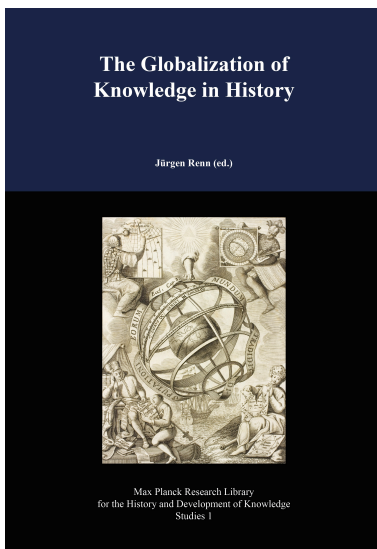


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Studies 1

Denise Gimpel:

Taking China to the World, Taking the World to China: Chen Hengzhe and an Early Globalizing Project



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Chapter 17

Taking China to the World, Taking the World to China: Chen Hengzhe and an Early Globalizing Project

Denise Gimpel

17.1 Introduction

In a lecture to a scholarly society in China in 1917, Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940),¹ Chancellor of the prestigious Peking University, announced that religion in western societies had long been replaced by scientific enquiry.² Religion’s knowledge function—the provision of answers to fundamental questions that the human intellect was not yet developed enough to answer—had been a necessity of the past that scientific methods had rendered redundant (Denton 1996, 183). China thus needed to know that the West’s past solution to a lack of knowledge (religion) was not a trajectory that the nation should copy. It belonged to the past.

China at this time, of course, needed a future and, in the eyes of many, it needed a future that would integrate it in global processes or what certain intellectuals or groups of intellectuals regarded as global or universal trends. After the failure of politics to provide the constitutional foundations of a new and modern republic following the so-called revolution of 1912 and the country’s rapid decline into division and warlordism, Chinese intellectuals were, more than ever, as Jerome Grieder puts it, “between orthodoxies” (Grieder 1981, 289). Traditional worldviews had all but crumbled; politics had, clearly, not been able to create a stable basis. China had failed to gain a niche and respect in the international community. It was, of course, the orthodoxy of socialism (with Chinese characteristics) that was to win the day after 1949, but in the early twentieth century there were contesting “globalizing projects.” According to Mao Zedong (1893–1976), for instance, the Chinese needed to be entered into the universal dynamics of world revolution and thus change their previous cultural habits:

Since the great call for “world revolution” the movement for the “liberation of mankind” has pressed forward fiercely, and today we must change our old attitudes towards issues that in the past we did not

¹For a good introduction to Cai Yuanpei’s position and activities, see (Chow 1960), *passim*.

²The lecture was titled “On Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education.” For the original Chinese text, see (Gao 1984, 30–34). A translation can be found in (Denton 1996, 182–189).

question, towards methods we would not use, and towards so many words we have been afraid to utter.³

For a more influential and elitist group of “globalizers” at roughly the same time, the world’s revolution was encased in the concept of “science” and the scientific method. For these individuals, as for Cai Yuanpei, the concept of science was to form the basis of a new orthodoxy that would globalize China and lift it out of its past paradigms of cultural and social understanding and change old attitudes, methods and the very vocabulary of life and thought thus integrating China into the world’s systems and laws. This scientific method was not limited to the study of the natural sciences. Although physics, chemistry, meteorology and the like formed an important aspect of the globalizing project, scientific principles were perceived as equally pertinent to almost all areas of life and activity.

Here it is clear that the understanding of “globalization” or the qualifier “global” at the center of this paper is not concerned with markets or economies, with direct foreign investment in China or with many of the other factors popularly associated with the term. Here globalization is understood as an impulse and a necessity felt by many Chinese in the early twentieth century to see China integrated into the world and its workings. The adjective “global” thus qualifies modes of thought, writing and being to which China was to aspire. It marks a target more often than a state or situation that had been achieved. Geographically, of course, China has always been a part of the world, but since the close of the nineteenth century Chinese intellectuals had increasingly felt it to be outside the international community of strong nations, and many of the reform projects of the time, whether aimed at Communist revolution or reform based on European or Anglo-American models, were predicated on a sense of outsidership and non-inclusion in world processes. This sense of outsidership was heightened by the fact that Japan, a small country that the Chinese had traditionally tended to look down upon, had indeed “globalized.” The Japanese, whose Meiji reforms since the mid-nineteenth century could also be said to have been predicated on a sense of outsidership,⁴ had integrated themselves into a world system, gained recognition and strength (enough strength to win a war against a European power in 1904) and even to push through their particular claims in Versailles in 1919.⁵ The aim of the present paper is thus to present one of these projects and to uncover its background and its attempts at institutionalization.

The following brief comments will be concerned with a concrete example of the manner in which a perceived universal “scientific” attitude or spirit was to be

³Translation taken from (Schram 1992, 318).

⁴Many reform attempts aimed at gaining the respect of strong Western nations. Japanese foreign minister Inoue Kaoru wrote in 1885, “What we must do is to transform our empire and our people [...] To put it differently, we have to establish a new, European-style empire on the edge of Asia.” See (Mackerras 1997, 196–197). Inoue’s remark is also cited here.

