

University of Groningen

## The Making of the New Culture Movement : A Discursive History

Kuo, Ya-pei

*Published in:*  
 Twentieth-Century China

*DOI:*  
[10.1353/tcc.2017.0007](https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2017.0007)

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*  
 Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*  
 2017

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Kuo, Y. (2017). The Making of the New Culture Movement : A Discursive History. *Twentieth-Century China*, 42(1), 52-71. <https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2017.0007>

### Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

### Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*



PROJECT MUSE®

---

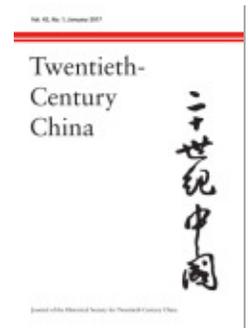
## The Making of The New Culture Movement: A Discursive History

Ya-pei Kuo

Twentieth-Century China, Volume 42, Number 1, January 2017, pp. 52-71  
(Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/tcc.2017.0007>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/649072>

# THE MAKING OF THE NEW CULTURE MOVEMENT: A DISCURSIVE HISTORY

YA-PEI KUO

*University of Groningen, The Netherlands*

This article argues that the “New Culture movement” as represented in current historiography was by and large constructed from 1923 to 1924. *Wenhua yundong* (cultural movement) was originally a common phrase referring to the post-May Fourth awakening to the power of modern mass communication. *Xin wenhua yundong* (New Culture movement) as a proper noun first emerged in Chen Duxiu’s polemics against alternative visions of cultural modernity in 1920. Propagandists of the Chinese Communist Party later, in 1923, turned Chen’s vision of cultural reform into a historical event of the late 1910s. Invested with an exaggerated sense of uniqueness and historicity, “Xin wenhua yundong” was cast as the sole source of reformist energy in the early Republic and the native precursor of China’s revolution. This mythological representation displaced collective memories of uncertainty and ambiguity in the years after World War I, and it has continued to shape understandings of China’s modern history.

KEYWORDS: Chen Duxiu, Deng Zhongxia, Liang Shumin, New Culture movement, Qu Qiubai, Research Clique, *wenhua yundong*

In modern Chinese history, the New Culture movement (新文化運動 *Xin wenhua yundong*) occupies an iconic place. A simple mention of it, regardless of the context, conjures up the explosive imagery of ideological radicalism that shot through the history of the nation’s long twentieth century: a full-scale revolt against all that was Chinese and traditional. As an icon, the movement is routinely treated as a thing in itself, with a clear date of birth and coherent content. The founding in 1915 of *Youth Magazine* (青年雜誌 *Qingnian zazhi*), later titled *New Youth* (新青年 *Xin qingnian*), marks its commencement. Chen Duxiu’s early writings in the pages of the journal, such as “To Youth” (敬告青年 “Jinggao qingnian”), “1916” (一九一六年 “Yijiuyiliu nian”), and “Our Final Realization” (吾人最後之覺悟 “Wuren zuihou zhi juewu”), were manifestos that furnished the movement with a canon, presaging how it would unfold. Some of the most celebrated names in modern Chinese history are linked together through it. Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Lu Xun, Ba Jin, Fu Sinian (傅斯年 1896–1950), Luo Jialun (羅家倫 1897–1969), and Wu Yu (吳虞 1872–1949),

who might not have worked side by side, are remembered as soldiers for the same cause. Their undertakings and enunciations—the onslaught on Confucian morals, the advocacy of vernacular literature, the mass demonstrations against the Treaty of Versailles—in this historiography gain broader meanings and are strung together to form a larger process.

The assumption that the New Culture movement shaped the events of the late 1910s and early 1920s often means ridding other events of their own significance. How May Fourth is treated in mainstream historiography is an example. In most historical narratives, May Fourth, the first incident of mass nationalism in modern China, gains historical meaning primarily through its close association with the New Culture movement. Chow Tse-tung's classic study of the period, *The May Fourth Movement*, thus presents the New Culture movement as the inspiration for the May Fourth incident.<sup>1</sup> Vera Schwarcz's *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* emphasizes the intergenerational collaborations between the major proponents of New Culture and the students who organized the May Fourth protests.<sup>2</sup> Yeh Wen-hsin, in a case study of activities in Zhejiang Province, suggests that the national student movement in the wake of the May Fourth demonstrations created a broader stage for the ideas of the New Culture movement.<sup>3</sup> Chinese historian Wang Hui (汪暉), in his monumental work *The Rise of Modern Chinese Thought* (現代中國思想的興起 *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi*), also argues that the May Fourth/New Culture movement gave the era its "consistency in outlook."<sup>4</sup> These scholars disagree on the nature of the historical connections between the New Culture movement and the May Fourth incident, but they agree on viewing them as belonging to one historical process.<sup>5</sup>

In spite of the overwhelming evidence of 1919's derailing effect on the aspirations of *New Youth*, the majority of historical works continue to see the history of the post-May

1 Chow Tse-tung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 171.

2 Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California, 1986), 55–93.

3 Wen-hsin Yeh, *Provincial Passages: Culture, Space, and the Origins of Chinese Communism* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), 151–58.

4 Wang Hui, *Xiandai Zhongguo sixiang de xingqi* [The rise of modern Chinese thought] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 2004), 1204–8. Wang's detailed argument for the "consistency in outlook" can be found in Wang Hui, "Yuyan yu weiji: Zhongguo xiandai sixiang zhong de 'Wusi' qimeng yundong" [Prophecy and crisis: the "May Fourth" movement of enlightenment in modern Chinese thought], pts. 1 and 2, *Wenxue pinglun*, no. 3 (1989): 17–25; no. 4 (1989): 35–86.

5 Not all scholars have accepted this construction of one May Fourth/New Culture movement. Allen Fung analyzed the May Fourth incident in its own context in his "Reinterpreting the Events of May Fourth: Power and Politics in Mid-1919," *Papers on Chinese History* 2 (Spring 1993): 54–77. Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China's Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 18, explicitly argued that their origins were two quite separate events. Chen Pingyuan also challenged the metanarrative by examining divergent personal memories of the May Fourth incident. See Chen Pingyuan, "Yi chang youxing: Wusi de linglei xushu" [One parade: the alternative narratives of May Fourth], in Chen Pingyuan, *Chumo lishi yu jinru wu si: yi chang youxing, yi fen zazhi, yi ben shiji* [Touching history and entering May Fourth: one parade, one magazine, and one collection of poetry] (Taipei: Eryu wenhua, 2003), 13–59.

Fourth<sup>6</sup> years in terms of the consummation of the New Culture movement. The tension between the New Tide (新潮 Xinchao) and New Youth groups at Beijing University,<sup>7</sup> the discord between political activism and scholarly commitment expressed in the “question vs. ism” debate,<sup>8</sup> the splintering of the New Youth group over Bolshevism’s suitability in China, and the bitter struggle between vernacular writers in the “literary realm”<sup>9</sup> have been known to the field for decades. Historian Zhang Qing (章清) thus characterized the early 1920s as a time of profound intellectual divisions.<sup>10</sup> Literary scholar Leo Ou-fan Lee also highlighted the New Culture movement’s lack of completion, which, according to him, succeeded in delineating the contours of a new China but failed to do much to fill in the outline.<sup>11</sup> Yet, the metanarrative of one cohesive movement ignited by *New Youth* continues to dominate historical memories. The internal divisions are not seen as presenting a threat to the movement’s integrity because of two deeply entrenched assumptions. The first is the assumption of a deep intellectual and social chasm between the insiders and outsiders of the movement. The chasm is often assumed to be so deep, that, on its face, the internal discords are relatively unimportant. Belief in the movement’s cohesion is furthermore bolstered by an assumption of its abstract nature: proponents of the New Culture might have had clashing personalities, opinions, and interests, yet they were bound together through a shared subscription to a handful of creeds. In other words, disagreements among elements within the movement were inconsequential, as long as all were united at a higher and more abstract level.

