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AN ANALYSIS OF THE EARLY MAY FOURTH INTELLECTUALS' INTERPRETATION OF "UNIVERSAL VALUES"

A Europe-China Cultural Encounter Perspective

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A Note on Chinese Romanization

In the text the pinyin system is employed for Chinese romanization. For citations from sources where the older Wade-Giles system is used, all Chinese names and terms in the text have been converted to pinyin for the purpose of consistency.

Abstract

There is an increased tension between China and the European Union (EU) over “universal values” of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. This is a question about ethical universalism and cultural relativism, a legendary debate by the Enlightenment thinkers. The real cultural encounter with China did not take place in Europe until the enlightened Europeans looked to China for the modernization projects to reform European society. The Chinese started to learn the Western technologies and sciences after the Opium wars, then the late Qing reformers initiated constitutional monarch reforms. After all these efforts failed, the early May Fourth intellectuals realized the importance of abandoning their traditional cultural superiority and learning the Western values and principles to truly transform China into a modern state. The author aims to examine how the early May Fourth intellectuals perceived democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in *New Youth* (1915-1920), a leading radical periodical in the May Fourth period.

The author finds that the early May Fourth intellectuals held a universalist view and advocated that democracy, the rule of law, and human rights should replace the outworn Chinese Confucian ethics and traditions and be implemented in China. However, instead of transplanting the whole Western values and principles into China, they stressed the importance to enlighten the masses with the new conception of the state and their new master role in the republic, and to implement direct democracy to foster their skills of political participation due to the unique Chinese cultural context. Hence, partial assimilation rather than complete modelling took place in the May Fourth intellectuals’ encounter with the Western thoughts.

Key words: China, Europe, cross-cultural encounter, universal values, the May Fourth Movement, 20th century, ethical universalism, cultural relativism, *New Youth*

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1. Introduction

I consider it a singular plan of the fates that human cultivation and refinement should today be concentrated, as it were, in the two extremes of our continent, in Europe and in China.

--Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in *Preface to the Novissima Sinica* (1697/1699)

How can we Chinese feel at ease in this new world which at first light appears to be so much at variance with what we have long regarded as our own civilization? ... How can we best assimilate modern civilization in such a manner as to make it congenial and congruous and continuous with the civilization of our own making?

--Hu Shi (1922, 7)

1.1. A Puzzle - Whose Values?

On 16th September 2021, the European Parliament (2021) passed a resolution to develop a new EU-China strategy as a response to China's increasingly assertive stance of aspiring to a stronger global leader. The resolution states that the rise of China poses serious threats to the established rules-based world order and the democratic values such as individual freedom, freedom of speech and freedom of the press. The new strategy should defend European core values of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. While in China, a noticeable phenomenon is the increased hostility toward the Western notion of "universal values" during the construction of modern Chinese value system. The Party-State asserts that "order is more important than freedom, state and group interest is more important than individual rights, harmony is more valuable than conflict, and morals are more important than laws" based on the Chinese Confucian traditions. Some contemporary Chinese scholars stress that 'all values are historically conditioned and rooted in a particular culture' (Tillman 2018, 1281-1282). When the systemic human rights violations in Xinjiang aroused tremendous public attention in Europe, it seemed that the Chinese themselves were disinterested in the Xinjiang issue or they even did not think it was an issue. Are European values universal? Should they be imposed in a very different culture like China? Those questions motivate the author to look back to the history of cultural encounters between Europe and China.

Democracy, human rights, rule of law are the hallmarks of European modernity whose origin is often traced back to the Enlightenment. It had been a legendary debate by the Enlightenment thinkers about ethical universalism and cultural relativism. Daniel Carey and Sven Trakulhun (2013) indicate that universalism remains the most contentious feature of the Enlightenment thoughts. According to the Enlightened universalists, social values of modern societies such as individual liberty, democracy, equality, and freedom of expression and publication have an absolute and universal quality and are superior to other moralities (Israel 2006, 869). Universalists generally display a critical attitude towards relativism and aim to create shared moral norms and epistemological standards by suppressing cultural diversity (Moscovici 2002, 2).

Imperial China traditionally held a sense of cultural superiority until her defeats in the Opium Wars. After that, the Chinese literati-officials¹ started to reform and modernize the country with the West² as the model. But the new Chinese intellectuals did not seriously study the Western ideas and principles until the May Fourth Movement in the 1910s and 1920s which drew "a dividing line in the intellectual, cultural, and socio-political history of modern China" (Chow 1960, 361). In the Communist China, the date of May fourth is the national Youth Day to commemorate the historical incident that thousands of

¹ The term of Chinese literati-officials is used to indicate those well-educated elites in imperial China who had passed the civil service examination which was based on Confucian classics and became important members of the imperial bureaucracy. It is also used to differentiate from the new intellectuals who were educated in the new school system which modelled the West after the imperial examination was abolished in 1905.

² From a cultural perspective, the term of "the West" is interchangeable with "Europe" in this research, specifically for both the Enlightenment thinkers and the May Fourth intellectuals.

college students demonstrated in Beijing to oppose imperialism and feudalism on May fourth in 1919. Now the term of the May Fourth Movement is often used by scholars to indicate “the whole concatenation of progressive events and processes that made up the cultural and intellectual revolution” between 1915 and the few years after (Mackerras 2008, 41). How did the May Fourth intellectuals talk about the “universal values” of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights when they imported these ideas from the West?

1.2. Research Aim

When the Enlightenment thinkers studied Chinese classics, society, and institutions in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their contemporary Chinese gentry-literati who had championed the Confucian political and social order for almost two thousand years still held their cultural superiority in the world. It was not until the May Fourth period that the new Chinese intellectuals started to turn their attention to the Western ideas and principles in their efforts to modernize China. It was not a simultaneous two-way process of cultural borrowing and assimilation between Europe and China when they met each other in history. Hence, the author conducts a literature review first on how the Enlightenment thinkers perceived China, then on how the May Fourth intellectuals discussed the Western core values. A theoretical discussion is followed. In the third section, she conducts an empirical study of how Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan wrote about the Western values and principles in the periodical *New Youth* between 1915 and 1920. The paper will end with concluding remarks.