⁵For a brief description of the events at the Versailles Peace Conference, see (Clements 2008, 53–108).

imported to the Chinese context and thus take China into the world and establish the strong world's principles in Chinese thinking and behavior. When knowledge travels it requires a means of transportation. It arrives at a given destination through a variety of media, but most of all it is transported by human agency, by the individuals, groups or networks that have translated and processed it for a new context and with a clear purpose. Foreign missionaries, merchants, military and others had for a long time taken their "knowledge" and skills to the Chinese in order to change and/or modernize them, but from the first decades of the twentieth century, a group of native intellectuals was also involved in the processing of what they considered were vital forms of knowledge for a new China. This process of selective and inventive transmission of materials and ideas from a dominant culture has often been called "transculturation" and has largely been discussed in connection with the colonial enterprise.⁶ In the present case, however, the imperial project plays a lesser role. The focus will be on the life, activities and writings of Chen Hengzhe (1890–1976), who in 1920 became China's first female professor of Western history at Peking University, and on the mechanisms by which she and others attempted to transmit what they believed to be global knowledge to the local, Chinese context. Questions will also be raised as to how such individuals gained and constructed their authority and how they produced new and authoritative interpretations of history, of the West, and of life.

Chen Hengzhe had studied history and literature in America between 1914 and 1920 (Vassar and Chicago),⁷ she was a historian of the West and of the European Renaissance, author of short stories, essays, poems and fables and she is an excellent example of the type of transculturation many early twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals envisaged. Her life and her writings illustrate that she was part of a network of urban intellectuals, most of whom had studied abroad, who shared the desire to translate China into a country that subscribed to values, ideas, modes of thought and modes of being and social organization that these intellectuals deemed globally or universally applicable. Like others, Chen Hengzhe was a product of significant historical changes that facilitated intercultural experience and new imaginings of the cultural setting in which they lived. This, they felt, also demanded deep epistemological changes in China: new ways of writing, thinking and acting. Chen's trajectory, however, also shows that, although they all saw themselves as self-determined and, even, enlightened, leaders of a new generation, they were willing victims of cultural imperialism, self-colonization and hubris. Nevertheless, and despite the ultimate failure of their project, their influence and the influence of the categories of thought that they espoused and the institutions they helped to create was immense up to the Communist victory in 1949 and, in many ways, has been experiencing its own renaissance since the opening policies inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s.

⁶See (Pratt 2009, 7).

⁷For a biographical sketch of Chen Hengzhe, see (Yang 1991).

17.2 Study Abroad and its Effects

Chen Hengzhe (or Sophia H. Chen Zen as she was known to her American friends) left China on 15 August 1914 on the S.S. China together with “over one hundred boy students from Tsing Hua College and fourteen girl students, nine of whom belonged to the Tsing Hua scholarship group.”⁸ Some twenty years later, when she wrote her *Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl*, she records this event as a momentous one in China’s history, as momentous for China as the outbreak of the First World War for Europe:

It was significant that just as the world was waiting to be affected by the changes to be brought about by this tremendous armed conflict, China was also preparing for fundamental change in her national life through the sending of her young girls by the government for the first time. For these young girls were not sent abroad to make military or political contacts with the western countries, as many young men as well as special commissioners had been sent for previously; but they were asked to study the cultural side of the western nations. (Chen n.d., 188)

Thus Chen Hengzhe set off for the wide world and a future that was, in her own view, to have significance for the national life of China and its womenfolk. The result of this journey was, in her own words, “an intangible yet strong alliance” between East and West “not on the soil of the war-creating spheres but right within the hearts of the peoples” (Chen n.d., 188).

This, then, was the manner in which she saw her trip: a significant event in the development of China, a significant event in the public attitude to young women and a significant influence on China’s place in the world. Clearly this is her rather inflated interpretation of her life *after the event*, but it characterizes her sense of mission during her studies and in her later writing. In his comments on biographical and autobiographical writings, Brian Roberts observes that “the recollection of past events is inextricably connected with people’s current life and its place in the group and wider surroundings” (Roberts 2002, 104). And it is in this context that we should understand Chen’s construction of the narrative of the purpose and results of her voyage: from the moment she arrived in the United States and even more so after returning to China, Chen’s life was inextricably linked with, on the one hand, activities that were to devalue “Chinese” knowledge and to replace it with the more developed ideas and institutions of the “civilized world”; on the other hand, she consistently (re)constructed her own biography as that of the exemplary modern women (what China needed): self-determined, mistress of her own fate, educated, successful.

⁸*Autobiography of a Chinese Young Girl* (Chen n.d., 187–188). I must offer my thanks to the librarians at Vassar College for making this text available to me.