Analyzing the discursive history of *xin wenhua yundong* (新文化運動 new cultural movement) in the years after the First World War, this article situates the establishment of the New Culture movement’s iconic status in the cultural politics of the mid-1920s. I argue that the New Culture movement, with clear fault lines against all nonsupporters and a stress upon ideological cohesion, was constructed in 1923–1924, when the young Chinese Communist Party (CCP) formulated its propaganda strategy for the purpose of

6 In this article, I use “post–May Fourth” to mean “after the May Fourth incident,” in distinction from the alternative use of it to mean “after the May Fourth period.”

7 Schwarcz, *Chinese Enlightenment*, 61–67. Highlighting the student generation’s differences—in educational experience and self-expectation—from their teachers at Beida in 1919, Schwarcz contended that events before and after the May Fourth incident provided opportunities for mutual understanding and thus collaboration.

8 Lin Yü-sheng, “‘Wenti yu zhuyi’ bianlun de lishi yiyi” [The debate concerning the question of “problem versus isms” of 1919 and its historical implications], *Ershiyi shiji* [The twenty-first century] 8 (December 1991): 15–20.

9 Leo Ou-fan Lee, *The Romantic Generation of Modern Chinese Writers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1973), 3–27; Michel Hockx, “Playing the Field: Aspects of Chinese Literary Life in the 1920s,” in Michel Hockx, ed., *The Literary Field of Twentieth-Century China* (Richmond, UK: Curzon, 1999), 61–78.

10 Zhang Qing, “Yijiuerling niandai: sixiangjie de fenlie yu Zhongguo shehui de chongzu” [The 1920s: the division of the intellectual circle and the reorganization of Chinese society], in Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan, Minguo shi shi, and Sichuan shifan daxue lishi wenhua xueyuan, eds., *Yijiuerling niandai de Zhongguo* [China in the 1920s] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue yuan, 2005), 383–402.

11 Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Incomplete Modernity: Rethinking the May Fourth Intellectual Project,” in Milena Doleželová-Velingerová, Oldřich Král, and Graham Sanders, eds., *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China’s May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2001), 31–65.

the United Front. Before this moment, the words *xin wenhua yundong* had been in wide circulation as a common phrase, which, in most contexts, connoted merely “a cultural movement that is new.” Men of letters used this term loosely in their discussions of how the new means of mass communication, such as print material, museums, and schools, could be deployed. Chen Duxiu in 1920 appropriated the phrase *xin wenhua yundong* and reinvented it as a proper noun for his specific vision of cultural reform. Chen’s vision was later historicized by CCP propagandists, such as Qu Qiubai (瞿秋白 1899–1935) and Deng Zhongxia (鄧中夏 1894–1933), and read back to the late 1910s. The New Culture movement, in this way, became a monument in the early Republic’s intellectual development and a token of China’s indigenous impulse toward revolution.

### WENHUA YUNDONG AS A COMMON NOUN PHRASE, 1919

*Wenhua yundong* (文化運動 cultural movement) was one of the most frequently invoked phrases in China’s public domain in the years after the First World War. A search of the largest database of Chinese periodicals, *Chinese Periodical Full-Text Database, 1911–1949*,<sup>12</sup> yields the following results. Between 1911 and 1930, there were in total 196 periodical essays with the noun phrase *wenhua yundong* in their titles. None of them occurred before 1919. The first essay that contained *wenhua yundong* in its title appeared in August 1919. The number quickly grew from 7 in late 1919 to 98 in 1920, and then dropped to 23 in 1921 and 10 in 1922. Going beyond the titles of journal articles, one also finds the phrase in public enunciations. In July 1919, the Young China Study Association (少年中國學會 Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui),<sup>13</sup> for example, announced in the first issue of its organ, *Young China* (少年中國 *Shaonian Zhongguo*), that “to generate a cultural movement” was a primary mission of the journal and, by extension, of the association.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, Sun Yat-sen referred to the on-going *xin wenhua yundong* as one of his main inspirations when announcing his plan for a party-owned printing house in January 1920.<sup>15</sup>

Realization of the modern mass media’s possible social impact was central to the meaning of the term at this stage. The printing of journals and newspapers represented

12 *Minguo shiqi qikan ziliao* [Chinese periodical full-text database, 1911–1949], accessed March 31, 2015, [http://www.cnbkys.com/shlib\\_tsd/product/detail.do?productCatId=6](http://www.cnbkys.com/shlib_tsd/product/detail.do?productCatId=6).

13 The Young China Study Association was one of the fastest growing organizations in 1919–1920. After its founding, it quickly built a national network of branches and recruited a large number of student members in various provinces. Before it ceased to function in 1924, its members included future CCP leaders such as Li Dazhao, Mao Zedong, and Yun Daiying (1895–1931), as well as founders of the Youth China Party such as Li Huang (1895–1991), Zeng Qi (1892–1951), and Zou Shunsheng (1893–1969). See “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui” [Young China Study Association], in Zhang Yunhou, Yin Xuyi, and Hong Qingxiang, eds., *Wusi shiqi de shetuan* [Societies of the May Fourth period] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1979), vol. 1, 211–572.

14 “Shaonian Zhongguo yuekan de xuanyan” [Announcement of the monthly *Young China*], in Zhu Weizheng, comp., *Zhongguo xiandai sixiang shi jianbian* [Abridged collection of primary sources in modern Chinese intellectual history] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1982), vol. 1, 447.

15 Sun Yat-sen, “Zhi haiwai Guomindang tongzhi han” [Letter to overseas comrades of the Nationalist Party], *Sun Zhongshan quanji* [Complete works of Sun Yat-sen] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1985), vol. 5, 209–10.

the most significant form. Wang Qingni (王晴霓 dates unknown), the editor of *Dawn* (曙光 *Shuguang*), for example, published an editorial piece in December 1919 complaining about the poor business practices of China's printing houses and publishers. Issues such as frequent breaches of contract and poor quality, according to Wang, made them the "largest obstruction for the cultural movement."<sup>16</sup> In a piece like this, *wenhua yundong* was treated offhandedly as a synonym of print media, revealing print's centrality in the conception. In the same vein, Sun Yat-sen's comments on the movement also highlighted the "diverse new publications hosted by the enthusiastic youth" as its trademark.<sup>17</sup>

Although print material figured as the most prominent referent, the scope of the (new) cultural movement was not limited to that. Wang Chichang (王熾昌 dates unknown), a student of Nanjing Higher Normal School, for example, used the term more inclusively. In an essay published in December 1919 in *Young Society* (少年社會 *Shaonian shehui*), a weekly produced by the Nanjing branch of Young China Study Association, he listed three activities as the primary forms of the cultural movement: compulsory education, print media, and lecturing in the open. According to him, all three of these activities needed to be extended beyond urban centers and student circles, so the movement would have broader social impact.<sup>18</sup> Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868–1940), the president of Beijing University, in his "A Cultural Movement Cannot Leave Out Aesthetic Education" (文化運動不要忘了美育 "Wenhua yundong buyao wang le meiyu") published in Beijing's *Morning Post* (晨報 *Chenbao*) in January 1920, also called for an expansion beyond print material to incorporate arts schools and other institutions, such as museums and concert halls, into the movement.<sup>19</sup>

In many contexts, the term's meaning rested on the conceptual demarcation between the cultural, the social, and the political as mutually autonomous realms of activity. An enunciation of full commitment to *wenhua yundong* often implied a withdrawal from other realms, especially that of politics. The case of the Young China Study Association was representative. Upon the group's formation in 1918, reform through nonpolitical actions was one of the common aspirations among the founding members, such as Li Huang (李璜 1895–1991) and Zong Baihua (宗白華 1897–1986).<sup>20</sup> Wang Guangqi (王光祈 1892–1936), the chief editor of *Young China*, in narrating the creation of the association in July 1919, listed education, publication, journalism, and the reform of individuals as its members' preferred methods of transforming China. Wang made it clear: as a study group, Young China would act differently from a political party and would firmly abstain from offering any concrete political and economic opinions.<sup>21</sup> Wang later attempted to

16 Wang Qingni, "Luantan" [Messy talk], *Shuguang* [Twilight] 1, no. 2 (1919): 59–60.

17 Sun, "Zhi haiwai," 210.

18 Wang Chichang, "Wenhua yundong de kuozhang gen xiuzheng" [Expansion and rectification of the cultural movement], *Shaonian shehui* [Young society] 2 (December 1919): 3–8.