Some scholars deal with the May Fourth Movement as a historical event, sometimes with a focus on its intellectual importance in China modern history (Chow 1960, Schwarcz 1986). Others might study the various political discourses embodied in the movement such as its Marxist discourse which led to the establishment of the People’s Republic of China (Ma 1974), or its nationalist discourse with an emphasis on the national salvation of the movement (Airaksinen 2014). When the scholars study the developments of Chinese democracy (Nathan 1986), or, the rule of law in China (Peerenboom 2002) or Chinese human rights (Angle and Svensson 2015), they cannot miss mentioning the May Fourth Movement. However, there is no holistic and systematic examination of how the May Fourth intellectuals interpreted the European core values from a cross-cultural encounter perspective per the author’s best knowledge. Hence, she wishes to contribute to this research gap to some extent.

Research questions:

How did the early May Fourth intellectuals interpret democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in *New Youth* (1915-1920)? Compared with the Enlightenment thinkers, how did the early May Fourth intellectuals deal with ethical universality and cultural particularity in their Western learning?

1.3. Delimitation of the Study

There were thousands of publications in China during the May Fourth movement (Chow 1960, Ma 1974, Lee 2001). But *New Youth* was no doubt one of the most influential ones and attracted a striking number of radical intellectuals³ around it who actively talked about new ideas as well as opposing the Chinese traditions which became a phenomenon of *New Youth* society. The period of the Movement can be extended from the early 1910s to the 1930s as Vera Schwarcz (1986) did in her study of the May Fourth. However, an ideological split of the *New Youth* society took place around the summer of 1920 which made the magazine was less relevant for this study since Volume 8 which was published in September 1920. There were many contributors wrote for *New Youth* who mentioned democracy, human rights, or freedom of speech, etcetera, in their articles. But Chen Duxiu was the founder and the sole editor between 1915 and 1918 of the magazine, and Gao was one of main contributors to the

³ Those intellectuals who opposed the Confucian traditions and customs and advocated the Western learnings were often classified as radical intellectuals in the early May Fourth period, in contrast with conservatives who still embraced Confucian ethics and traditional social orders.

magazine with a focus on introducing the Western thoughts and ideas. Due to the limited time and space, the author delimits her empirical study to the writings by Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan in *New Youth* Volume 1-7 from September 1915 to April 1920⁴ to explore how the early May Fourth intellectuals perceived the Western values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Discussion

In this sector, the author will first investigate how the Enlightenment thinkers' viewed China to build up the knowledge of how to study a cross-cultural encounter phenomenon as well as to deepen and broaden her general background knowledge of Europe. This is also a necessary preparation for the author to conduct this study since she has a Chinese cultural background and knows Europe very little. Second, she will conduct a study of the May Fourth Movement which serves as the most important context of this study, and search for the state-of-the-art studies on how the May Fourth intellectuals interpreted democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. Third, the author highlights the theoretical framework which guides the formulation of the whole study.

2.1. Cultural Encounters with China - a European View

It is important to bear in mind that before the real encounter with China after 1500, Europe had developed a very different civilization compared with her contemporary of China (McNeill 1963, 558). After assimilating the essences of the classical, Moslem, and Byzantine cultures and under the influence of "Roman law, Greek science and philosophy, and the ecclesiastical encouragement of reasoning about doctrine and the world", Europeans appealed to human reason in exploring the universe and advancing technical and scientific developments. Furthermore, there was increased popular participation in economic, cultural, and political life. Representatives from different social groups could influence the legislation and decision-making process in national politics, for example, the establishment of the English Parliament made the King consult with landowners, nobles, and bishops since the thirteenth century, and the French Estates-General consisted of clergy, nobility, and commoners which could be traced back to the beginning of the fourteenth century. Also, a powerful central government has not been a tradition in Europe.

At the same time, even though gunpowder, the compass, and printing had reached Europe from Mongol-ruled Yuan Dynasty (McNeill 1963, 531), China remained unknown to Europeans. It was the first time for a European to look from the inside of China when Marco Polo travelled in China from 1275 to 1292. He portrayed the remote country as "a benevolently ruled dictatorship, colossal in scale, decorous in customs, rich in trade, highly urbanized, inventive in commercial dealings" (Spence 1998, 1, 3). However, Donald T. Cristchlow comments that Marco Polo's account of China seems too fantastic to be true for the Europeans during the fourteenth century (Mungello 1999). In fact, the "substantive intellectual or cultural exchange between Europe and China" did not take place until the first Portuguese mission arrived in China in their search for wealth and to convert China to Christianity in the late 1510s (Mungello 1999, 1, 5). But the Europeans' knowledge of China remained quite fragmentary until the Enlightenment thinkers started to study China at the end of seventeenth century.

Jonathan Israel (Israel 2006) claims that "the Enlightenment has been and remains by far the most positive factor shaping contemporary reality and those strands of modernity" despite the critics as biased, Eurocentric, imperialistic, hegemonic by postmodernists or post-colonialists. This philosophical and intellectual movement which dominated Europe during the late seventeenth and

⁴ In the collection of *New Youth* under the examination by the author, the last issue in Volume 7 is the fifth which was published on April 1 in 1920. Other collections of *New Youth* Volume 7 might have a sixth issue which was published after the summer of 1920. But this Issue Six of Volume 7 was a special issue to commemorate International Labours' Day with a more Marxist colour and is not so relevant for this study.

eighteenth centuries emphasized that reason was the primary source of authority and legitimacy, and advocated democracy, individual liberty, separation of church and state, etcetera. China became a popular subject for the enlightened Europeans in at that time.

2.1.1. Enlightenment Thinkers' Views on China

2.1.1.1. Background

From 1500 onwards, European traders and missionaries brought back detailed knowledge of China including the language, history, philosophy, geography, flora and fauna, institutions, society, and the people. In 1687, under the efforts of a group of scholarly Jesuit missionaries who travelled to China, the book *Confucius Sinarum philosophus sive scientia Sinensis latine exposita* was published in Paris which included Chinese history, the study of Chinese language, and the Latin translations of three Confucian classics: *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, and *Lunyu* (Leibniz, Cook and Rosemont 1994, 12). There were not so many Europeans who could afford to travel to China during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hence, the missionary accounts of China, together with the correspondences with those missionaries, became the main sources for the Enlightenment thinkers to study China. Even though the Jesuit missionaries' approach was actually shaped by their program of converting the Chinese to Christianity, they had anyhow seriously studied the Chinese language and its culture and remained the most knowledgeable and leading authorities on China among the Europeans throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (Mungello 1999).

Mungello (1999, 83) divides those Enlightenment thinkers into: the Proto-Sinologists, the Sinophiles, and the Sinophobia. Leibniz was one of the most famous early Enlightenment Proto-Sinologists while Voltaire represented Sinophile group and Montesquieu the Sinophobia. Similarly, Leibniz, Montesquieu, and Voltaire stood out of Jonathan D. Spence's (1998, 81-99) writing on the Enlightenment thinkers' study of China. How did those three Enlightenment thinkers talk about China?