One of the early examples of these activities was the founding of the Science Society by Chinese students in America. In 1914 a group of students at Cornell University established an informal Science Society that was to become, one year later, the Chinese Scientific Society. Its mouthpiece was the journal *Kexue* (*Science*) that had been launched in January of the same year.⁹ That this was an attempt to align China with what its supporters understood as global processes is clear from the editorial of the first issue. “It is science, and only science, that will revive the forest of learning in China and provide the salvation of the masses”¹⁰ according to the inaugural statement, and an article in the first issue by founding member Ren Hongjun (1886–1961) explained why China did not possess any science and what this meant for the country.¹¹ The editor-in-chief, Yang Xingfo (1893–1933) explicitly related the founding of the Science Society to globally/universally pertinent processes when he wrote that “[a]ll civilized countries have established scientific societies to promote learning.”¹²

However, the students behind this journal not only felt that China was in need of a different kind of scholarship, both in content and approach in order to join the ranks of the civilized nations, they also saw a need for a new mode of presentation. Thus, from the beginning, *Kexue* adopted Western-style punctuation and was probably the first in the history of Chinese journals to do so. Ren Hongjun felt that the Chinese needed quotation marks in particular (Fan 2004, 9). This is, in itself, a remarkable development since it points to the recognition of the worth of the individual statement (quoting one person’s opinion or findings) as valuable, legitimate and objectively verifiable as opposed to citations from the (Chinese) Classics as a source of legitimation and as the ultimate (moral) orthodoxy.¹³ Thus, the members of the society clearly felt, a national-cultural frame of reference for intellectual work was being replaced by a broader one with “universal” characteristics.

It was not only science majors who were present at the meetings of the Science Society. In fact the issue of punctuation had been brought up by a young student who was to become one of China’s leading thinkers and writers, Hu Shi (1891–1962), who had initially chosen to study agriculture in America, but soon turned to philosophy. The history major Chen Hengzhe was also present.

The link between the humanities and the natural sciences was, in any case, a very close one at this time. No matter what the students were studying, their aim was to “save China,” to introduce at all levels of society the scientific spirit that

⁹For a reproduction of the title page of the journal, see (Fan and Zhang 2002, 15).

¹⁰“*Kexue fakanci*” (Inaugural statement of *Kexue*) reproduced in (Fan and Zhang 2002, 14–18, 18). This translation is taken from (Wang 2002, 302).

¹¹The article with the title “Why China Lacks Science” is reprinted in (Fan and Zhang 2002, 19–23).

¹²Cited in (Wang 2002, 301).

¹³Chinese had, of course, always had a means of identifying statements as quotations. However exact references were never given since the educated reader would recognize references and allusions. References to orthodox classical authorities were often prefaced with statements such as “The Book of Odes says” or “The Master [Confucius] said.”

they felt their countrymen and women lacked.¹⁴ Thus the chemist Ren Hongjun writing in *Kexue* in 1917 linked the cultural and political conservatism of China with a lack of progress.¹⁵ In 1922 the biologist Bing Zhi (1886–1965) could speak on the connection between biology and women’s education, taking the education of women as a must and their training in biology as a prerequisite for the eradication of superstition. Likewise the meteorologist Zhu Kezhen (1890–1974) criticized the unscientific methods used in China to counteract problematic weather conditions. Instead of praying for rain or slaughtering animals, the proper way to deal with “disastrous droughts or floods is to prepare for them before they come, by reforestation, by water conservancy, and by the establishment of a large number of meteorological stations” (Wang 2002, 307–308). Cultural habits were impeding development. In the 1930s Hu Shi wrote of the difference between Western scientists who had worked with natural phenomena and Chinese scientists who had worked with books and words. The result was, according to Hu, that the Chinese “created three hundred years of book learning” while the West “created a new science and a new world.”¹⁶

These scholars were clearly not only trying to spread new ideas from the natural sciences; their concept of knowledge was directly linked to social progress and change that was conceived as linear and leading to improvement, to a place amongst the “civilized countries.” Ren Hongjun also made this clear when he linked advanced knowledge of the material world with an advanced “view of life.” Science, he felt, could affect the way people viewed and organized life and he saw proof of this in the course of history: the way people viewed life in the Middle Ages was quite different from the way it was now viewed in the light of the theory of evolution. This was evident in social progress,¹⁷ the social progress displayed in *other* parts of the world. A change in spirit, attitude and mode of learning, acting and writing in China would make similar progress possible in China. In fact, it seems that these scholars thought that such change would come inevitably with the changes they put forth: they had found the translation formula and could now catapult China into the laws of the “modern” universe.

This then, is the project within which one must view Chen Hengzhe’s writings and activities. On the surface its argumentation would seem sound enough; and yet we could also see her and her colleagues as the enthusiastic subjects of cultural imperialism. As Jean-Paul Sartre put it somewhat drastically in his 1961 preface to Franz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*:

¹⁴For a discussion of a similar project through popular literature, see (Gimpel 2001, especially chap. 2.).

¹⁵Cited in (Fan 2004, 18).

¹⁶See (Hu 1934, 70–71). Three hundred years refers here to the period from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Hu Shi is comparing intellectual endeavour in the East and the West in this period.

