, and intellectual abyss. (Chen 1)

For a generation of Chinese intellectuals, science and technology were the keys to national wealth and power, a means of enlightenment, without supporting any political ideology. Darwin's theory of evolution became an important part of the intellectuals' conviction that the principle of natural selection explained social changes, while Herbert Spencer's *Study of Sociology* (1873) played a substantial role in the definition of the May Fourth period in terms of expectations and political reforms.⁵ The struggle for existence and the survival of the fittest govern biological and social evolution as species, and societies evolve from homogeneous to heterogeneous forms leading to a state of increasing individualization. This is the message that China received from Europe while engaged in a cultural struggle for independence and identity after the punitive 'Twenty-one Demands' (1915), the Paris Peace Conference (1919), and the subsequent loss of Shandong.⁶

Written by the political activist Luo Jialun (1897-1969) during the turbulent days of May 1919, the students' *Manifesto* in Beijing reveals China's anxiety and historical awareness:

The loss of Shantung means the destruction of the integrity of Chinese territory. Once the integrity of her territory is destroyed, China will soon be annihilated . . . China's territory might be conquered, but it cannot be given away, Chinese people might be massacred but they will not surrender. Our country is about to be annihilated. (qdt. in Chow Tse-tung 89)

It was the understanding that the Chinese intellectuals' failure to grasp the mechanism of evolution led directly to the lack of progress in China, and therefore they wondered whether in the dramatic struggle to survive they were not going to be eliminated throughout the process of human selection. Thus, Chen confessed his fear of extinction in a letter to a friend:

. . . to the hopelessness of our catching up with European and American civilizations. Most of our people are lethargic and do not know that not only our morality, politics, and technology but even common commodities for daily use are all unfit for struggle and are going to be eliminated in the process of natural selection. (qtd. in Spence 144)

Instead of a Faustian sense of dynamism, Chinese rhetoric is filled with a melancholic patriotism. An atmosphere of growing nationalism is counterbalanced by the citizens' demands for economic, political, and social changes, but whose rights of self-determination had just been ignored. The May Fourth Movement identified Confucianism as the ideology to be blamed: all in all, a discredited moralism and a religious-philosophical system chiefly liable for turning China into a feudal society. Confucianism was accused of undermining the individual as a member of the family and not as an independent unit. Furthermore, Confucius imposed values, summarized in the four ideographs – loyalty, filial piety, chastity, and righteousness –, without providing individual rights. Because of this atavistic belief, a caste system was created with a distinction between superior and inferior categories, in which father and husband stand as superior, children and wife obey as inferior. Likewise, women are not regarded as independent citizens but objects of the male society, and men do not possess anything until their parents die. As a cultural reaction, the May Fourth era, as much as the Maoist phase a few decades later, theorizes Confucianism not as the philosophy-religion of harmony and benevolence, but as the ideology which legitimated centuries of exploitation, the principal impediment to China's modernization. In

the attempt to dethrone Confucius and his spurious progeny, what the May Fourth Movement really does is wash away millennia of cultural references, traditions, family systems, old moralities, customs, and institutions. Written records point to students who rejected their names, their families, denied their fathers, denounced family bonds as slavery, proclaimed individual self-expression, including sexual freedom. At stake here is not only the gender dynamic but the whole cultural apparatus which does not correspond to the needs of the civil society anymore. Superstitions, divination, geomancy, magic pills for immortality, foot binding are the heritage of a society that must be left behind, while reforms and popular sovereignty are the concepts around which a rejuvenated nation-state must be molded. Returning scholars, more or less radical, understood that civil society is essential to the expansion of knowledge, special competence, and autonomy, but such autonomy was felt as a threat to the stability of the Chinese state. Although perhaps a generalization, it seems that China has assumed in its millenarian history a Daoist anti-intellectualist standing: "Do not seek to enlighten the people, but to make them ignorant./ People are difficult to govern because they have too much knowledge" is the Tao-te-ching unequivocal escapist message.⁷ Hu Shi (1891-1962), one of the leaders of the New Cultural Movement and the main advocate for the use of written vernacular Chinese, understands contentment as the attitude of not simply China but Eastern civilization:

Contented Easterners are satisfied with their simple life and therefore do not seek to increase their material enjoyment. . . . They are satisfied with their present lot and environment and therefore do not want to conquer nature but merely [to] be at home with nature and at peace with their lot. They do not want to change systems, but rather to mind their own business. They do not want a revolution, but rather to remain obedient subjects. (qtd. in de Bary and Lufrano 386)

If we agree with the assumption and apply it to Chinese philosophical outlook, then individualism and liberalism had to be

rigorously limited and channelled into a larger state-imposed unity. Simultaneously, desires and personal interests were defined as some sort of anti-social evil by Confucian morality because they reflected a selfish attitude. As a consequence of this antithesis, Confucianism symbolized obscurantism, hence it was incompatible with the new belief, the new society, and the new state that the May Fourth generation was about to build.⁸ Liang Qichao (1873-1929), one of the most influential Chinese intellectuals in the Republican Era, who emphasised the lesson of the Swiss jurist Bluntschli “People are born for the state, not the state for the people” (qtd. in Fairbank and Goldman 259), was one of the first to promote the idea of the individual development as a benefit for the collective. In his famous essay *Discourses on the New People* (1902), arguing in favor of self-reliance, he went as far as to assert that nothing less than a total destruction of the Confucian system could save China: “I have thought and thought again about the popularly accepted system in China today; there is almost not a single aspect of it which ought not to be destroyed and swept away, root and branch” (qtd. in Levenson 116). However, the apocalyptical stage has its savior. Science seemed to be the future, the key to modernity, the myth evoked to get access to a new era of prosperity, welfare and democracy, invoked as freedom from traditional constraints, the tool to achieve it. Wu Zhihui (1865-1953), an iconoclast figure involved in the reform movement, is often remembered for his anti-Confucian cry: “All thread-bound (old-style) books should be dumped in the lavatory” (qtd. in de Bary and Lufrano 178). In 1923, during the controversy over science and metaphysics, he wrote an essay titled *A New Conception of the Universe and of Life, Based upon a New Belief*, de facto replacing the Confucian order of cosmos with the mechanistic conception of the universe. He maintains that science alone, not religion, will be needed to make mankind better and more moral: “I believe that morality is the crystallization of civilization and that there has never been a low morality when civilization reached a higher state and I believe that all things in the universe can be explained by science” (qtd. in de Bary and Lufrano 375).

This was a period of changes and transition in which the craze for science came together with an opening towards Western theories. Consequently, the dominant belief in science and social progress produced strong intellectual attachment among the educated youth. Leaders of the New Culture Movement had a radical belief in science and materialism; hence, they were inclined to the study of Marxism; reformers such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi identified themselves unequivocally with the pragmatism of John Dewey, who lectured widely in China in 1919 and 1920. Bertrand Russell's pacifism and political radicalism impressed those already attracted to the socialist experiments in the Soviet Union, while his view on the world of appearance and the nature of reality had much in common with the concerns of Buddhist philosophy. Yet, it was also an opening towards Western society as a whole. Students coming back from abroad brought with them new ideas, such as socialism, labor's rights, and women's rights. Feminism was more than a byword; it actually resulted in a number of women's military and Red Cross units, the formation of women's groups support and the first female student admitted to Beijing University in 1920. Not surprisingly, Lu Xun referred to a "Nora phenomenon" recalling the iconoclastic success of Ibsen's *Doll's House* (1879).⁹ It is evident that, even though the Treaty of Versailles had shaken China's faith in Western powers, it did not shake the belief that Western culture was relevant to Chinese needs. The Chinese intellectuals had ambivalent feelings: they harbored resentment against Western influence, but Chinese nationalism, the wounded patriotism of a whole country, was a feeling concerning international politics in general rather than foreign culture in particular. International politics and Western cultural influences were spheres well distinguished. Likewise, the cultural forum was a sponge that absorbed common interests and advocates for change. The artistic production began to shift from a production conceived for morality's sake to realism in terms of style, thus abandoning in literature the classical language for the vernacular, and then in terms of content, thus revealing daily issues and spiritual tensions. Foreign books were translated and published, and books brought

new ideologies: Dewey (pragmatism), Russell (liberalism), Mikhail Bakunin (anarchism), Leo Tolstoy (humanitarianism), Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (scientific socialism). China was all of a sudden invaded by unknown artistic expressions; Western culture all at once converged critically on the Chinese stage to an extent that centuries of “isms” so divergent and confusing helped usher a new society. Even so, as Leo Ou-fan Lee noticed, the enthusiasm was more a quest for modernity than an aesthetic of modernity:

This new concept of modernity in China seems to have inherited, in varying degrees, several familiar notions of Western bourgeois modernity: the idea of evolutionism and progress, the positivist belief in the forward movement of history, the confidence in the beneficial possibilities of science and technology, and the ideal of freedom and democracy defined within the framework of a broad humanism. (500-1)

Assuming modernization as the main target, the May Fourth era was essentially an intellectual movement against feudal-Republican China in favor of a hypothetical China whose traits Mao would shape a few decades later. Meanwhile, the West, read it as Europe, was already dealing with the burden of its contradictions. Wu Zhihui and, like him, an army of intellectuals, were victims of a historical misunderstanding. Indeed, they seemed to ignore the Western intellectual discourse over science during the decades between 1880-1930. The omnipotence of the scientific paradigm was about to be overturned by the so-called philosophy of life.

Post-WWI Europe was a landscape whose cities in ruin were what had remained of the scientific-industrial revolution. The scene at the turn of the century was one of disarray. Europe pretended to dominate the world culturally and economically, but the wave of the Great War washed away much more than cities and factories. It is the old order of European society which disappeared in the form of social status, family relationships, state-religion dynamics, and the very role of human beings in society became questionable. Which society? The war's destructiveness, both physical and moral, undermined the fabric of the national past; traditional values were

dismissed, but the vacuum they left had not been replaced by anything else. In this desolate and abandoned land that was post-war Europe, nihilist theories found fertile ground. The pretentious positivist understanding of the world was answered by the European intelligentsia by declaring the failure of Western civilization. Physics (Werner Heisenberg, Kurt Gödel), philosophy (Friedrich Nietzsche), sociology (Max Weber, Georg Simmel), literature (Thomas Mann, Robert Musil, Luigi Pirandello, James Joyce, Virginia Woolf) and art (Avant-garde) were all tainted by the same pessimism. The twentieth century had opened with new dark certainties: science could not explain the mystery of human life, man had become the slave of his own machines, and such beliefs that there was no man (Michel Foucault), no art (Theodor Adorno) and no god left (Nietzsche). But it is the entire concept of modernity that shows signs of contradictions and that reveals once more that evolution is not always synonymous with progress. The unleashing of ferocious imperialisms or violent colonialism all along reflects the fact that nations are responsible for forgetting the liberal premises through which man's liberation should have happened. Capitalist economy enlarged the gap between the rich and the poor, and, on a larger scale, between wealthy and third-world countries. The introduction of machines into the system of production had created a surplus of labor force, therefore, unemployment first, alienation afterward. The slaughtering of nations and entire civilizations had been accomplished in the name of God, but science is the hand that triggered class struggle, wars, exploitation, violation of human and civil rights. Was it then really progress? There is a shadow of futility and hopelessness framing the most sensitive consciousness; modern society, the greatest accomplishment of the nineteenth century Western societies, is collapsing, leaving behind a lack of order and the failure of science. Notably, the regretful conclusion of European achievements is that history has been betrayed, and science is to blame for it.

In 1919, Liang Qichao, having crossed the oceans a few times and after having gone through different stages of understanding, finally persuaded himself that emulating Western

culture was not the way to guarantee success to China. In fact, materialistic Western societies had surely achieved progress, but such progress had left these societies spiritually insecure. In a later article, Liang expressed his sense of shock and confusion over the loss of life and cultural destruction of the war. Paralleling European pessimism, the article does not regard science as the savior of mankind, for the understanding of life cannot possibly be reached through the channels of chemistry or mathematics. He draws a fitting metaphor in which men are compared to travelers in the desert and have lost their direction. They see a black shadow in the distance, run towards it thinking that it might take them somewhere, but, as soon as they reach it, the shadow suddenly disappears:

Those who praised the omnipotence of science had hoped previously that, as soon as science succeeded, the golden age would appear forthwith. Now science is successful indeed; material progress in the West in the last one hundred years had greatly surpassed the achievements of the three thousand years prior to this period. Yet we human beings have not secured happiness; on the contrary, science gives us catastrophes. We are like travellers losing their way in the desert. They see a big black shadow ahead and desperately run to it, thinking that it may lead them somewhere. But after running a long way, they no longer see the shadow and fall into the slough of despond. What is that shadow? It is this "Mr. Science." The Europeans have dreamed a vast dream of the omnipotence of science; now they decry its bankruptcy. This is a major turning-point in current world thought. (qtd. in Chow Tse-tsung 328)

Returning from Europe, Liang had observed the aftermath of World War I. As he confronted the destructive folly of war, his disillusionment was much in contrast to his early view of the West as the embodiment of social progress and enlightened civilization. Yet, there is not a simple answer. Some conceived the traditional culture (Confucianism) as the principal impediment to Chinese modernization; some others were simply reluctant to embrace Western modernity for fear it might wipe out the unique Chinese

identity. Liang Shuming (1893–1988), the author of *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (1921), condemned the wholesale Westernization as impractical and undesirable, and, in open disaccord with what Chen Duxiu had argued in 1916, re-endorsed Confucianism as the basis for Chinese reconstruction. More specifically, assuming that cultural construction on the Chinese soil is a creative endeavor, he called for a synthesis of Chinese and Western cultures that would nevertheless be distinctively Chinese: “The fundamental spirit of Chinese culture is the harmony and moderation of ideas and desires;” thus “[w]e must renew our Chinese attitude and bring it to the fore, but do so critically” (qtd. in de Bary and Lufrano 381). Though the arguments are somewhat confrontational, Chinese political thinkers and reformists clearly had in mind that the Western challenge was not so much geographical as it was existential. Thus, while requesting a transformation of China’s economic and educational systems, they emphasised to different degrees the danger of over-reliance on Western models, what Deng Xiaoping (1904–1997) termed ‘Spiritual Pollution’¹⁰ in 1983. These thinkers, whose significance is immense in the definition of China-West socio-political relationships, felt the spiritual murder the West was about to bring to China by introducing unnatural conditions of life. Western industrial capitalism would disrupt social ties, dislocate social routines, crash the primacy of the spirit, the last one being a crime that transcends physical murder. Under the influence of Liang Qichao’s view, intellectuals such as Zhang Junmai (1886–1969) and Yan Fu (1854–1921) warned about the ontological differences between two opposed visions of life when confrontation becomes inevitable:

The fundamental principles upon which our nation is founded are quietism, as opposed to [Western] activism; spiritual satisfaction, as opposed to the striving for material advantage; a self-sufficient agrarianism, as opposed to profit-seeking mercantilism; and a morally transforming sense of brotherhood rather than racial segregation. . . . A nation founded on agriculture lacks a knowledge of the industrial arts, [but] it is likewise without material demands;

thus, though it exists over a long period of time, it can still maintain a standard of poverty but equality, scarcity but peace. But how will it be hereafter? (qtd. in Mishra 320)

But the differences are not merely economic. It is the cultural structure that does not overlap:

China values the Three [family] Bonds most highly, while the Westerners give precedence to equality. China cherishes relatives, while Westerners esteem the worthy. China governs the realm through filial piety, while Westerners govern the realm with impartiality. China values the sovereign, while Westerners esteem the people. China prizes the one Way, while Westerners prefer diversity. . . . In learning, Chinese praise breadth of wisdom, while Westerners rely on human strength. (qtd. in Mishra 159)