2.1.1.2. Leibniz's View on China

Leibniz was born in 1646 while the destructive Thirty Years War came to an end in 1648. Hence, a central goal for Leibniz was to halt the theological and political conflicts among European states and seek internal peace and harmony in Europe (Spence 1998, 83). The studies of Leibniz's writings of China shows that he believed in plurality, diversity, the essential harmony of matter, the power of universal reason to grasp objective truth, and that the basic beliefs of the Chinese were fully compatible with Christian doctrines (Leibniz, Cook and Rosemont 1994, 2-3). Leibniz engaged in lengthy correspondences with many missionaries to China for his study of China throughout his life, especially those accommodationist missionaries who advocated toleration and moderation and appreciated Chinese heritage. To Leibniz, both China and Europe are the great civilizations but on the opposite extremes of the Eurasian continent, and the two competed with each other in almost equal combat in different ways. Europe was superior to China 'in profundity of knowledge and in the theoretical disciplines' as well as in military science but Chinese surpassed Europeans "in practical philosophy and in comprehending the precepts of civil life". And all the laws of the Chinese facilitated to achieve public tranquillity and maintain social order. He praised the Chinese for their obedience toward superiors and reverence toward elders, the religious relation of children toward parents, and the marvellous respect and an established order of duties among those equals who had little obligation to each other (Leibniz, Cook and Rosemont 1994, 45-47). Leibniz suggested that learning from China could benefit Europe such as stopping Europeans from further corruption for a moral life, and reconciling disputes between Catholics and Protestants to restore peace in Europe. He wished not only China could send their missionaries to Europe but also Chinese could increase their receptivity to European ideas and artifacts. But this did not happen until almost two centuries later.

2.1.1.3. Voltaire's View on China

Being same as other Enlightenment thinkers who were interested in China, Voltaire had never been there (Watson 1979, 40). For Voltaire, the Jesuit translations of Chinese classics were more authentic

and reliable because the Chinese themselves should be the best witnesses to their morality (Watson 1979, 40). The Confucian classics manifested that the Chinese enjoyed an exceptional degree of freedom from superstition and deceit, while the seventeenth-century Europeans still suffered from the religious persecution. With the freedom from the religious intolerance, Chinese enlightened moral and political outlook could play an important role in the enlightenment of Europe (Watson 1979, 49). Voltaire argued that it was the rites (*li*) which formed the general spirit of Confucian China. Chinese rites consisted of religion, laws, morals such as continuous self-cultivation per Confucian teaching, and manners such as respects to parents, elders, managers, and the emperor. The Confucian classics rendered a religious code which set constraints on the absolute power of the emperor. The fixed and established manners had a near resemblance to laws and ‘it is manners which govern the Chinese’. The acts of the tribunals whose members needed to pass all strict civil service examinations also had the force of law. In fact, this confounding of religion, laws, morals, and manners set the context in which a wise administration and great ruler such as Emperor Kang Xi of Qing dynasty should operate. Hence, Voltaire concluded that China was a monarchy which was governed by law rather than by a single arbitrary will (Watson 1979, 43-44). He also suggested that the good laws can be exported from China to Europe. In general, both the early Jesuit missionaries and Enlightenment Sinophiles appreciated China’s ethical system and the ideal of a scholarly mandarin.

2.1.1.4. Montesquieu’s View on China

As the most notable Enlightenment Sinophobe, Montesquieu criticized that the appearance of honour, political virtue, and the Confucian social ethics in the missionaries’ account of China were superficial (Kow 2014, 353). At the bottom of the eighteenth-century China, it was still fear, cudgel, and servile obedience which governed the state under a single person’s will. Montesquieu believed that the missionaries had been deceived by ‘an appearance of order’ and China was not a mixture of virtue, honor, and fear which should be admirable for Europeans (Montesquieu and Nugent 1766, 141-143). Montesquieu classified China as a despotic government rather than republican or monarchical after examining the political and civil laws of China. Different from Voltaire, Montesquieu thought ‘other powers like the tribunals lack necessarily legal means to oppose the ruler, and the separation of powers and the checks and balances among them was not clear and at risk’ (Watson 1979, 44).

According to Montesquieu, the particularity of each government was decided on five factors: “1) the nature and principle of government; 2) the security and liberty of the state and its citizens; 3) external factors such as climate and soil; 4) the characteristics of the inhabitants, such as their spirit, commerce, number, and religion; and 5) the historical and legislative processes by which laws come into being”. Since the five factors varied across states and cultures, the more the laws suited in the Chinese peculiar context, the less possibility to apply it to Europe. Hence, Montesquieu concluded that China could not be a model for Europe. It is worth noting that Montesquieu did agree that Chinese government was not so corrupt, and some laws of China could be useful to uphold the harmony between different ethnic groups in Europe (Watson 1979, 46)

In summary, both Leibniz and Voltaire were enthusiastic in promoting the model of China in Europe. They found reason in morality and politics worked in China and praised the Chinese for selecting their officials on the basis of scholarship. But their study of China was for their European concerns and was part of the overall Enlightenment intellectual program in which religion should be replaced by reason (Mungello 1999, 90-91). Montesquieu’s negative perceptions of the despotic China was later inherited by other European writers such as Rousseau, Diderot, Kant, and Herder in the late eighteenth century (Kow 2014, 352). After the Opium Wars when the Western powers became hegemonic globally, China was seen as a corrupt, stagnant civilization, or even worse, as the hostile racial terms of ‘Yellow Peril’⁵ (Mungello 1999, 94). The political stability, cultural cohesion, and the excellence of Confucian moral system in the imperial China were left behind by both Europeans and Chinese.

⁵ The term of “yellow peril” expressed a fear that the great number of the yellow race threatened the existence of the superior white race and Western civilization in the nineteenth century.

Through the writings of Leibniz, Voltaire, and Montesquieu, we can draw a picture of how the imperial China looked like from a European perspective before she encountered the Western powers in the middle of the nineteenth century. This can serve as a historical and cultural background for the May Fourth intellectuals' encounter with the Western thoughts and ideas. The Enlightenment thinkers' perceptions of China also rendered rich material to examine their views on ethical universalism and cultural relativism.