¹⁷See (Fan 2004, 19–20). See also Hu Shi’s comments on the problems involved in the fact that “the Chinese view of life has never encountered science face-to-face!”; Hu Shi, *Kexue yu renshengguan xu* (Preface to science and the view of life), cited in (Wang 2002, 308–309).

The European elite undertook to manufacture a native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them as with a red-hot iron, with the principles of Western culture, they stuffed their mouths full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to the teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home, whitewashed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brothers; they only echoed. From Paris, from London, from Amsterdam we would utter the words “Parthenon! Brotherhood!” and somewhere in Africa or Asia lips would open “...thenon! ...therhod!” It was the golden age.¹⁸

Shame and a sense of cultural inadequacy (an inadequate orthodoxy) had prepared the minds of individuals like Chen Hengzhe to react positively to the Western discourses with which they were confronted at every turn in the early twentieth century. The discourses of science and democracy, of modern education and equality, were clearly predicated on societies whose national cultural strength made them exemplars in China’s continuous and continuing search for national wealth and strength as well as global recognition. Chen, like others, was exposed to the new ideas through the press, schooling and word of mouth. At the same time foreign powers (in her case America) actively strove to train a Chinese national elite in their own image.

Like many other young people of the time, Chen Hengzhe read the newly available print media and was influenced by them and their presentations of the wonders of the modern Western world.¹⁹ Her perceptions of different and new possibilities in life were mediated on the one hand, as she herself explains, by such towering figures as Liang Qichao (1873–1929), influential scholar-journalist of the period and Tan Sitong (1865–1898), martyr of the ill-fated but ambitious Hundred Days of reform of 1898;²⁰ on the other hand, she was fascinated by both Madame Roland (1754–1793) and Joan of Arc (1412?–1431). However, the image that she chooses to use as the focus of her life and writings is that of the will to achieve and shape one’s own destiny (*zaoming*).²¹ The concept had, she writes, been passed on to her by her maternal uncle together with an awe of active Western women. She fittingly frames her autobiography with this image, opening her text with a fable comparing the difficult and winding passage of the Yangzi River through mountains and into the sea with the man-made, dull and non-self-

¹⁸Jean-Paul Sartre’s preface to Franz Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth* (Sartre 1961, 1).

¹⁹It is impossible to go into the details of the Chinese press and its introduction of “things foreign” at the time in such a brief article. For a first glimpse of some of issues dealt with, see, for instance (Gimpel 2001; Vittinghoff 2002; Lackner and Vittinghoff 2004) and the detailed bibliographies offered there.

²⁰See, especially, chapter 5 of (Chen n.d.). For basic biographical information on Liang Qichao, see (Boorman 1967, vol. II, 346–351). For Tan Sitong, see (Spence 1987, 51–53).

²¹See, for instance, her autobiographical essay *Wo youshi qixuede jingguo* (My early schooling) in (Chen 1995, 314–326, 315, 325; Chen n.d., 151).

determined course of the Grand Canal.²² Her life, as she saw it in hindsight, had been a difficult path to a self-determined and successful future because she, like the mighty Yangzi, had fought against all obstructions of tradition and ignorance and finally also managed to flow out into the Pacific Ocean (Chen n.d., 189) and freedom (albeit on the S.S. China), a young Chinese girl celebrating her new-found autonomy, even though, and with hindsight, the heteronomous nature of her project is clear: the very identity that she wished to forge for herself was predicated on an idea antithetical to traditional Chinese views of women including, as it did, free movement in public space, international travel, education, a career and authority. Her autobiography records the success of her project:

I was thirteen years old, a year in which I discovered myself, so to speak, and started on a journey of my own choice. It was found out later on that this journey was full of dangerous rapids, of inaccessible mountain paths, and of a thousand and one perils; yet it was a journey of my own choice, and through thick and thin, through sunshine and rain, I have stuck to it; with a conscious mind and a willing heart even till this day. (Chen n.d., 47)

The similarities with the difficult journey of the Yangzi River are impossible to ignore. And, like the Yangzi, Chen is saying “What I am is proof of my struggle with those mountains” (Chen n.d., 2).²³ Writing in the late 1920s or early 1930s, Chen here is authorizing herself, making of herself a success. Her journey had taken her out of Chinese territory; she had become a woman of the world with a message for the future of her country. It was a form of self-colonization; her life, at least her understanding and interpretation of it, was predicated on Western ideals—self-determination, female equality and independence. She was abandoning the past’s organizing principles of personal and politico-social life and relating to a “global” scheme of events.²⁴

Parallel to this readiness for self-colonization, this self-created space for development that entailed the devaluing of local Chinese ideals in favor of a new frame of reference, both the American and the Chinese governments provided physical and intellectual spaces that enabled the colonization of minds. One possibility was created by the Boxer Indemnity Fund. This fund, formally agreed upon in 1908, was to provide a generation of young and Western-oriented scholars with degrees from renowned American universities, and their first-hand knowledge of life outside China and of scholarly activity quite different from the traditional Chinese curriculum. Political leaders in China resisted the attempt of President

²²For the text in Chinese, see (Chen 2004, 1–3). For Chen’s own version of the text in English, see (Chen n.d., 1–4).