19 Cai Yuanpei, "Wenhua yundong buyao wang le meiyu" [A cultural movement cannot leave out aesthetic education], in *Cai Yuanpei quanji* [The complete works of Cai Yuanpei] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997), vol. 3, 739–40.

20 Zhang Shaopeng, "Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui de zongzhi yanbian" [Evolution of the Young China Study Association's mission], *Shehui kexue luntan*, no. 7 (2012): 198.

21 Wang Guangqi, "'Shaonian Zhongguo' zhi chuangzao" [The creation of *Young China*], in *Wang Guangqi wenji* [Works of Wang Guangqi] (Chengdu: Bashu shudian, 2009), vol. 4, 52.

make this initial consensus into an explicit policy. In his memorandum for the annual meeting in Nanjing in 1921, Wang argued that because “to oppose political activities had long been the association’s principle,” in the future, whoever deviated from this principle should have his/her membership suspended.<sup>22</sup> This strong position against any form of political activism ignited a heated debate at the Nanjing meeting and heralded the final split of the group.<sup>23</sup>

Most comments on *wenhua yundong* had a reformist undertone. The idea of societal transformation through individual awakening constituted a shared aspiration among proponents. Wang Chichang deliberately excluded a host of newspapers and magazines that had large readerships in urban areas from the scope of the cultural movement, in spite of their modern format and language. To him, only those that strove “to introduce the culture of the world, discuss the methods of actively improving society, and provide spiritual resources and pragmatic guidance for educated individuals” counted as part of the movement.<sup>24</sup> Luo Jialun, then a student at Beijing University, took a similar position. An active leader in the May Fourth event, Luo published an assessment of the student movement in *New Tide* in 1920. Toward the end of this long piece, he made a number of suggestions for future action and pointed to the cultural movement as “the most fundamental.”<sup>25</sup> Luo equated the cultural movement to a “revolution in thought” (思想革命 *sixiang geming*) and took it to be “the foundation for all other changes.”<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Cai Yuanpei, in his piece on aesthetic education, emphasized the instillation of energetic and noble feelings in all citizens. In addition to professionalization of art education, Cai suggested that an aesthetic sense should be injected into China’s public spaces. Parks, architecture, and even street posters ought all to be designed by professionals, he wrote, so the lives of “citizens regardless of their social strata” would all be enriched through contact with the arts.<sup>27</sup>

Because of the assumed reformist orientation and the recentness of the awareness, *wenhua yundong* often appeared with the prefix “new” (新 *xin*).<sup>28</sup> Yet, *xin wenhua yundong* in late 1919 and early 1920 apparently had the same referent as *wenhua yundong*. Among the seven 1919 pieces containing *wenhua yundong* in their titles that can be

22 Wang Guangqi, “Dui jinnian Nanjing dahui de tiyi” [Suggestions for the meeting in Nanjing this year], in *Wang Guangqi wenji*, 116.

23 Zhang Shaopeng, “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui,” 198–204.

24 Wang Chichang, “Wenhua yundong,” 6–7.

25 Luo Jialun, “Yinian lai women xuesheng yundong de chenggong, shibai, he jianglai ying qu de fang xiang” [Our student movement’s success and failure of the past year, and the general direction of its future], in Zhu Weizheng, *Zhongguo xiandai*, vol. 1, 686.

26 Luo’s list of concrete measures included 1) the improvement of the quality of Chinese periodicals in general, 2) the increase of the quantity of printed propaganda material for the masses, 3) the translation and introduction of works of large volume from the West, and 4) the fostering of specialized scholarship. Luo Jialun, “Yinian,” 686.

27 Cai, “Wenhua yundong,” 739–40.

28 For the obsessive search for “newness” (*xin*) in China’s quest for modernity, see Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Modernity and its Discontents: the Cultural Agenda of the May Fourth Movement,” in Kenneth Lieberthal, ed., *Perspectives on Modern China: Four Anniversaries* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1991), 159–64; Leo Ou-fan Lee, “Literary Trends: The Quest for Modernity, 1895–1927,” in Merle Goldman and Leo Ou-fan Lee, eds., *An Intellectual History of Modern China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 191.

found in the *Chinese Periodical Full-Text Database, 1911–1949*, four attached the prefix *xin* to *wenhua yundong*. The subjects of these four pieces, however, do not differ from those of articles that addressed simply *wenhua yundong*. Jinzhi's (進之 dates unknown) piece on “the new cultural movement,” which appeared in the *Educational Supplement* (教育周刊 *Jiaoyu zhoukan*) of *Eastern Times* (時報 *Shibao*) in November 1919, offers a case in point.<sup>29</sup> An attempt at an overall summation of the movement, the short commentary started with a demarcation between a political movement and a cultural movement and thus underlined the nonpolitical nature of the endeavors. Like all the examples discussed above, this one listed compulsory education, study and lecturing groups, the adoption of phonetic symbols and vernacular language, and publications that promoted social liberation and reconstruction as the primary signifiers of a larger process. Last but not least, the piece emphatically reiterated that the regeneration of social vitality should occur through the awakening of individuals and the elevation of their moral qualities.<sup>30</sup>

How new was the new cultural movement to its commentators in late 1919 and early 1920? Although most comments insinuated that the movement had been underway before a name was given to it, no one attempted to pin down the concrete date of its instigation. The most precise identification of its commencement, made by Chen Qixiu (陳啟修 1886–1960) in 1920, located it sometime between 1918 and 1919.<sup>31</sup> In spite of this general vagueness, many, including Sun Yat-sen, cited the student movement on May 4, 1919 as its earliest indication and assumed it to be a post-May Fourth phenomenon.<sup>32</sup> In any event, the enterprise of *New Youth* was nowhere mentioned in this early stage of the discussion.<sup>33</sup>

Rather than seeing the movement as the consummation of certain earlier occurrences, the majority of commentators and proponents saw it as being inspired by parallel events in the global arena. Cai Yuanpei opened his essay on aesthetic education with a statement that “at this moment, the cultural movement has reached China from Europe and America, yet many of its [Chinese] advocates have no clue of how to carry it out.”<sup>34</sup> He unabashedly recommended China should propel the global trend by emulating what others

29 Jinzhi, “Jiaoyu xiaoyan: xin wenhua yundong” [A few words on education: new cultural movement], *Jiaoyu zhoukan* 39 (November 17, 1919): 1.

30 The majority of scholarly works on the history of New Culture movement as a proper noun treat *xin wenhua yundong* and *wenhua yundong* as interchangeable. Compare Deng Shaoji, “Guanyu ‘Xin wenhua yundong’ zhe yi mingcheng” [On the name “New Culture movement”], *Xuelin manlu* 14 (1999): 69–75.

31 Chen Qixiu, “Wenhua yundong di xin shengming” [New life of the cultural movement], *Xueyi* [Art of learning] 2, no. 2 (February 1920): 6.

32 See, for example, Zhu Daihen, “Ni yu tongxiang mojun taolun xin wenhua yundong shixing fangfa shu” [Draft letter to discuss the implementation method of the new cultural movement], *Jiangsu shengli di'er nuzi shifan xuexiao xiaoyouhui huikan* [Journal of the alumni association of Second Jiangsu Provincial Girls' Normal School] 9 (1919): 37; “Zhuri xinpin: xin wenhua yundong zhi jieshi” [Daily news comments: new cultural movement's explanation], *Xinghua* 44 (November 12, 1919): 28; Qu Qiubai, “Wenhua yundong: xin shehui” [Cultural movement: new society], *Xin shehui* [New society] 15 (March 21, 1920): 1.