2.1.2. State of the Art: The Enlightenment Universalism

The tensions over 'universal values' between the EU and China today is not unprecedented. In essence it is about if the European values should be imposed on non-European cultures which can be seen as a legacy from the Enlightenment, a legacy of the debate about ethical universalism and cultural relativism. For example, Moscovici scrutinizes the French fiction of *Supplement au Voyage de Bougainville (1770)* by Diderot and finds that the Enlightened writer suggested a more reciprocal rather than hierarchical approach to cultural exchange, and a modest attitude toward one's own ethics and a tolerant one toward those of another (Moscovici 2002, 89). Daniel Carey and Sven Trakulhun (2013) indicate that universalism remains the most contentious feature of the Enlightenment thoughts. Universalists aim to create shared moral norms and epistemological standards by suppressing cultural heterogeneity (Moscovici 2002, 2). It is argued that Kang Youwei who led the 1895 Petition and the 1898 Hundred Days' Reform during the late Qing, held an Enlightenment universalist view that 'the moral universalism based on equality, democracy, and individual liberty is both superior to and compatible with Confucian traditions and imperial Chinese institutions, no matter how deeply rooted obedience, family control over the individual, and social hierarchy are within a given cultural-ideological heritage. Ancient Confucian traditions could be reformed and modernized in the light of these universal values' (Israel 2006, 871).

However, research also reveal that the Enlightenment thinkers did attempt to reconcile moral universalism with cultural incommensurability through their debates on China. Simon Know (2014) examines the countering views of China by Bayle and Montesquieu and questions the dominance of universalism among the Enlightenment thinkers. Know's study shows that except for their countering views on China, Bayle attempted to balance Enlightenment reason with subjective conscience while Montesquieu applied universal reason to China's particular contexts. For example, even though the seventeenth and eighteenth century's China was characterized with modern corruption, political virtues once existed with ancient China before Zhou dynasty who could make good laws. Bayle believed that Confucianism was a form of rational atheism. Montesquieu also regarded Confucianism as a moderating civil religion in the vast despotic state. Know (2014, 354) concludes that both Bayle and Montesquieu sought to take into account historical and geographical particularities and even questioned universalist assumptions rather than simply imposing their universal values on other cultures as exemplified in their views of China. Walter Watson (1979, 38) studied the arguments centred around the questions if China was a despotism and if China was a model for Europe between Montesquieu and Voltaire. According to Voltaire, the Confucian tradition represents an ideal of government for the enlightenment of Europe to escape from the religious intolerance (Watson 1979). Both studies reveal that the Enlightened thinkers to some extent did endeavour to reconcile ethical universalism and cultural diversity through their descriptions of China. Even though the Enlightenment accounts of China might fail to transcend European superiority, they did show robust appreciation of cultural diversity.

By contrast with the Europeans who had already studied the Chinese philosophy, society and institutions in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the Chinese showed a different pattern in their response to the cultural encounter with Europe.

2.2. Cultural Encounters with Europe- A Chinese View

Chow (1960, 13-14) divided China's response to Western civilization between the Opium Wars and the May Fourth period into three stages based on what China learned from the West and how Chinese educated elites positioned their Confucian heritage:

At the first stage, the Opium Wars forced the Qing (1644-1912) court to acknowledge her vulnerability, military weakness, and failure at sea. Chinese literati-officials initiated the Self-Strengthening Movement in 1860 to learn Western scientific technology but still held the view that 'traditional Chinese institutions and traditional thought were superior to their Western equivalents and did not need to reform' (Chow 1960, 13). Qing China started to buy weapons from the West and established her own arsenals and shipyard to defend against foreign powers. But Chang (1980, 275-276) pointed out that the influx of Western learning during this stage was slow and its impact on the Chinese elites were superficial because 'up to the 1890s their education was still oriented to the civil-service examination system and to the Confucian learning which formed its foundation.' In general, the ruling gentry-literati showed indifference to Western ideas and values and were uninterested in social reform beyond the scope of economic and military modernization.

At the second stage, China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895 marked a failure of those self-strengtheners' efforts in the commercial and industrial fields. The threat of continuous Western expansion was not only social-political but also cultural and religious (Chang 1980, 285). To enhance national wealth and power, Chinese reform-minded elites attempted to model Western laws and political institutions and aimed to transform China to "a constitutional government and a participant polity" (Chang 1980, 292). Their efforts could be observed in the 1895 Petition of Examination Candidates, the 1898 Hundred Days' Reform, the 1901 Reform Edict, the abolition of civil service examination system in 1905, the 1911 Revolution which overthrew the Qing dynasty, and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. At this stage, many of the reformers started to question the legitimacy of Chinese traditional political order and the religious-ideological foundation of the state and society, namely Confucianism. For example, a few radical reformers criticized the Confucian tenet of the "Three Bonds" (*san gang*)⁶ for it enjoined authoritarianism and ran counter to their declared egalitarian beliefs. They proclaimed that China's Confucian moral-ideological order should be rejected as well as her traditional political institutions and technological culture. Meanwhile, some of the reformers argued that even though China's political institution should be changed, her moral ideological order was still sound, and Confucianism should be defended. Nevertheless, for most of the reformers in the late Qing, their deep-rooted loyalty to Confucianism to some extent constrained their enthusiasm for Western constitutionalism and the parliamentary system (Chang 1980, 281-282). In general, at this stage, Chinese scholars still insisted that Western learning was for practical use while Chinese philosophy, ethics, and principles should remain the fundamental structure of Chinese society. This turned out to be insufficient to modernize China as proved by the "resurgence of warlord rule and the two attempts at monarchical restoration"⁷ in the newly established Republic (Chow 1960, 13).

At the third stage of the May Fourth Movement period, the new Chinese intelligentsia for the first time realized the importance to study the "Western ideas and principles that underly Western technology and institutions" and attempted to completely transform Chinese traditional civilization including her philosophy, ethics, and social theories into a new culture (Chow 1960, 13, 327). Even though scholars

⁶ The "Three Bonds" were the three fundamental principles to govern the three most fundamental social relationships in the traditional Chinese cultural which required sons be obedient to fathers, wives be obedient to husbands, and ministers be obedient to the emperor.

⁷ The first one was led by Yuan Shikai, the first President of the Republic of China, who revived the hereditary monarchy and became the emperor himself between December 1915 and March 1916. The second one was led by General Zhang Xun and briefly reinstalled the last emperor of the Qing dynasty in July 1917, which was quickly reversed by the Republican troops.

argue that the May Fourth Movement marks the final breakdown of Chinese Confucian traditions (Lin 1979, 11), how to position the cultural heritage in the encounter with the West remains controversial for the Chinese for a long time. The May Fourth new thought movement was challenged not only internally by their conservative compatriots but also externally by the failure of the Western civilization as exemplified in the First World War. After the comparative study of Chinese and Western civilizations, Liang Qichao and Liang Shuming led the reflections on the previous “complete Westernization” approach in the beginning of the 1920s and constituted “the first systematized and strong defense of Confucianism and Eastern civilization since the influx of Western thought into China” (Chow 1960, 329). This was followed by a continuous debate on how to modernize China, such as the advocacies of “wholesale Westernization”, “reconstruction of civilization on a Chinese base”, and “national form” which claimed to adapt Western civilization to the Chinese form but preserving their essentials, during the 1930s and 1940s (Chow 1960, 332).