²³For the Chinese text, see (Chen 2004, 1).

²⁴The universal importance of the self-determined individual had been underscored, for instance, through the popularity and the frequent translation of Samuel Smiles’ *Self-Help* of 1859. See (Gimpel 2001, 127–128).

Roosevelt's government to impose the condition that the indemnity funds be allocated purely for educational activities. They sensed that this was an all-out attack on Chinese values, an attempt to further American political and economic efforts in China and create an educated class indebted to American society and open to American demands. As the president of the University of Illinois put it in a memorandum at the time, the educational use of the funds would lead to "the intellectual and spiritual domination of its [China's] leaders." The American Third Assistant Secretary of State, Huntington Wilson, commented in 1907 that the return of the indemnity funds "should be used to make China do some of the things we want. Otherwise I feel her gratitude would be quite empty."²⁵ Thus it is clear that the return of these funds, the amount of which had, from the beginning, been purposely wrongly calculated by the American government,²⁶ although still celebrated (as was certainly intended) in many a history textbook as a generous act of the United States towards China, was a calculated act of aggression, an attempt at intellectual colonization and control. Of course, it offered a broadening of mental and intellectual horizons positively wished for by a good number of young Chinese men and women at the time, but it also led to a situation where young men and women could no longer conceive of solutions to Chinese problems that could be taken from within their own culture.

Ironically enough, other scholarships for American universities were available through Chinese government grants, many of which appear to have been financed by funds dedicated to those who had contributed to the 1911 "revolution" and were to be trained as experts in various field. These government grants financed the foreign education of Chen's husband-to-be and close associate, Ren Hongjun (1886–1961).²⁷ Ren travelled to America, studied chemistry and was central in setting up the Science Society there.²⁸ He later returned to China to occupy positions vital to the development of scientific research and education. The Boxer Indemnity Fund paid for Chen Hengzhe's long wished-for "modern education." Not only did she subsequently become the first female professor of Western history at the prestigious Beijing University in 1920, she also compiled textbooks on Western history for the new national school system, textbooks that incorporated the scientific spirit her husband also ardently promoted.

²⁵Both quotations are taken from (Hunt 1972). The quotations are on p. 550 and p. 549 respectively.

²⁶See (Hunt 1972) for a detailed discussion of the negotiations and the background to the Boxer Indemnity Fund remission.

²⁷For Ren's description of the problems involved in getting the grant, see (Fan and Zhang 2002, 712–713).

²⁸The nine founding members included seven Boxer and two non-Boxer fellows (Ren Hongjun and Yang Xingfo).

17.3 The Influences on Writing

Chen's history textbooks were commissioned for a series published by the powerful Commercial Press of Shanghai under the auspices of another ex-student in the United States, He Bingsong (1890–1946)²⁹ and at the invitation of the even weightier scholar, publisher and editor Wang Yunwu (1888–1979).³⁰ He Bingsong's career illustrates well the powerful networks that had been built up between the students in America and how they continued to sit at the center of knowledge dissemination when they returned to China. After returning home in 1917, he was, among other things, inspector of schools in Zhejiang province, professor of history at Beijing University, head of the English department at Beijing Higher Normal School. In 1924 he headed the committee for the history sections of the Commercial Press's encyclopaedia. From 1927 he was responsible for the influential education journal *Jiaoyu zazhi*. Chen herself was also benefitting from these close networks: Cai Yuanpei had offered her the job at Beijing University. Cai had been the Minister of Education in the early years of the Republic and was now head of the nation's leading university. He had worked and spoken with Chen's husband prior to Ren Hongjun's period of study in the United States.³¹

On her arrival back in China then in 1920, Chen, like others, was thoroughly ensconced in the institutions of change. We cannot reconstruct her lectures at Peking University, but we do still have two of her important contributions to a new understanding and dissemination of the course of history. On the one hand there is her two-volume *History of the West* (*Xiyang shi*) of 1924 and 1926 respectively, the first such publication by a Chinese historian and covering the history of the West from prehistory to the First World War; on the other we still have her *Short History of the European Renaissance* (*Ouzhou wenyi fuxing xiaoshi*) of 1930.³²

In the original foreword to her *History of the West*, Chen made it clear from the beginning that her task as an historian was to provide explanations and to improve the materials available in Chinese for the study of Western history. In her "Introductory Remarks" to the books, she elaborated a little:

Even if this is a textbook for higher middle schools, the author's aim is also to provide general knowledge of Western history for all people.

She wished "to train the reader's ability to analyze all kinds of phenomena in contemporary society."³³ Finally her main aim was to "aid young people in developing

²⁹See (Wang 2001, 70–73).

³⁰See the Foreword to *History of the West* in (Chen 2007, 3). For more information on Wang Yunwu, see (Boorman 1967, vol. III, 400–402).

³¹See Ren Hongjun's autobiographical sketch in (Fan and Zhang 2002, 712).