33 Sun Yat-sen did suggest that the movement was initiated by “the one or two early awakened,” but he gave no further indication of what he had in mind. Sun, “Zhi haiwai,” 210.

34 Cai, “Wenhua yundong,” 739.

had done. This sense of global coevality was even more prominent in the understanding of the cultural movement expressed by Zhang Dongsun (張東蓀 1886–1973). An active figure in the cultural scene of the late 1910s, Zhang was often labeled as a representative of the Research Clique (研究系 Yanjiu xi) led by Liang Qichao. In September 1919, Zhang published an article, “The Third Phase of Civilization” (第三種文明 “Disan zhong wenming”), upon the inauguration of a new journal under his own editorship, *Liberation and Reform* (解放與改造 *Jiefang yu gaizao*). In this article, Zhang predicted that, with the end of the First World War, the world was entering a new phase of human development. In contrast to the unenlightened First Phase and the semi-enlightened Second Phase, the fully enlightened Third Phase would be marked by a transformation of the codes of conduct for human interactions. Liberty and competition, central to the Second Phase, would give way to mutual aid and collaboration, ushering in a civilization that centered on the value of collectivity (群性 *qunxin*).<sup>35</sup> In the advanced world of the future, “moral thinking would focus itself on social awareness, economic policy on distribution, institutions on global governance, and finally society would be relatively free of hierarchy.”<sup>36</sup> To prepare Chinese citizens for this new world, a cultural movement, which amounted to “education in its broadest sense,” was necessary to instill the requisite set of moral qualities.<sup>37</sup> No longer dedicated exclusively to the scientific knowledge and methodology of the Second Phase, the cultural movement would prioritize “the spirit of mutual help, the propensity for coordination, the ability of self-governing, and the ethic of sociability,”<sup>38</sup> and thereby facilitate China’s adaptation to the new world. Without denying that, on the ladder of socioeconomic development, China stood at the end of the First Phase and needed to survive the challenges of the Second Phase, Zhang nevertheless believed that China would be facing a changed world from this point on. The competitive pressure would be released after the civilizational restructuring, and developmental goals would be reached through international collaborations.

Zhang Dongsun’s interpretation of the cultural movement expressed the widespread, albeit fleeting, sanguinity in the wake of the war. Yet, not all proponents of cultural reform shared this outlook of the future. Acknowledging that the end of the Great War provided a new context for China,<sup>39</sup> Luo Jialun, for one, continued to frame his advocacy of the cultural movement with a deep sense of national crisis. To him, the world remained an unchanged arena of jostling for hierarchical position. Lagging behind others in development, China faced the imminent threat of annihilation. Fearing that “a nation with no basic culture would surely be extinguished in the world of future,”<sup>40</sup> Luo saw the cultural movement as a means for building up China’s intellectual and spiritual resources and thus as a step of nation building. In comparison with Zhang Dongsun’s “The Third Phase of Civilization,” Luo’s nation-centered mode of thinking, which had been in vogue since the

35 Zhang Dongsun, “Disan zhong wenming” [The third phase of civilization], in Zhu Weizheng, *Zhongguo xiandai*, vol. 1, 612–15.

36 Zhang Dongsun, “Disan zhong wenming,” 613.

37 Zhang Dongsun, “Disan zhong wenming,” 615.

38 Zhang Dongsun, “Disan zhong wenming,” 615.

39 Luo Jialun, “Yinian,” 672.

40 Luo Jialun, “Yinian,” 698.

turn of the twentieth century, might appear old-fashioned. Yet, it was born out of somber observations of world politics in 1919. Chen Duxiu, Luo's mentor at Beijing University, in the wake of the May Fourth protest, pointed to the Western powers' connivance with Japan at the Paris Peace Conference and announced that the world remained an unchanged place and that national self-defense should be China's first line of political commitment.<sup>41</sup> Chen concluded one of his editorial pieces with firm words: "A nation unable to defend itself would inevitably fall into the thrall of slavery."<sup>42</sup> The message of social Darwinism remained relevant in the new era of history.

Zhang Dongsun's and Luo Jialun's different interpretations of the war and its meaning informed their different visions of *wenhua yundong*. When considered together, their cases testify to the cacophonous nature of the early discussion in search for a coherent agenda of reform. The discussion had a clear focus; a consensus existed about the need for cultural reform. Yet, beyond this consensus, there existed a wide range of ideas for creating a viable program, each based on a distinct view of history and of China's position in the world. At this early stage of the postwar debate, reference to Chen Duxiu's 1916 call for reforms in ethics and philosophy remained noticeably rare. Indications of the totalistic antitraditionalism widely regarded today as the hallmark of the New Culture movement are also hard to find. If *wenhua yundong* was either partially or totally inspired by the intellectual endeavors of *New Youth*, as Liang Shuming would later assert,<sup>43</sup> most participants at this stage were either oblivious of the connection or did not consider it significant enough to mention.

## CHEN DUXIU AND THE BIRTH OF A PROPER NOUN, 1920

Chen Duxiu's earliest invocations of (*xin*) *wenhua yundong* occurred in December 1919, when *New Youth* printed two short pieces by him in the column Random Thoughts (Suigan lun).<sup>44</sup> Chen attached no expository note on its conceptual significance and placed no emphasis on its relevance to the journal under his editorship.

Chen's upfront intervention in the discussion did not occur until the following year. In the spring of 1920, he composed two essays that directly addressed *xin wenhua yundong*. The first, "To the Comrades of the New Culture Movement" (告新文化運動諸同志 "Gao xin wenhua yundong de zhu tongzhi"), appeared in *L'Impartial* (大公報 *Dagong bao*; Changsha, Hunan) in February, and the second, "What is the New Culture Movement?" (新文化運動是甚麼 "Xin wenhua yundong shi sheme?"), in the April issue of *New Youth*.

41 For Chen's comments on the peace process in 1919, see Chen Duxiu, "Gongli zhan sheng qiangquan" [Justice prevailed over power], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji* [Selected works by Chan Duxiu] (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 2009), vol. 2, 36; "Jikai jiamian" [Unveil the hypocrisy], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 36; "Gongli he zai?" [Where is the justice?], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 37.

42 Chen Duxiu, "Shandong wenti yu guomin juewu—duiwai duinei liangzhong chedi de juewu" [The Shandong question and citizens' resolution: two fundamental resolutions on international and domestic affairs], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 107.

43 See the next section of this article.

44 Chen Duxiu, "Tiaohelun yu jiu daode" [Theory of amalgamation and the old ethics], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 134; "Liu xuesheng" [Returned students], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 137. Both were published in *New Youth* on December 1, 1919.

In these pieces, Chen drew on the noun phrase's established meaning. The first one opens with a statement that “publication is part of but not all of *xin wenhua yundong*” and places the boom in print capitalism at the center of the movement.<sup>45</sup> The second piece, a clarification of what *xin wenhua yundong* should consist of, opens and ends with the same invocation of *wenhua* as an autonomous and separate realm from those of the military, politics, and manufacturing and is thus framed within a well-established construct.<sup>46</sup>

In the history of Chen's public enunciations, these two pieces constituted a milestone. Prominently highlighted in both pieces was the newly constructed entity—the New Culture—set in opposition with an equally new construction, the Old Culture (舊文化 *jiu wenhua*).<sup>47</sup> In “To the Comrades of the New Culture Movement,” Chen set these two into stark opposition and opened with a statement that “comrades in the promotion of *xin wenhua yundong* naturally regarded *jiu wenhua* as lacking.”<sup>48</sup> Underscoring this binarism, Chen brought combating the old to the forefront. The struggle between the new and old was even more prominent a subject in Chen's second piece, “What is the New Culture Movement?” Rather than giving a straightforward answer to the question in the title, he listed all of *wenhua*'s subfields, i.e., science, religion, ethics, arts, literature, and music. *Xin wenhua yundong* as such became a campaign that aimed to instigate ruptures in all of these subfields and create new science, new religion, new ethics, new arts, new literature, and new music.<sup>49</sup> Whereas the outlook expressed in these pieces was not new, Chen appropriated *wenhua yundong*, which had become available only in late 1919, as a new verbal representation of his long-term iconoclasm. Practices, behaviors, values, and norms were now succinctly summed up by a new concept, culture, making it possible to address all human mental activities in one breath and facilitating the streamlining of his comments on specific subjects into an overarching position.