However, distrust versus the process of modernization and the consequent disruption of the Chinese *modus vivendi* was only the surface of the debate. The problem was not the transaction from agrarianism to mercantilism but a more radical suspicion towards the West. The West was conceived as a materialist society worn out by worship of money and power. It is a civilization embedded in the tyranny of matter and warfare as body of life, incapable of practising what it professes, thus abandoning justice for exploitation, love for egoism, equality for segregation. By the same token, it was clear to Chinese scholars that, in order to survive, China had to absorb some Western knowledge without corroding the Chinese spirit. How the search for modernity could emerge independently from westernization was a social phenomenon they would have to learn through practice. The basic assumption was that in the *ti-yong* dualism, “Chinese essence vs. Western practice,” also as “Spiritual China vs. Materialist West,” the superiority of Chinese values would empower a backward China on its road to modernization.¹¹ Even so, preserving the Confucian Way (Dao) through the use of Western “instruments” (qi) or “methods” (fa) was not going to be an easy task. How far could one go in changing basic institutions without destroying cardinal virtues as had

seemingly happened in Europe? China's heterogeneous identity and Chinese continuity in terms of historical longevity and culturally transmitted values identify China not as a nation-state but as a civilization. Hence, it was also clear to some of these scholars that such a confrontation would indeed turn into a clash of civilizations where Western scientific methods would battle against the Chinese conception of life based on benevolence (*ren*), filial piety (*xiao xun*) and property (*li*). In the 1920s, Sun Yat-sen (1866-1925) summarized the cultural clash with the following dire overview:

Such a civilization, [the West] when applied to society, will mean the cult of force, with aeroplanes, bombs, and cannons as its outstanding features . . . Therefore, European civilization is nothing but the rule of Might. . . . There is another kind of civilization [the East] superior to the rule of Might. The fundamental characteristics of this civilization are benevolence, justice and morality: This civilization makes people respect, not fear, it. . . . One may say, therefore, that Oriental civilization is one of the rules of Right. Since the development of European materialistic civilization and the cult of Might, the morality of the world has been on the decline. (qtd. in Saaler and Szpilman 81)

China's disenchantment with the West could not be plainer. The biased approach shaped the debate in terms so antagonistic that not even Marxism was going to quieten the contrast between Western scientific materialism and Asian/Chinese morality. Notwithstanding the differences, the New Cultural Movement of May Fourth made it clear that, without conceiving China in a global order, domestic disorder and endemic weaknesses were not to be solved. Yet, the movement never really achieved what it intended to. The idealism behind it was defeated by anti-imperialist campaigns, political utopian tasks, and domestic struggle. Today, one century later, the May Fourth's warning over the danger of cultural contamination sounds like a fulfilled prophecy. The process of modernization has brought about a widespread westernization and erosion of traditional culture. One must wonder if in a China that is becoming increasingly international, the process of

acculturation is more about imitation of foreign models than about the expression of Chinese uniqueness. Therefore, for the Marxist intellectual, who is also a political militant, the impossible task to solve Lu Xun's dilemma remains of paramount importance:

Imagine an iron house without windows, absolutely indestructible, with many people fast sleep inside who will shortly die of suffocation. But you know that since they will die in their sleep, they will not feel the pain of death. Now if you cry aloud to wake a few of the lighter sleepers, making those unfortunate few suffer the agony of irrevocable death, do you think you are doing them a good turn? (6)

If we actualize Lu Xun's cynical view, China is no longer the iron house, but the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation remains a winding path, rather than a straight line. The allegory closely recalls Walter Benjamin's iconic reading of Paul Klee's painting about the nihilistic mood awaiting the *Angel of History*. An angel-like creature is slowly moving away from something; his eyes are staring at the viewer, his mouth wide open, his wings are spread. He does not seem to be moving; instead, Benjamin suggests that the angel's face is turned towards the past from which he is pulled away by the storm of progress bouncing human beings ceaselessly into the future.¹² Lu Xun and Benjamin share the same pessimism, the same catastrophic sense of modernity. Awakening the dead is shattering reality into pieces, but letting them sleep is betraying the role of art, which is not complementary but confrontational in relation to politics.

Notes:

¹ This article is part of a longer manuscript and was written a few years ago, in 2019, when I was a junior scholar. My research interests have changed in the meantime, so that history might have already answered some of the questions I raised back then.