³²Chen's *History of the West* has recently been republished in one volume (Chen 2007). The *Short History of the European Renaissance* (Chen 1930) has not been republished. For the present paper I have used a reprint of 1930 published in the series *Wanyou wenku* (Universal library) edited by Wang Yunwu. The author's preface to the text is dated 14th year of the Republic, i.e. 1925.

³³See (Chen 2007, 3, 5).

an international perspective so as to reduce misunderstandings among people and increase their comprehension of each other.”³⁴ In other words, her *History of the West* aimed to take students and general readers out into the world and to guide their understanding of it. Globalization—in the present sense of the inclusion of China in the world, of making China into a (respected) part of the globe—lies at the heart of her agenda. She underscored this in the closing words of her *History of the West*, and it is here that science, history, global inclusion and world development go hand in hand. In her understanding of the history of “cultural Europe,” a term that includes “Europeanized America,”³⁵ the greatest effect of the development of science since the Renaissance had been the globalization (literally the “worldization” *shijiehua*) of European history, making European culture the common property of the world and enabling modern culture (*jindai de wenhua*) to open up completely new terrain (*xin xingshi*).³⁶ Here “modern culture” would appear to be synonymous with the culture emanating from the trajectory of Western history. She does not ignore the fact that both politics and capital have been able to misuse this phenomenon in the pursuit of selfish interest in the form of nationalism and imperialism, which, as she had insisted time and again in the course of her *History of the West*, ultimately lead to war, but she still preaches internationalism (*guoji zhuyi*), which would culminate in mutual understanding in the world and a time when each nation’s culture would become the common property of the world. And, she warns, it will be the fight between nationalism and internationalism that will seal the fate of mankind in the future.³⁷ Global inclusion in her day involved the spread of knowledge of Western history; in the future, and in the form of internationalism, it would include an understanding of the cultures of the world.

It was clearly her intention to make sure that Chinese readers were aware of this “common property of the world” that constituted “modern culture” so that they could gauge the workings of the contemporary Chinese situation. It is also clear that, for her, the history of the world hinged on the important era of the European Renaissance,³⁸ and it is in her short fifty-page discussion and introduction of the European Renaissance of 1930 that we find most clearly expressed the principles by which she believed history “worked” and how China could align itself with these principles and become a part of “world history.” Traditional Chinese views of history were to be devalued and replaced by evolutionary theory and the idea of progress in history. The past was now required to be linked with the

³⁴See (Chen 2007, 6).

³⁵See (Chen 2007, 7). In fact Chen had to admit that she had no room to include American history in her book. She planned an extra publication dealing with America.

³⁶See (Chen 2007, 363).

³⁷See (Chen 2007, 364).

³⁸Renaissance, of course, was altogether an important term at the time. China was to be renewed and refurbished with a viable orthodoxy. See also Hu Shi’s series of lectures on China from the 1930s collected under the title *The Chinese Renaissance*. The preface to the collection of lectures states that the title of the publication was “selected by him expressly to characterize the nature of the cultural transformation described” (Hu 1934, vii).

present. China had every possibility of travelling the same road to modernity as all other countries had taken.

Chen's *Short History of the European Renaissance* was published in 1930 by the Commercial Press. The choice of topic alone is telling. For Chen, the Renaissance was a return to order after the chaos of the Middle Ages; it was an entry into the light after a period of darkness; it was the emergence of man and his individuality, a turning away from the other-worldly concerns of the past and a focus on the here and now. This process, starkly simplified here, can, she wrote, be a "shortcut to a new culture," one that ushers in, among other things, the seeds of a spirit of investigation, the development of textual criticism, the setting up of libraries and academies, the systematic reform of education and the rise of women scholars able to interact freely with men. These *were* the issues at the center of the Science Society and its members who were worried that the "force of science" might not be "enough to sweep away the evil spirit that spreads all over the country." It underscored the contemporary issues that occupied these individuals as students and as professionals: women's emancipation and professions, the individual and his/her ability (given the right attitude to life) to create his/her own destiny, textual correctness in content and form, reform of educational curricula and the provision of information to the general public. In other words, this was political and social reform hand in hand with new frames of reference.

Not only the book's choice of topics reflects the concerns of those wishing to change the thought patterns of their fellow countrymen; the principles framing the interpretation of history reflect the way in which global trends could be brought to China, how the "common property of the world" was to be understood. On numerous occasions in the text, Chen introduces her readers to what, for the sake of simplification, I shall call universal "laws of history." These suggest to the reader that the developments she has traced through European history are applicable to other places (i.e. China). Thus, for instance, a new, modern culture "naturally" grew out of a scholarly reconsideration of one's own ancient culture. As she put it, "very soon new sprouts begin to form on old roots, and the new is ushered in" and, she added, this was a "common phenomenon" when a new culture is born as long as one rejects the *mode of thinking* that had ruled the past.