Chen's intervention shifted the discourse of *xin wenhua yundong* in two ways. Whereas previous comments predominantly had concerned themselves with the utilization of new media, Chen showed no interest in furthering this thread of discussion. His pieces instead highlighted “culture” as a totalizing concept for the collective spiritual, intellectual, and mental life of humankind. Inscripting such a conception into the phrase (*xin*) *wenhua yundong*, Chen displaced the “culture” connoted in the prior usage of the phrase and swiveled the attention from the movement's media to its substance.

Secondly, Chen's construction of “the New Culture” changed the linguistic characteristics of the phrase. As an alternate to *wenhua yundong*, *xin wenhua yundong* contained an extra linguistic element whose function had previously been ambiguous. What the element *xin* was meant to modify had never been clear. Theoretically, it could work

45 Chen Duxiu, “Gao xin wenhua yundong de zhu tongzhi” [To the comrades of the New Culture movement], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 169–74.

46 Chen Duxiu, “Xin wenhua yundong shi sheme?” [What is the New Culture movement?], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 217–21.

47 Like *xin wenhua yundong*, the phrase *xin wenhua* (new culture) had been in use before. However, it had not carried the specific connotation that Chen tried to inscribe here. For example, see “Zhuri xinpin,” 28.

48 Chen Duxiu, “Gao xin wenhua,” 169.

49 Chen Duxiu, “Xin wenhua yundong shi sheme?” 217.

as the sole modifier of the noun phrase *wenhua yundong*, insinuating a contrast with a certain old cultural movement. Alternatively, it could function side by side with *wenhua* as one of two modifiers of the noun *yundong*, stressing that the movement was both new and cultural. Of these two possibilities, the second reading was probably more feasible, since a lucid reference to any old cultural movement was nowhere to be found. Chen's usage deviated from these precedents and introduced a new way to dissect *xin wenhua yundong*. Focusing his efforts on inscribing his particular vision into the notion of *xin wenhua*, he made it into a conceptually self-standing entity. *Xin wenhua yundong* as such was rendered into a proper noun with a specific referent.

Chen's reinvention of *xin wenhua yundong* set in motion a change of linguistic practice. *Xin wenhua yundong* and *wenhua yundong* started to take up distinct referents and became differentiated. The differentiation was apparent in *Eastern and Western Cultures and Their Philosophies* (東西文化及其哲學 *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*) by Liang Shuming (梁漱溟 1893–1988). Liang published this book in 1921, but the content was in the making when he gave two public lecture series, first at Beijing University and then in Shandong, in 1920–1921.<sup>50</sup> In this book, the difference between *wenhua yundong* and *xin wenhua yundong* was unmistakable: the former referred to a more general phenomenon of seeking changes through cultural means, the latter to a program that aimed to replace China's old culture in toto with a new one. Attributing both to Chen Duxiu's initiatives, Liang gave them two different datings. The cultural movement, by and large, took inspirations from Chen's call for ethical reforms in the early issues of *New Youth* and continued until the early 1920s. On the other hand, the New Culture movement was a recent invention of the post-May Fourth times. The differentiation allowed Liang to profile his own position. Liang endorsed Chen's initiation of reform in 1916, but disagreed with his more recent proposal of cultural iconoclasm.

Liang placed his own academic endeavors since 1919 squarely in the broader and more general movement, which he also summed up as a movement of thought reform. In the introduction to *Eastern and Western Cultures*, Liang traced the cultural movement's initiation back to the enterprise of *New Youth*. Citing Chen Duxiu's famous essay of 1916, "Our Final Realization," Liang admitted that only through the advocacy of Chen and his associates did the question of an ethical and philosophical overhaul come to people's attention: "Many of us begin to see thought reform [思想之改革 *sixiang zhi gaige*], instead of any political problem, as the most urgent matter."<sup>51</sup> The sway of this argument of Chen's spread beyond the circles affiliated with *New Youth* and Beijing University and spurred a collective turn to cultural matters in the late 1910s: "People who had put a premium only on political activities, like Liang Qichao, gave up their political careers and started to pay

50 Liang Shuming, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue* [Eastern and Western cultures and their philosophies] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1937). The work has in general been viewed as a text of neo-traditionalism. Charlotte Furth, for example, labels it as a neo-traditionalist "reaction to the reform modernization." See her "Intellectual Change: From the Reform Movement to the May Fourth Movement, 1895–1920," in Goldman and Lee, *Intellectual History*, 41–65. For the book's immediate impact and reception, see Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucianism: Liang Shu-ming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 78–79.

51 Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, 6.

attention to academic and intellectual reforms.”<sup>52</sup> The launch in 1920 of the Society of Public Lectures (講學社 *Jiangxue she*), under the auspices of Liang Qichao and others, further attested to this movement’s lasting and broad impact.

The same *wenhua yundong* inspired Liang Shuming’s own interest in the comparative study of Eastern and Western cultures. In the book’s preface, he openly stated that “it is only due to the so-called *wenhua yundong* that we have seen and heard terms such as ‘Eastern and Western Cultures’ over the past two to three years.”<sup>53</sup> Liang wholeheartedly agreed with Chen’s diagnosis of China’s problems as well as his recommended remedy. The misconception that Western technology and institutions could be grafted onto Chinese morality had led China to a chaotic dead end. In this specific sense, Liang opposed the theory of cultural amalgamation. Each culture had to be treated as an organic whole, with a distinctive philosophical outlook undergirding the functionality of its particular technology and institutions. To make Western technology and institutions work in China, that is, to modernize, there existed no other choice than an open embrace of Western philosophical orientation and a ruthless restructuring of Chinese culture.<sup>54</sup>

In spite of his admiration for Chen’s earlier insight, Liang was critical of the New Culture movement that “arose only after the May Fourth movement.”<sup>55</sup> A program that reified the West, it reduced science, democracy, and the critical spirit into dogmatic tenets. “I dare not agree with them. For the harms of Western life philosophy have been so severely criticized, and yet they still try to indiscriminately bring it, in its original form, into China.”<sup>56</sup> By insinuation, Liang accused Chen Duxiu of being an essentialist who refused to come to terms with the fact that the West itself was on the verge of a cultural restructuring. Science, democracy, and critical rationalism represented only the West of yesterday, not that of tomorrow. Like Chen Duxiu, Liang idolized the West. The West that he idolized, however, was not reducible to any identifiable attributes. Rather, as the embodiment of the spiritual energy behind human progress, it was an ever-changing entity that constantly reinvented itself.

The distinction between *wenhua yundong* and *xin wenhua yundong*, which paralleled a differentiation between the Chen Duxiu of 1916 and that of 1920, opened up the possibility of cultural reform without subscribing to the most radical version of it. Liang placed other public figures such as Liang Qichao and his associates back in the camp of reformers, in spite of their disagreement with Chen Duxiu’s position after 1919. Most importantly, Liang’s juxtaposition of two movements counteracted Chen’s narrative of one single movement centering on his own vision of the New Culture, and it laid bare the hidden agenda in Chen’s polemics against competing visions of a cultural movement.

Chen’s redefinition of the New Culture movement in 1920 was to a large extent motivated by his deep disagreement with certain “comrades” in the movement. In the first essay, Chen Duxiu spoke against those who blew cultural autonomy out of

52 Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, 6.

53 Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, 2.

54 Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, 6, 9–10.

55 Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, 213.