Benjamin I. Schwartz (1972, 2-10) does not agree with Chow that the May Fourth marked the qualitatively departure of Chinese intellectual revolution. He argues that the late Qing reformers were actually “the real transformers of values and the bearers of new ideas from the West”. The May Fourth Movement was just a culmination of China’s learning of Western ideas and values since the late Qing. Schwartz’s view can be exemplified by the case of Kang Youwei, the most influential reformer of the late Qing who led the 1895 Petition and 1898 Reform together with his disciple Liang Qichao. Kang was interested in the secular Western learning, especially the Western forms of governments. Kang was perceived as a universalist who believed that a Western constitutional and parliamentary government could be transplanted into China and democracy was “a political ideal destined to be realized in all future human societies” (Chang 1980, 286). However, when it came to the Republic of China, Kang became a leading conservative who proposed to fortify Confucianism as China’s national religion and even to prescribe it into the constitution which was fiercely attacked by the May Fourth radical intellectuals in *New Youth*.

Nevertheless, the May Fourth Movement played a pivotal role in the history of modern China, in which the Chinese intellectuals actively discussed and disseminated the Western ideas and principles, no matter they were radicals or conservatives. The following part will provide a holistic view of how the May Fourth Movement constituted an important context for the new radical intellectuals interpreted the Western “universal values”.

2.2.1. The May Fourth Movement

After the 1911 Republican Revolution, the Republic of China was established in 1912. However, the warlord government between 1912 and 1915 still upheld the traditional ethics and institutions, and the severe press and publication laws restricted the freedom of press and suffocated the new intellectuals (Chow 1960, 43). The most publications were old-fashioned and stereo-typed with articles supporting the traditions and advocating the “national quintessence” such as the “Three Bonds”, and very few dealt with the contemporary social problems. The stagnant and backward situation characterized all the Chinese publications at that time. For example, there was no single Chinese book on philosophy published between 1910 and 1917 and just a few of Western works could be found in China which were almost entirely written in the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries (Chow 1960, 177). However, the Western social and political thoughts had advanced a lot after the Enlightenment. This is the background of the May Fourth Movement. But to analyse the May Fourth intellectuals’ interpretation of their Western learnings, it is important to learn what the May Fourth Movement is and how it constructed an important setting for the new intellectuals learn the Western thoughts and values.

Today in the People’s Republic of China, National Youth Day is celebrated annually on 4th May to commemorate the May Fourth Movement in 1919. From a Chinese perspective, the concept of the May Fourth Movement can firstly be associated with the student patriotic and anti-imperialist demonstrations of 1919. Triggered by China’s diplomatic failure at the Versailles Peace Conference

after the First World War that the possession of Qingdao and other rights in Shandong⁸ would be shifted from Germany to Japan under a secret agreement between Japan and Western powers, on May fourth in 1919, more than 3000 college students in Beijing assembled and started their anti-imperialist demonstrations. It further aroused the nationalist passions throughout China and was joined by workers and merchants. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, all Chinese political leaders attempted to portray their own versions of the May Fourth Movement for their particular political purposes (Schwarcz 1986, 244).

The May Fourth Movement has been scholarly contravertial and lacks an agreed definition. Liu Zaifu (2020, 127-129) recommends three different approaches to look into the May Fourth Movement: cultural or political May Fourth; the new culture movement or the new literature movement; revolutionary or reformative May Fourth. The cultural May Fourth started at the end of 1915 marked by the establishment of the magazine *New Youth* while the political one started with the student protests on May fourth in 1919. The New Culture movement suggested to replace Confucianism with Western ideas of science and democracy while the new literary movement stressed to change literary language from classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese. Depending on that their proposal to solve China's problem is radical or moderate, there is a revolutionary or a reformative May Fourth. Vera Schwarcz (1986, 6-8) deciphers the May Fourth movement from four perspectives: human emancipation from patriarchal authority of the family and the state bureaucracy, quest for modernity, national salvation, and the search for a new culture. Chow Tse-tsung (1960, 358-359), a seminal researcher of the May Fourth Movement, states that it was a combination of intellectual revolution and socio-political movement which was led by the newly awakening intellectuals in the 1910s and 1920s but with nation salvation as its main purpose. Yu Yingshi (2001, 311) perceives the May Fourth Movement as "first and foremost a cultural movement in response to the stimulus of Western ideas."

Charlotte Furth (1972, 59) suggests to understand the May Four movement from four angles: first, it was demonstrations against the Versailles treaty of June 1919 which soon aroused popular mass revolutionary movement in China with culmination in the Nationalist and Communist revolutions with an end of the Communist victory in 1949. Second, a peak of the "New Culture" movement calling for emancipation from classicism in culture, and acceptance of Western learning. Third, it attacked China's Confucian orthodoxy for a new culture. Fourth, a clear division between the May Fourth participants, who turned to revolutionary from original "liberal" position as of evolutionary and education-oriented approach. For the first time in China, modernists took a leading role in setting criteria of orthodoxy for the whole society (Ibid).

By contrast, Li Zehou (1987, 7) states that the May Fourth Movement included two different movements: one was the New Literature Movement, and the other was the Student Anti-Imperial Movement. He (1999) further states that the May Fourth movement has two dual variations of Enlightenment and Nationalism. Vera Schwarcz (1986, 285) points out that political patriotism and cultural iconoclasm are the most significant characteristics of the May Fourth Movement and argues that the May Fourth concept serves as 'a reminder of the lack of freedom of thought and freedom of expression' six decades after the event. Airaksinen (2014) carries on a nationalist discourse analysis of the movement. Doleželová-Velingerová and Wang (2001, 1) argue that the May Fourth movement marked the beginning of the construction of China's literary and cultural modernity even though a complete Chinese discourse of modernity can be traced back to 1898 Reform by the Qing court. Lee (2001) comments that the May Fourth movement did not achieve its goal to destruct Chinese tradition neither did it formulate a new worldview to enlighten the people. Hence, the May Fourth intellectual project is an incomplete modernity project (Ibid).