Another "natural law" illustrated through the Renaissance, according to Chen, was the revival of the true human spirit. Human reason, she explained, was a faculty that may be stymied for a while, but cannot be kept down forever. It was, she asserts in complete agreement with Cai Yuanpei, the spirit that rejected the superstition with which religion had (mis)guided humanity in the past. Finally, in the conclusion to her text, she summarized three ages in the life of any important historical development. In Chen's words, these are "the age of budding; the age of blossoming; the age of decline." What we have here is something simple that students can learn and something that they can apply to all events and developments in history. And China, coming out of the dark warlord period, could only be seen as positioned on the threshold of "the age of budding"!

The impression of a rule underlying historical and national development is further confirmed if we take into consideration the language in which Chen very often couches her descriptions and explanations. It is the language of the natural sciences and of the inevitability of seasonal change and growth and decline. She likens historical phenomena to the natural growth of sprouts, to the blossoming of trees, to the ripening of fruit and the falling of leaves, all at the right season. It is an affirmation of the complementary trajectories of the natural world and its inhabitants. Here, it is true, she is utilizing a common discourse in the writing of Chinese history, but as Arthur Wright has observed in connection with traditional Chinese views of history:

On the surface this is a life-cycle analogy: polities, like men, have their periods of birth, growth, maturity, senescence, and death. Yet these successive phases were never seen as the product of natural law or blind fate. The dynamic behind them was moral and the lessons to be drawn from the study of dynastic rise and fall were moral lessons. (Wright 1965, 3)

Although we cannot exclude a certain moral component to Chen's historiography (she was preaching against war), her natural analogies, despite their classical roots, entail both reference to scientific findings and research and progression towards a new and improved human condition: internationalism and peace.³⁹ It can hardly surprise us that old and new discourse merge in this transitional era. Chen's text, however, was conceived of as new and was certainly in line with the recent discussions on a new study of history that had been taking place at Beijing University.⁴⁰ The text itself is written in a clear, non-classical language with modern punctuation and with footnotes.

This is an evolutionist history, if you will, in that it believes in the possibility of progress to a better world, even while it fears that the baser human instincts could gain the upper hand through war and exploitation. Evolutionary theory, something one might well term a widespread virus at the time, was one of the governing principles of her history writing and of the efforts of her natural scientist colleagues. It also influenced the manner in which she and her colleagues envisaged the cementing of the path to global inclusion and strength for China: ideas and institutions that had (apparently) been instrumental and necessary in the creation of strong nations throughout the world (scientific societies, scholarly and popular journals, publishing houses, libraries, national schools and universities, etc.) figured prominently in all their efforts and their plans for strengthening their country through a change of mental paradigm. The new (non-Chinese) study and analysis of history could illustrate general principles of global developments and aid in gearing the minds of China's youth to a different developmental trajectory

³⁹References to scientific research and its results are frequent particularly in Chen's *History of the West*.

⁴⁰For a discussion of the debates, see (Sang 2008, 134–136).

in their country. Science could give them the tools for implementing the required changes, and a recognition of their individual capacities—that the new scientific view of life would provide—would empower them mentally for the tasks.

But it was not only in her history texts that universal principles were incorporated and illustrated. As we have seen, her autobiography made it clear that the modern individual took on active responsibility for his or her own life (*zaoming*) and this principle also underlies her fable “The Grand Canal and the Yangzi River.” It is recognizable also in the biographies she includes in her prose works. Just as the individual statement had taken on more significance through the use of quotation marks, individual lives incorporating the new universally applicable orthodoxy of success were now also considered important. In 1930 Hu Shi could write that “biography is the least developed branch of Chinese literature,”⁴¹ but it was nothing new to write biographies of positive or negative historical figures. Chinese dynastic histories regularly included them. However, as noted many years ago, traditionally “[t]he ultimate purpose of biography was to instruct officials in orthodoxy, not to present rounded portraits of fallible human beings” (Boorman 1962, 453). This pattern was changed in the early twentieth century when the emphasis was placed on “the development of individual potential as a valid end in itself” (Boorman 1962, 454). In other words, the individual was being instructed in global orthodoxy. The significance of lives was calibrated differently; the exemplars and their target groups had changed, even though the mechanisms had not! Particular interest was shown in foreigners who were “founders of new nations or new ‘isms’ ” as well as in revolutionary Chinese leaders of the “modern” kind.⁴²

Chen Hengzhe’s collected prose contains biographies of a number of exceptional women: Madame Curie; Jane Adams; a biography of her aunt whose personal strength and industry were a source of inspiration to her; her own autobiography; Abelard and Eloise; Wilfrid Wilson Gibson; Dante and Petrarch.⁴³ Strange bedfellows, one might believe, but they all share characteristics that she and her fellow scholars, educators and scientists emphasized: a strong will, a spirit of inquiry, a close connection with the real world, humanism and poetry.⁴⁴

Chen’s history books and some of her prose were aimed to take students and general readers out into the world; but her aim was also to bring the world to an understanding of China. This aspect of her globalizing activities, one that resonates with her desire for internationalism and recognition of all the cultures of the world, can only be mentioned very briefly here, but she and her associates not only presented and represented the global for a Chinese audience; they also

⁴¹Cited in (Howard 1962, 465).