56 Liang, *Dong Xi wenhua ji qi zhexue*, 205.

proportion. In the conviction that China could have scientific knowledge while holding a critical stance toward its underlying philosophical outlook, Chen saw the excessive and artificial demarcation of culture from other spheres. Although Chen was one of the first to identify ethics and philosophy as a separate realm of reform, he never lost sight of the interconnectivity between culture and other matters. Cultural and political reforms were conceptually distinct but were in actuality intricately linked. They had to be aligned along the same guidelines so as to maximize the overall effects.<sup>57</sup> Science could not function in a culture that was critical toward it. To view scientific practice and its underlying ethos as separable opened the door for backtracking to the late Qing formula of dividing “the essence” (體 *ti*) from “the application” (用 *yong*), which in the final analysis offered a pretext for resisting modernity in the name of cultural subjectivity.<sup>58</sup>

Chen’s second essay expanded this crusade by explicitly identifying two misguided and banal voices within the cultural movement. The first contended that “science has become useless and we should focus on philosophy” and the second that “Westerners have now been taken by Eastern culture.” To Chen, those who believed that the usefulness of science for mankind had reached its limit failed to appreciate that science as a methodological principle continued to dominate the studies of both natural and social worlds. Even in the field of philosophy, all modern thinkers, such as James, Bergeson, and Russell, reached their breakthroughs by abiding by scientific methods. Chen dismissed the second voice even more quickly. The Westerners who claimed to be interested in Eastern culture, in his view, were either peculiar antiquarians, disingenuous politicians, or tasteless populists. Their views of the human future, in Chen’s eyes, were nothing but groundless speculations.<sup>59</sup>

Chen never explicated the target of his polemics. However, an informed reader, like Liang Shuming, could easily surmise the nemesis Chen had in mind. Liang Qichao, at the end of the war, was most instrumental in publicizing the West’s increasing cynicism over science and its rising interest in Eastern philosophy. In the years after 1919, individuals who associated themselves with Liang Qichao, loosely referred to as the Research Clique, clung to aspects of his historical view and developed their own ideas. Sharing none of Liang Qichao’s optimism for the imminent revival of Chinese culture, Zhang Dongsun, a leading member of the clique, echoed Liang Qichao’s appraisal of the war as a civilizational threshold in his “Third Phase of Civilization.” As the editor of the Shanghai-based *China Times* (時事新報 *Shishi xinbao*) after 1917, Zhang Dongsun was responsible for the creation and management of its literary supplement, *Learning Light* (學燈 *Xuedeng*), which, in the early stage of the cultural movement, constituted one of

57 Chen’s call for cultural reforms on the pages of *New Youth* has long been identified as politically motivated. See Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 42–46; Timothy B. Weston, “The Formation and Positioning of the New Culture Community, 1913–1917,” *Modern China* 24, no. 3 (July 1998): 255–84. In his recent article, Wang Hui specifically highlights the assumed interconnectivity between culture and politics in Chen’s “attempt to engage and stimulate politics by separating culture and politics.” Wang Hui, “The Transformation of Culture and Politics: War, Revolution, and the ‘Thought Warfare’ of the 1910s,” *Twentieth-Century China* 38, no. 1 (January 2013): 5.

58 Chen Duxiu, “Gao xin wenhua,” 171–72.

59 Chen Duxiu, “Xin wenhua yundong shi sheme?,” 217–18.

the first forums that openly supported vernacular literature, advocated thought reform, and introduced socialism.<sup>60</sup>

By addressing people like Liang Qichao and Zhang Dongsun as “comrades,” Chen ostensibly tipped his hat to their contributions. The comradeship at the same time formed the grounds for Chen’s criticism against them. Exactly because they were supposed to be comrades, Chen could hold them up against the objective of the movement and condemn their deviations. The key discursive move that remained furtive in this condemnation lay in the insinuation that there had always been only one movement and that *xin wenhua yundong* had always been about the New Culture. To mask the novelty of his conception, Chen cited Cai Yuanpei’s reform proposal as evidence of the movement’s existence before 1920. His “What is the New Culture Movement?” praised Cai Yuanpei’s famous piece on aesthetic education for striking the essential chord of the movement. Chen nevertheless had to alter Cai’s exact wording. While Cai’s original piece spoke only about “a cultural movement,” Chen rephrased it as “the New Culture movement should not leave out aesthetic education.”<sup>61</sup>

The very existence of the broader movement was written off. Chen was very aware of the force of the cultural movement that had been underway since the late 1910s. Shortly before his polemics against the Research Clique, Chen had referred to *wenhua yundong* in a comment on the publishing business.<sup>62</sup> More than a year after his two pieces on the New Culture movement, he also criticized in the pages of *New Youth* the way that *wenhua yundong* had been confounded with actions of social agitation and complained that “both its critics and proponents” lacked appreciation of what culture consists of.<sup>63</sup> On both occasions, Chen used *wenhua yundong* in the established way and discussed the role of the modern press in the process of cultural change. Yet *wenhua yundong* remained nameless in the two key texts in which he gave extensive attention to the concept of the New Culture movement. Rather, the New Culture was represented as epitomizing all efforts toward cultural reform since the late 1910s. As such, it formed the yardstick for all reformist attempts. Those who dissented from his particular vision became deviants who had lost sight of the supposed objective of the singular movement. They were aberrant not only in regard to the New Culture movement but also in terms of the general movement of cultural reform.

## THE CCP AND THE INVENTION OF A HISTORICAL EVENT, 1924

By the time Chen penned his two essays on the New Culture movement in 1920, he had left Beijing University and turned himself to the political activities that led to

60 For the continuous tension between the Research Clique and the radical elements at Beijing University associated with *New Youth* and *New Tide*, see Peng Peng, *Yanjiu xi yu Wusi shiqi xin wenhua yundong—yi yijiuerling qianhou wei zhongxin* [The Research Clique and the New Culture movement of the May Fourth era: centering on the period around 1920] (Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 2003), 54–65, 162–72, 257.

61 Chen Duxiu, “Xin wenhua yundong shi sheme?,” 220.

62 Chen Duxiu, “Xin chubanshu” [New publications], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 157.

63 Chen Duxiu, “Wenhua yundong he shehui yundong” [Cultural movement and social movement], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 2, 378.

the founding of the CCP in 1921. Chen's renewed devotion to politics did not end his engagement with the debate on cultural reforms. Rather, it ushered in a period of intense politicization of his intellectual enunciations. Specifically, after the CCP joined the Third International in 1922, the propagation of the Marxist outlook of history took priority. A number of journals were established. The propaganda campaign systematically bombarded readers with the vocabulary and perspective of historical materialism. The application of this newly imported theory to the Chinese situation opened up a chance to rewrite history. A different narrative of the early Republic's intellectual history was created in this context.

Among the party organs established in 1923, the earliest and the most renowned was *New Youth Quarterly* (新青年季刊 *Xinqingnian jikan*). Bearing the same title as the old enterprise most closely associated with Chen Duxiu, the journal founded in June 1923 adopted the format of a quarterly and was placed under different leadership. Chen, now the general secretary of the CCP, passed the editorship to the propaganda officer, Qu Qiubai. *New Youth* from this point on would function as the mouthpiece of the party under the auspices of the Comintern.

In itself, the decision to refurbish a journal that had been struggling since 1920 and had officially folded in 1922 spoke to the party's ambition of redefining and claiming its legacy. Qu Qiubai, a 25-year-old journalist who had just returned from Soviet Russia, composed the lead article for the first issue. The "new manifesto" (新宣言 *xin xuanyan*) acknowledged *New Youth Quarterly's* ideological stance but insisted it represented a natural continuum with the journal created in 1915. Qu opened his piece with a diagnosis of China's state of affairs from the perspective of historical materialism. The collapse of the imperial system in 1911 failed to topple the patriarchal structure. Diachronic values and practices, incompatible with the political structure of the Republic, continued to preponderate. Herein lay the historical significance of *New Youth*. In the days of cultural "aberrance" (畸形 *jixing*), it stood as the only voice of reason. Divulging the perversity of Confucianism, traditional ethics, gender inequality, and classical Chinese, it took the cultural aberrance head-on and tackled the core of China's historical problems. As such, it began revolutionary thinking in China. In subsequent years, Qu continued, through continuous reflection on China's social reality and systematic exploration of revolutionary theories, the journal moved out of its unwitting state and gained a clear awareness that only the proletariat could bring about true historical transformation. Claiming the journal "had long been the thinking apparatus of the proletariat," Qu's narrative suppressed the differences between the *New Youth* of 1915 and that of 1923 and placed the journal at the center of a process leading to the CCP's birth.<sup>64</sup> Without referring to the New Culture movement, it set the precedent of characterizing events in 1919–1923 as the logical outcome of those in the mid-1910s.<sup>65</sup>

64 It should be noted that, up to this point, Chen Duxiu had never explicitly made reference to any content of *New Youth* in his construction of the New Culture movement.