Because the purpose of this study is to explore how the early May Fourth intellectuals talked about the Western core values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in *New Youth* (1915-1920), the author selects to focus on the cultural feature of the May Fourth Movement, namely a renunciation of

⁸ Shandong is a province which is located in the eastern coast of China.

the Chinese tradition and customs to create a new culture through the learning of the Western philosophies and values, rather than its political or nationalist discourses or the vernacular language promotion efforts.

It is also worth noting that the rapid rise of printing and journalism during the May Fourth era laid the groundwork for the movement and contributed to the creation of the “public sphere” for the enlightened intellectuals to transmit new ideas and construct modernity project (Lee 2001, 35). Also, the Western learning by the May Fourth intellectuals had a deep link to the Japanese modernity project and was often translated from Japanese interpretations of Western texts and ideas (Schwarcz 1986, 5). For example, Chen Duxiu established *New Youth* after he returned from Japan and Gao Yihan was in Tokyo when his article titled “Rousseau’s Social Philosophy” was published in *New Youth* Volume 7 Issue 5 in 1920. Gao also translated a Japanese article entitled “Theoretical Basis of Suffrage” which was published in *New Youth* Volume 6 Issue 4 in 1918. Even though both radical and conservative May Fourth scholars appealed to Western authors, Yu (2001, 310) critiques that the May Fourth’s Western learning is shallow. The May Fourth intellectuals did not understand the classical culture of the West and they only responded to those Western values and ideas that could be explained in their own tradition including the theory and practice of Confucianism (Ibid). However, the grammar of the contemporary Chinese literary was inadequate to describe the new Western terms and concepts. Not to say that the modernity claimed by the May Fourth intellectuals was something that their European contemporaries already hoped to leave behind (Schwarcz 1986, 8).

Under the forcible and humiliating encounter with Western imperialism, Chinese May Fourth scholars attempted to emancipate the Chinese from their Confucian ethic of self-submission to the family, and to the state bureaucracy. But Vera Schwarcz’s study (1986, 284-286) shows that the roots of old culture and old values are failed to be eradicated and the Confucian ethic of subservience still dominates mass culture and the ruling Party in China six decades after the movement. China is still struggling to reconcile Western concept of modernity with her distinctive cultural heritage. Hence, she concludes that the May Fourth movement was an incomplete enlightenment project. Schwarcz (1986, 298) further explains that the failure of the May Fourth’s enlightenment efforts is not only because of the resiliency of China’s feudal ethic, but also a result of the May Fourth intellectuals’ surrender to the pressure of national salvation and their own desire to get involved in political revolutions. She tells that the enlightenment cannot be achieved through revolution.

2.2.2. State of the Art: Interpretations of “Universal Values” by the May Fourth Intellectuals

There is no doubt that the May Fourth movement exerted far-reaching influences on modern China’s political, social, and educational developments (Chow 1960, 254). For example, to free Chinese women from their traditional social bondage was one of the most significant achievements of the movement and Chinese women’s emancipation was actually initiated by *New Youth* (Chow 1960, 257). Some researchers have attempted to study the Chinese interpretations of democracy, human rights, or the rule of law in the May Fourth period.

2.2.2.1. Human Rights and Individual Liberty

Stephen C. Angle and Marian Svensson (2001) point out that the discourses on politics, ethics and law are configured differently in Chinese traditions from their European counterparts. There was even no correspondent terminology in Chinese about the European term ‘rights’ until the mid-nineteenth century and classical Confucianism denies the individual as the “sole unit of ethical or political assessment”. They further state that “rights and human rights” were part of the May Fourth radicals’ progressive political and ethical claims of liberating individuals from the oppression of family and tradition for social progress and modernization (Ibid).

“Individualism” was more prevailing in the May Fourth era, which heavily influenced the contemporary youths seeking “personal liberation and independence” (Yang 2019). Cai Yuanpei, the

president of Beijing University in the May Fourth period, promoted “freedom of thought and freedom of intellectual autonomy” (Schwartz 1972, 11). Lin Yusheng (1979) argued that individualism was used by the May Fourth intellectuals to “smash older forms of authoritarianism but provided no bar against new forms of authoritarianism” because it was not accompanied by any positive faith in the “inviolability of the individual”. In fact, soon after the May Fourth Movement, individualism gradually receded and became supplanted by a heavily “politicized form of collectivism” in China (Ibid).

2.2.2.2. Democracy

Even though “Mr Democracy” was well perceived as the slogan of the May Fourth Movement, the concept of democracy was not sufficiently discussed and understood by the new intellectuals (Chow 1960, 228-230). Charlotte Furth (1972, 61) argues that the May Fourth radicals had similar interpretation of democracy as Liang Qichao who perceived democracy as a new ideal of personal and social relationships rather than a set of political forms. As Nathan (1986) comments, after the 1911 Republican Revolution, Chinese political thinkers principally agreed that China should be democratic, but there was no detailed agreement on people’s rights and power. Democracy was just an ornament of the May Fourth modernity (Ibid).

Edward X. Gu (2001, 590) points out that both Chow Tse-tsung and Vera Schwarcz failed to clarify if the discourse of democracy by the May Fourth intellectuals is liberal, and neither Charlotte Furth nor Benjamin Schwartz found an “appropriate accommodation” for democracy in their studies of the May Fourth Movement. Gu argued that the May Fourth intellectuals worshipped the ‘common people’ and their discourse on democracy was populist and utopian, but they did not favour the tyranny of the majority.

2.2.2.3. Rule of Law

In his book *China’s Long March Toward Rule of Law*, Randall Peerenboom (2002, 2) makes a thorough study of the situation of rule of law⁹ in the People’s Republic of China. He even mentions the late Qing reformers’ efforts in establishing rule of law in China. Unfortunately, he fails to tell us any detail of rule of law in the May Fourth period.

The Enlightenment thinkers’ cultural encounter with China has been well studied by researchers. By contrast, the May Fourth Movement has mainly been studied as a historical event. How the May Fourth intellectuals interpreted the Western ideas and principles of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in details has not been sufficiently examined. If the May Fourth intellectuals’ Western learning shared a similar pattern with the Enlightenment cultural encounter with Confucianism is to be further explored. This research attempts to contribute to the research gap of the early May Fourth intellectuals’ encounter with the Western “universal values” of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights.