⁴²See (Howard 1962, 467).

⁴³See (Chen 1995, 275–363).

⁴⁴Almost all of the individuals discussed here wrote and published poetry themselves. Poetry, and in particular poetry in the vernacular, was also a central issue in reforming the nation. Hu Shi conducted the first experiments in vernacular poetry and Chen Hengzhe has been credited as having written the first Chinese short story in the vernacular. For a discussion of the “literary revolution,” see (Chow 1960, 269–288) and *passim*. See also (Idema and Haft 1997, 259–266).

presented and represented China in the global arena. On four occasions between 1927 and 1933, she represented China at the meetings of the Institute of Pacific Relations, an organization that dated back to 1919.⁴⁵ One author chronicling the institute's activities in fact mentions that a volume of essays edited by Chen after the roundtable meeting in Kyoto in 1929, the *Symposium on Chinese Culture* (Zen 1931),⁴⁶ was still being used as a university text in America in the 1980s! (Hooper 1988, 106) Moreover, the contributors to the book read very much like a Who's Who of the Science Society and of students who had studied abroad in America or Britain. Thus Hu Shi wrote on religion, philosophy and literature, Ren Hongjun on science. Bing Zhi contributed a chapter on biological science. The book ends with Chen Hengzhe's "Summary of China's Cultural Problems." As the detailed list of contributors at the beginning shows, all of them occupied high positions in either government or education.

17.4 Conclusions

Chen Hengzhe and her associates were to become the national representatives of their new global associations and ideas. They were to become professors at prestigious universities and start new university departments and research centers, strengthening the fabric of the nation and strengthening China's national standing in the global arena. It was their texts that explained the world to China and China to the world and they were leaders in almost all the disciplines of a university system that no longer concentrated on the canonical texts of a central tradition. They had relegated that tradition to the sphere of the old. They had changed its forms of organization, its contents, its modes of linguistic presentation and manner of writing. They could do this at least until 1949 because in theory, and in partial practice, there was a developing system of reform at almost all levels of society. This was a national system also predicated on ideas perceived as universally relevant to good governance: a democratic parliamentary system. The demise, or severe restriction, of their influence was due not so much to the Japanese invasion of China or the corruption and incompetence of the Nationalist government, but to a changed regime after 1949.

All of these individuals were, to greater and lesser degrees, prone to the "intellectual and spiritual domination" so clearly targeted by educational and political circles in America, but none of them would have been such an enthusiastic victim of this domination if the historical situation of China had been a different one. Chinese intellectuals, in between orthodoxies, were caught up in the pursuit of solutions to the pressing problems of their country. They had been humiliated by the international community. Now they sought ways for themselves and their countrymen to join that same community. Karl Marx is much quoted as saying

⁴⁵For a fascinating summary of the history and the significance of this Institute, see (Hooper 1988, 98–121).

⁴⁶The book was originally published in 1931.

that shame is a revolutionary sentiment,⁴⁷ and it would not seem to be an exaggeration to say that what Chen Hengzhe and her associates were doing had all the makings of a revolutionary project: the changes in self-perception and self-definition that were to ensue through their work and their writing were intended to change and have changed China for good. The concepts and ideas they took to China have, indeed, had what Walter Benjamin termed an “afterlife,”⁴⁸ an existence and interpretation that may be quite separate from their origins and that depends on the perceived needs of the culture processing them at any given historical moment. Traditional (local) paradigms of national organization at all levels were devalued and replaced by international/global ideas and institutions. The individual gained a higher status (at least until 1949); the idea of science as a universally valid principle never left China again; universities on Western models became the norm and their curricula replaced Chinese learning with “universal” knowledge. In a post-colonial world it is hard not to look askance at the trajectories of individuals such as Chen Hengzhe; it is (or ought to be) difficult to swallow Chen’s claims about the universality and global validity of the European experience and European knowledge. However, she and others like her inhabited an historically contingent space that made them into translated and translating individuals. It was a zone that made them the *object* of translation: they were no longer Chinese in the sense that Chinese intellectuals had been some fifty years earlier. Yet it was also a zone that made them the agents of an act of translating others. They were the victims of cultural imperialism; they were the protagonists in a process of self-colonization and the self-appointed and often self-important guides to a better future for China as a globally recognized player. They were the agents of a highly complex process of transculturation. They were on a mission to save the people, but often without consulting them, and they took their authority from the fact that they had studied abroad. This was their hubris. However, as Mao Zedong’s contemporaneous and eventually stronger project of replacing local Chinese conditions with the universal ideological principles of socialism also shows, saviors are rarely modest!

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⁴⁷Cited, for example, in Jean-Paul Sartre’s “Preface” to Fanon’s *Wretched of the Earth*, see <http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/1961/preface.htm>.

⁴⁸Benjamin was, of course, writing about translation in a more narrow sense, but his idea of the afterlife is equally applicable to the cultural translation project of bringing China into a global arena. See (Benjamin 2002, 16).

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