65 Qu Qiubai, "Xin qingnian zhi xin xuanyan" [A new manifesto of new youth], in *Xin qingnian jikan* 1 (June 15, 1923): 1–3. Most historians today see the quarterly as a journal distinct from *New Youth* before 1923. See, for example, Chen Pingyuan, "Yi fen zazhi: sixiang shi/wenxue shi shiye zhong de *Xin Qingnian*" [One magazine: New Youth in the perspective of intellectual/literary histories], in *Chumo lishi*, 63.

One month after Qu's piece appeared, Chen Duxiu published a short essay in the first issue of another CCP propaganda forum, *Vanguard* (前鋒 *Qianfeng*), also under Qu Qiubai's editorship. In a piece titled "The United Front in Thought Revolution," Chen echoed Qu's application of historical materialism and characterized the nation's current state as an agricultural and cottage economy compounded with feudal militarism and patriarchal clanism. Chen then turned to the intellectual realm and listed five of his contemporaries as typical products of the historical conditions. Cai Yuanpei, Liang Qichao, Zhang Junmai (張君勱 1887–1969),<sup>66</sup> Zhang Shizhao (章士釗 1881–1973),<sup>67</sup> and Liang Shuming "claimed to be new," but their outlooks continued to be muddled by patriarchal thinking.<sup>68</sup> Only Hu Shi, Chen's former collaborator, "genuinely understood the thought and culture of the modern bourgeoisie" and "represented the dawn of modern Chinese thought."<sup>69</sup> Hu was thus the ideal target for the party's campaign of the United Front. In spite of the differences between Hu's experimentalism and "our materialist view of history," collaboration would be a reasonable and favorable course of action, in the face of the common nemesis of patriarchal thinking.

With the reference to "United Front" (聯合戰線 *lianhe zhanxian*) in the title, Chen's piece announced a stratagem for applying imported theory to reality. Since its Second National Congress in 1922, the CCP had openly adopted the Leninist concept of the United Front as its operational guideline. In theory, assisting the bourgeois-democratic revolution had become the immediate objective. Yet, in practice, to identify the true bourgeois-democratic elements proved to be a question of interpretation. By calling Hu Shi the spokesperson of bourgeois thinking and all others the residuals of outmoded feudalism, Chen turned his allies and enemies in the debate on culture into the proletariat's and the party's allies and enemies. Knowingly or not, he changed the relationship between different forces in the cultural movement by the application of class labels. The language of historical materialism helped create a deep chasm between the more radical option, represented by Chen's version of the New Culture movement, and other less radical ones, rendering the differences between them irreconcilable.

Chen's rudimentary planning of the United Front in the intellectual realm provided the baseline for further remapping of the intellectual scene. In October 1923, the Socialist Youth Corps (社會主義青年團 *Shehui zhuyi qingnian tuan*), a subgroup of the CCP, launched a biweekly titled *Chinese Youth* (中國青年 *Zhongguo qingnian*). In the next three months, Deng Zhongxia, a 27-year-old graduate of Beijing University and founder of the Socialist Youth Corps, published two essays in *Chinese Youth* in support of Chen's proposal for the United Front. Deng's two essays, "The Current State of China's Realm of

66 Zhang Junmai (Carsun Chang) was a member of the Research Clique. In 1923, he initiated the "debate on science and philosophy of life" by questioning whether science would provide answers to all questions in life.

67 Zhang Shizhao worked closely with Sun Yat-sen for the revolutionary cause before 1911 and was one of the most influential political theorists and public intellectuals in the early Republic. He was known for his disagreement with Chen Duxiu about his New Culture movement.

68 Chen Duxiu, "Sixiang geming shang de lianhe zhanxian" [The United Front in thought revolution], in *Chen Duxiu zhuzuo xuanji*, vol. 3, 102.

69 Chen Duxiu, "Sixiang geming," 102.

Thought” (中國現在的思想界 “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie”) and “The Question of United Front in the Realm of Thought” (思想界的聯合戰線問題 “Sixiang jie de lianhe zhanxian wenti”), specifically referred to Chen’s proposal<sup>70</sup> and purported to expand its scope. In addition to Hu Shi, Deng’s list of potential allies included Ding Wenjiang (丁文江 1887–1936) and Yang Quan (楊銓 1893–1933), as well as “behavioral psychologists, politicians who followed the Three People’s Principles, writers with social concerns, and populist educators.”<sup>71</sup> The names of enemies similarly extended from Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming in philosophy to “Liu Tingfang [劉廷芳] in psychology, the Research Clique, the Political Learning Clique [政學系 Zhengxue xi], anarchists, federalists in politics, Mei Guangdi [梅光迪] in literature, and Huang Peiyan [黃培炎] and Guo Bingwen [郭秉文] in education.”<sup>72</sup>

Two tropes that later significantly shaped the historiography of the intellectual history of the early Republican period emerged in this context. Deng named all those who were still under the sway of patriarchic feudalism as belonging to “the school of Eastern culture” (東方文化派 *dongfang wenhua pai*). Deng did not invent this term. In an article titled “Eastern Culture and World Revolution” (東方文化與世界革命 “Dongfang wenhua yu shijie geming”), published in the first issue of *New Youth Quarterly* in June 1923, Qu Qiubai had used it to refer to those who blindly defended Eastern culture without realizing its morbidity.<sup>73</sup> In this theoretical piece, Qu argued that so-called “Eastern culture” manifested nothing but a distorted form of the patriarchal feudalism that characterized the prebourgeois stage of historical development. The most horrid mistake of the school of Eastern culture lay not so much in its leniency toward the evils of patriarchal practices but in its adherents’ anachronism. They failed to see that Eastern culture was doomed to be washed away by the progressive currents of history.

Deng Zhongxia took this label over from Qu and deployed it as an analytical device. Three distinct groups, led respectively by Liang Qichao, Zhang Shizhao, and Liang Shuming, were the paragons of the school of Eastern culture.<sup>74</sup> Echoing Chen Duxiu, Deng accused all three groups of clandestinely promoting traditional culture and undermining the credibility of science. Under the facade of supporting modern knowledge, they were “reactionaries” (反動派 *fandong pai*) who tried to sabotage the modernization of Chinese thought.<sup>75</sup>

The second trope that Deng introduced at the turn of 1924 was the “New Culture movement” as a historical event. The construction involved several steps of manipulation.

70 Deng Zhongxia, “Sixiang jie de lianhe zhanxian wenti” [The question of a United Front in the realm of thought], in Zhu Weizheng, *Zhongguo xiandai*, vol. 2, 176.

71 Deng Zhongxia, “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie” [The current state of China’s realm of thought], in Zhu Weizheng, *Zhongguo xiandai*, vol. 2, 174–75; Deng Zhongxia, “Sixiangjie de lianhe zhanxian wenti,” 176–79.

72 Deng Zhongxia, “Sixiangjie de lianhe zhanxian wenti,” 179–80. This list includes most renowned intellectuals who either dissented or remained aloof from Chen’s agenda of cultural reforms at the time.

73 Qu referred to the “school of Eastern culture” only three times in his long essay, without giving special theoretical exposition. See “Dongfang wenhua yu shijie geming” [Eastern culture and world revolution], *Xin qingnian jikan* 1 (June 15, 1923): 70, 71, 74.