2.3. Theoretical Discussion

To address the research questions, the author suggests a three-level theoretical framework to conduct the empirical study. Firstly, the theory of cross-cultural encounter which is developed by Fred Dallmayr is adopted as a point of departure to formulate this study. Dallmayr (1996) studied the European expansion in history and suggests that there are different models in the cross-cultural encounters: *conquest*, to incorporate of alien territories and populations; *conversion*, including both conquest and forced cultural assimilation; *assimilation and acculturation*, cultural hegemony within domestic context that typically targets marginalized ethnic or linguistic group; *partial assimilation*

⁹ Peerenboom purposely chooses the term of “rule of law” instead of “the rule of law” to imply that there are different conceptions of the rule of law in the world, not only a liberal democratic multiparty version in the West but also a single-party socialist variant in China. However, “rule of law” is interchangeable with “the rule of law” in this text.

though a process of cultural borrowing in which the two encountering cultures are nearly equal or roughly comparable, and some others models. Dallmayr classifies the Enlightenment thinkers' learning from the then advanced Chinese bureaucratic practices as partial assimilation model. Secondly, the analytical tool of ethical universalism and cultural relativism in the study of the Enlightenment thinkers' views on China is borrowed to look into how the early May Fourth intellectuals interpreted the Western principles and ideas in *New Youth* (1915-1920). Thirdly, even though that the author understands that the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, together with free market economy tangle up to construct a distinctive modern European culture, it is for practical purpose that the author filters the data from *New Youth* (1915-1920) through the lens of three different themes, democracy, rule of law, and human rights to explore how the early May Fourth intellectuals perceived the Western principles.

3. Methodological Approach and Design

3.1. Methodology

The May Fourth period was the first time for Chinese to realize the importance to study the Western ideas and principles in order to transform China into a modern country. *New Youth* was one of the most influential publications to introduce the Western values and thoughts. The author is interested in how the May Fourth writers talked about democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in the period when its Confucian traditions and ethics were still very dominating in the society.

3.2. Material

3.2.1. New Youth (xin qingnian)

In September 1915, the monthly journal of *Youth Magazine* (*qingnian zazhi*) was established in Shanghai by Chen Duxiu. After the first volume of six issues, it was suspended by the authorities. When it was resumed, it was renamed *New Youth* (*xin qingnian*) from Volume 2 Issue 1 in September 1916. With the growing Marxist orientation of *New Youth* after the May Fourth Incident in 1919, a division of the editorial direction took place among the *New Youth* society. The liberal editors and contributors left the magazine during the period of 1920 and 1921 (Chow 1960, 44-45, Ma 1974, 79-158). After Chen Duxiu, together with Li Dazhao, founded the Chinese Communist Party in July 1921, *New Youth* ultimately became an official instrument of the Communists in their debate against non-Marxist ideologies until it ceased publication in July 1926. Out of the boom of periodicals during the May Fourth era, *New Youth* had "one of the longest periods of publication" (Ma 1974).

Nevertheless, as one of the most leading radical publications in the early Republic of China, *New Youth* offers rich historical materials for the student of the May Fourth Movement (Ma 1974). A striking number of the leading radical and liberal intellectuals of the time were associated with the journal, which made it a 'bombshell of thought' for the Chinese young readers who struggled for social reforms in the beginning of the twentieth century. Before it became the organ of the Chinese Communist Party, *New Youth* was not only a battlefield to fiercely attack on Chinese traditions with an emphasis on Confucian thoughts and values for human emancipation, but also a platform to introduce Western thoughts and principles such as liberalism, utilitarianism, dogmatism, democratic reformism, etcetera. Numerous big names from Europe and America were mentioned by *New Youth* writers, such as Henri Louis Bergson, Spinoza, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Hegel, Jeremy Bentham, Darwin, etcetera.

In order to understand how the early May Fourth intellectuals discussed the Western values of human rights, democracy, and rule of law, the author conducts a study of *New Youth* publications from Volume 1 Issue 1 (September 15, 1919) to Volume 7 Issue 5 (April 1, 1920), which are available in the library of University of Gothenburg. Given its increasing Marxist orientation after 1920 summer, the author argues the available source serves the purpose of this study quite well. The author is aware

of that some other periodicals in the May Fourth period also were good publications in promotion of the Western ideas and thoughts, such as *Journal New Tide (Xin Chao)*. But due to the limitation of source availability and length of this paper, the author focuses on a thick analysis of *New Youth* Volume 1 to 7 which were published between 1919 and April 1920. It is also due to the limitation of this study, the author focuses on the examination of the articles by Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan in *New Youth* Volume 1 to 7.

In the edition under this research, the sequence of pagination is continuous in Volume 4-6 but for some unexplained reason, it starts anew with each article in Volume 1-3, and starts anew with each issue in Volume 7. Hence, there is no page number if referring to the articles in *New Youth* Volume 1-3, and page number means its sequence of pagination in the specific issue if referring to the articles in Volume 7.

3.2.2. Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan

Since September 1915, Chen had been the sole editor of *New Youth* until an editorial committee was formed in January 1918 which consisted of Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Li Dazhao, Shen Yinmo, Qian Xuantong, and Gao Yihan. However, Chen Duxiu resumed sole editorship of the journal in the summer of 1920 (Lee 2001, 43, Ma 1974, 154). Hence, the journal *New Youth* was inevitably shaped by ‘Chen’s powerful personality, his anti-establishmentarian mentality, and a desire to gain hegemonic power in the field of culture which led to the radicalization of modern Chinese intellectuals’ (Lee 2001, 43). Furthermore, Chen Duxiu was a definite proponent of Western modernity. Lee (2001, 42) points out that “Chen took for granted the correctness of Western values such as progress, democracy, freedom, and utilitarianism” without critical reflection. Chen Duxiu led the attack on Confucianism in *New Youth* society and was a prolific political commentator. He also translated parts of Charles Seignobos’ *History of Contemporary Civilization* (1890) (*xiandai wenming shi*) from French into Chinese and introduced the Enlightenment thinkers such as Descartes, Spinoza, Leibnitz, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, Diderot, which was published in *New Youth* Volume 2 Issue 2. Not only because of his control of the magazine, but also because he was a typical radical within the *New Youth* society, the author argues that Chen Duxiu is a good representative to study in order to explore how the early May Fourth intellectuals actively engaged in the Western learnings.