² The watershed in China's recent history is Deng Xiaoping's policy of reform and opening up (改革开放, pinyin: *Gǎigé kāifàng*), the enlightened

project of free market economy. The structural changes have brought immense economic development and the formation of new sets of beliefs and values. For this reason, the fate the *Gǎigé kāifàn* remains unpredictable.

³ Buddhism entered China from India at the end of the Han Dynasty (202 BC – 220 AD), but it was only in the seventeenth century that non-Han rulers, known for the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), adopted it as a State philosophy to contrast the Confucianism of the Chinese ruling class. For more about Buddhism and China see: Moses (1977) and Chün-fang Yü (2020).

⁴ Chen Duxiu, Marxist intellectual, was the founder of La Jeunesse (新青年 *Xīn Qīngnián*, 1915), dean of students at Beijing National University, and the first secretary-general of the Chinese Communist Party (1921).

⁵ The introduction of social Darwinist ideas in China is analyzed among others by Schwartz (1964) and Spence (1982).

⁶ In 1914, Japan entered World War I as a British ally; soon Beijing became a political and strategic target for the empire of Japan. The ‘Twenty-One Demands’ (1915) were a set of demands issued by Japan with the clear intent to give Japan a regional ascendancy over China. Example of diplomatic overplay, secret negotiations made of China a virtual protectorate of Japan. Tokyo not only procured full control of Shandong peninsula, but also special concession in Manchuria and Fujian. As WWI ended, the Treaty of Versailles (1919) did not reward China as expected. Japan maintained control over the former German-held territory of Shandong, thus triggering a sense of national injustice that provided the background of the May Fourth Movement. As the terms of the agreement came known, the intervention of European powers forced Japan to retreat, securing little of what it had previously obtained. In 1922, at the Washington conference, the ‘Twenty-One Demands’ were annulled, and Shandong was returned to China in 1923, but the Sino-Japanese relations were indefinitely spoiled.

⁷ In *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy* (1973, 170), Tao-te ching, literally the Classic of the Way and its Virtue. Behind the anti-intellectual position of Daoism there is the philosophy of non-action (*wu-wei*), sort of non-interventional attitude, whose aim is not to act against nature, ergo letting nature take its course. However, the notion of non-being (*wu*), later elaborated by Buddhism and existentialist logic, has been charged with a sterile non-action thus dangerously shifting into a nihilist shipwreck.

⁸ For a fuller discussion on the rejection of Confucianism in the May Fourth era see: Guy Alitto (1979).

⁹ Somewhat relevant, since the founding of *La Jeunesse* in 1915, Chen Duxiu had advocated the cause of women's rights, and in 1918 he ran a complete vernacular translation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in the magazine.

¹⁰ The campaign against "Spiritual Pollution" (1983) assumed that the Western world and the introduction of liberalist ideas were polluting socialism and Chinese spiritual civilization. China must then shut its door to keep the nation's spirit pure. As the campaign revealed itself to be a political boomerang in the reform process, in 1984 the campaign was called to a halt. The term 'spiritual pollution' resulted somehow controversial, as it had already been used by Hitler (1937) to condemn the Bolshevik culture in a famous speech on Arian Art. Deng Xiaoping was advised to replace the phrase with 'bourgeois liberalization' – Bourgelib (see Barmé and Minford John 345). For an in-depth analysis, see Wendy Larson (1989), and Sylvia Chan (1988).

¹¹ Zhang Zhidong's (1837-1909) essay "Exhortation to Study" (*Quanxue pian*), 1898. At the end of the nineteenth century, a group of Chinese scholars under the banner of 'Chinese learning for fundamental structure, Western learning for practical use' (中学为体西学为用 *zhongxue weiti xixue weiyong*) believed that China should have maintained its own Confucian roots ("substance" – 体 *ti*) of society, while at the same time using Western learning for "practical application" (用 *yong*) in developing China's military, economy, and infrastructure. For an analysis of the *ti-yong* dualism, see Daniel Bays (1978).

¹² This is the full quotation: "A Klee painting named 'Angelus Novus' shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise; it has got caught in his wings with such violence that the angel can no longer close them. This storm irresistibly propels him into the future to which his back is turned, while the pile of debris before him grows skyward. This storm is what we call progress" (Benjamin 258).

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