74 Deng Zhongxia, “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie,” 173–74.

75 Deng Zhongxia, “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie,” 174, 175.

To establish a fixed association between the movement and *New Youth* was a most subtle but significant one. Although Deng made no explicit mention of *New Youth*, his narrative equated the two. The criticism voiced against the journal by “Wang Jingxuan” (王敬軒)<sup>76</sup> and Lin Shu (林紓 1852–1924) in 1918 was cited as the earliest objection to the movement. The equation was supposed to be exclusive: the deviation from one thus signified the dissentience from the other.<sup>77</sup> Deng used the most superlative language to characterize the movement’s potency. As soon as it was launched, the movement “sailed smoothly” (一帆風順 *yifanfengshun*) and “prevailed over all objections” (稱霸一時 *chengbayishi*), quickly becoming “the proclaimed orthodoxy” (定於一尊 *dingyuyizun*).<sup>78</sup> The immensity of its popularity provoked resentment. The reactionaries acted out of jealousy and with the vicious intention of usurping the movement’s influence among the youth of China.<sup>79</sup>

The semantics of *xin wenhua yundong* was further altered in this context. First of all, it gained historicity that had not existed before. Although Chen Duxiu in 1920 still saw the New Culture movement as an ongoing project for generating cultural reform, Deng Zhongxia in 1923 narrated it as an event that had succeeded in instigating changes in the late 1910s. Concomitant with this invented historicity was its characterization as a highly cohesive intellectual event. Narrowly pinned to the historical enterprise of *New Youth*, the New Culture movement was nevertheless a larger-than-life process that transcended the collectivity of all of the journal’s readers and producers while determining its direction. Constructed as an ideational extraction from actual events, it left out all ambiguities, uncertainties, and contradictions in the journal’s existence, and became the signifier of cohesion at a more abstract level.<sup>80</sup>

The invented historicity of the New Culture movement provided a new argumentative device for Chen’s proposal of the United Front. Stepping back from Chen’s direct application of class labels to contemporary scholars, Deng now mapped out their intellectual positions in terms of affinity with the New Culture movement. Hu Shi had to be viewed as a potential ally because of his faithful adherence to what the New Culture movement represented. His “school of scientific methodology” (科學方法派 *kexue fangfa pai*) and Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao’s<sup>81</sup> “school of historical materialism” (唯物史觀派 *weiwu*

76 The letter by “Wang Jingxuan” printed in *New Youth* (March 15, 1918) was later proved to have been penned by Qian Xuantong (1887–1939), who sat at the time on the journal’s editorial board. See Chow, *May Fourth Movement*, 66. Historian Wang Qisheng has analyzed this episode from the perspective of marketing strategy and seen in it a pivotal event that changed the public reception of the journal. According to Wang, only after the faked letter had been published did other voices of objection, such as that of Lin Shu, surface, unwittingly confirming the journal’s ultimate avant-garde status. The exchange of polemics that followed spurred public interest and increased the journal’s popularity among young readers. See Wang Qisheng, “Xin wenhua shi ruhe ‘yundong’ qilai de” [How was the New Culture “mobilized?”], in *Geming yu fangeming: shehui wenhu shiye xia de minguo zhengzhi* [Revolution and antirevolution: Republican politics from a sociocultural perspective] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2010), 11–16.

77 Deng Zhongxia, “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie,” 173.

78 Deng Zhongxia, “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie,” 173.

79 Deng Zhongxia, “Zhongguo xianzai de sixiang jie,” 173–74.

80 For the fluctuation of the journal’s style, management, and focus between 1915 and 1923, see Wang Qisheng, “Xin wenhua,” 1–38.

81 Li Dazhao was one of the initiators of the discourse of “Eastern civilization.” Yet, after Deng’s 1923 piece, he was remembered primarily as an iconic figure in the New Culture movement and the Chinese

*shiguan pai*) descended directly from the movement; together, they constituted the “truly new” and “truly scientific” scholarship in China.<sup>82</sup> The invented genealogy now provided the basis for the proposed United Front.

Serving the agenda of the United Front, Deng’s sketch of the intellectual scene of the early Republic carried the imprint of historical materialism. The supposed antagonism between the permissible bourgeois and favorable proletarian elements on the one hand and the vile residuals of the patriarchal past on the other was written into the imagined battle between the “New Culture movement” and the “school of Eastern culture.” The difference between the subscribers and nonsubscribers to the ideological platform of the New Culture was thus exaggerated. Whereas Chen Duxiu in 1920 still addressed Liang Qichao and Zhang Dongsun as “comrades in the New Culture movement” in the title of his essay and still attempted to rally them around his own vision, Deng Zhongxia, from his ideologically driven outlook in 1923, saw them as nothing but the old evils. The widening of the New Culture movement’s margins against all outsiders, by suppressing the possibility of any common ground and underscoring the movement’s absolute uniqueness in history, assured its status as the sole source of reformist energy in the early Republic.

## CONCLUSION

How the invented history of the New Culture movement became widely accepted in the collective memories of modern China, during the decades of political conflict and ideological struggle that followed, is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to say that in Deng Zhongxia’s mythological representation, one discerns the prototype of a metanarrative that, to this day, continues to be perpetuated by textbooks of all languages and studied by all students of China.

As shown in this article, the establishment of this narrative came at a high cost of erasing a host of memories, voices, and perspectives from the history of the period after the First World War. The assumption that the New Culture movement was essentially a process to disseminate abstract ideas, for example, displaced numerous accounts of the post–May Fourth enthusiasm for modern means of communication, which in 1919 prompted the coinage of *xin wenhua yundong*. Inspired by historical materialism, the deepened fault

Communist movement. Most of his works on Eastern civilization during the 1910s were overlooked until the twenty-first century. His is therefore a revealing case of how the constructed dichotomy between “the New Culture movement” and “the school of Eastern culture” led to a simplified understanding of the internal dynamics and diversity of the *New Youth* group. For an insightful analysis of Li’s reflections on Eastern civilization, see Yang Fangyen, “Zaizao xin wenming: Li Dazhao zaoqi sixiang zhong de pupian yu teshu” [Toward a new civilization: the universal and the particular in Li Dazhao’s early thought], *Zhengzhi kexue luncong* 63 (March 2015): 1–54.

82 For the continuous mutual sense of comradeship among Hu Shi and other coeditors of *New Youth* (such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao) after Hu pulled out of the journal’s operations in 1920, see Luo Zhitian, “Zou xiang ‘zhengzhi jie jue’ de ‘Zhongguo wenyi fuxing’—Wusi xianhou sixiang yundong yu zhengzhi yundong de guanxi” [The Chinese renaissance that teetered toward a political solution: the relationship between intellectual movement and political movement in the period before and after May Fourth], in *Luanshi qianliu: Minzu zhuyi yu minguo zhengzhi* [Undercurrents of chaotic times: nationalism and Republican politics] (Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 2001), 119–24.

lines against those outside of the New Culture movement wiped out the historical awareness of a broader cultural movement and thus the possibility of a common ground shared by all actors therein. The assertion of the New Culture movement's cohesion and historicity not only suppressed differences among its assumed participants but also outright altered the sequence of events in intellectual history and rendered non-New Culture proposals of reform merely reactions. Last but not least, as a trope created to stress the native origins of the CCP, the mythological representation of the New Culture movement narrated its own meanings in a solely national context, downplaying the prevalent sense of global connectivity that characterized the time. To restore these memories, voices, and perspectives to their fair places in history, a new historiography of the early Republican era can probably start with an open recognition of the New Culture movement's fictitiousness.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Yang Zhende of the Institute of Chinese Literature and Philosophy at Academia Sinica, Taiwan, for her help during my research. I am also grateful to Kiri Paramore for his careful reading of an early version and to the two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

### NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

Ya-pei Kuo is university lecturer of modern history at University of Groningen, the Netherlands. Her research focuses on the conceptual histories of “culture” and “religion” in modern China.

Correspondence to: Ya-pei Kuo. Email: ya-pei.kuo@rug.nl.