As one of the main contributors to *New Youth* and being part of its editorial committee between 1918 and 1920, Gao translated and introduced many Western philosophers’ works in political and social domains. For example, he translated the main contents of Bluntschli’s *The Theory of the State* with his own comments which was published in *New Youth* Volume 1 Issue 2, and part of A.V. Dicey’s *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution*¹⁰ (*daixue yingguo yanlun ziyou zhi quanli lun*) which was published in *New Youth* Volume 1 Issue 6. Based on Bentham’s *theory of legislation*, he wrote an article entitled “Utilitarianism and Life” in Volume 2 Issue 1. His essay titled “Self-government and Liberty” in Volume 1 Issue 5 referred to Bosanquet’s *The Philosophical Theory of The State*. He introduced *Spencer’s Political Philosophy* in Volume 6 Issue 3 based on Barker’s *Political Thought in England from Spencer to today*. He shared his reading of Mill’s *On Liberty* in Volume 4 Issue 3. He also introduced *Rousseau’s Social philosophy* in Volume 7 Issue 5 based on Rousseau’s work *Principles of Social Reconstruction*. Gao also wrote several articles of the nature and scope of the state according to the prevailing Western thoughts for *New Youth*. These works show that Gao was one of the most knowledgeable intellectuals regarding the Western ideas and values in the May Fourth period. Hence, the author will examine Gao’s texts in *New Youth* in the coming sector as well.

¹⁰ The part that was translated was the Chapter VI *The Right to Freedom of Discussion* in Part II *The Rule of Law* of the book.

3.3. Choice of Method- Qualitative Textual Analysis

The researcher is highly interested in the articles written by Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan between 1915-1920 in the publication of *New Youth* and searches for their views on how China could learn from the West about the values and principles. According to Alan Bryman (2016, 554-555), magazine and other mass media output are often the potential sources to conduct a qualitative textual analysis and a fine-grained textual analysis produces a “greater sensitivity to the nature and content of specific themes”. Bonnie S. Brennen (2012, 194) also suggests that textual analysis in media studies could help the research to bring out the “entire range of potential meanings” in texts, both surface meanings and the underlying intentions. Hence, the author employs the method of qualitative textual analysis to conduct the empirical study of how the early May Fourth intellectuals discussed democracy, rule of law, and human rights in *New Youth* (1915-1920).

Given the magazine articles serve as the primary sources in this research, a method of content analysis seems to be a potential choice. A content analysis can be used to identify specified characteristics of messages or capture the dominant themes in the texts. Even though quantification is not part of the formal definition of content analysis any longer, “what the different approaches to content analysis have in common is still a concern with numbers” (Franzosi 2004, 187). According to Barbara Czarniawska (2014, 99), content analysis “traditionally begins with the formulation of categories and hypotheses concerning their frequency and connections between them”. But the author does not need to formulate the main themes based on the frequency of their occurrence in the articles. On the contrary, the author reads through the articles through the lens of three existing themes of “democracy, the rule of law, and human rights”. She aims to find out how the two selected May Fourth writers interpreted those Western principles in their texts in *New Youth*. Hence, a method of content analysis does not meet the needs of this research.

The research question is about political thoughts of democracy, the rule of law, and human right, which are often the objects of critical discourse analyses. But Fairclough (2004, 214) suggests a critical discourse analysis not only deals with text analysis but more stresses on how the text/discourse produces, reproduces, and changes ideologies in the process of social transformation. In general, discourse analysis inevitably focuses on mechanisms of power and renders a description of their functioning (Czarniawska 2014, 101). Iver B. Neumann’s (2008, 70) discourse analysis model also assumes that there is a dominating representation of reality as well as other alternatives are to be identified through the analysis. However, the early May Fourth intellectuals focused on cultural and intellectual discussion and if their perceptions of the Western values produced or changed the relations of power in the early Republic of China was simply not the focus of this study. The author thus feels that neither discourse analysis nor critical discourse analysis is applicable to this research.

To address the research question, how the early May Fourth intellectuals perceived the ‘universal values’, the author scrutinizes the articles in *New Youth* volume 1-7 by Chen Duxiu and Gao yihan. Firstly, the author searches for which articles by the two authors had democracy, law (constitution), or human rights as the subjects, or other similar words such as ‘modern thoughts’, or introductions of some specific Western social and political philosophy. Secondly, after reading through the selected articles, the author takes excerpts of what the two writers interpreted democracy, the rule of law including both constitution and civil laws such as rights to freedom of speech and publication, human rights, individual liberty, the modern conception of state. Thirdly, the author translated those Chinese excerpts into English. Fourthly, those raw materials were apportioned to three different categories of the modern conception of the state and individual liberty, the rule of law, democracy for the author to conduct analysis.

After the author answers the question of how the early May Fourth intellectuals perceived democracy, the rule of law, and human rights from ethical universality and cultural particularity perspective, she compares the two historical cultural encounters between China and Europe, the Enlightenment

thinkers' views on China and the May Fourth intellectuals' perceptions of the Western ideas and principles and attempts to map out the similarities and differences between them.

3.4. Ethical Considerations and Translation

The articles in the periodical *New Youth* (1915-1920) are the analysis object in this research. Alan Bryman (2016, 555) suggests that when using mass-media output such as articles in the magazines as sources of data for a qualitative social research, authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and contextual factors should be taken into consideration. The sole editorship of Chen Duxiu in *New Youth* between 1915 and 1918 might make the reader to question if *New Youth* provided an accurate description of the reality or not. The author is aware of Chen's huge influence in *New Youth*. But the contributors to *New Youth* were actually diversified. For example, Chen was the author of four articles out of 13 totally in Volume 1 Issue 1 and 4 out of 15 in Volume 1 Issue 2. And throughout the seven volumes, from time to time, the author can find notes from the editor if some change was made to the original text. When analysing different elements of "universal values", the author cross-checks both Chen Duxiu's and Gao Yihan's texts out of different articles in order to get genuine interpretations by the early May Fourth intellectuals. The author believes the authenticity of the data is somehow assured. The author also pays attention to the matter of credibility through the analysis. In fact, uncovering error or distortion of the data is part of the task of the study. The range of the contemporary publications which is employed in the study is confined to articles exclusively in *New Youth* due to the availability of Chinese data in the University of Gothenburg and Sweden as well as the limited time and space of this research. This implies a challenge to the data's representativeness. However, *New Youth* itself has been recognized as one of the most influential periodicals during the May Fourth era. Many articles in *New Youth* have been quoted and analysed before by other May Fourth researchers which become helpful clues for the author's selection of representative data. For example, Chen Duxiu's article titled "Foundations of the Exercise of Democracy" were mentioned both by Chow in his seminal research of the May Fourth Movement and Gu's study (2001, 595) of the populist discourse of democracy in the May Fourth Movement. The author believes those factors help mitigate the risk of representativeness of the data. The author traces the root of "universal values" to the Enlightenment Europe and review the literature of the May Fourth Movement as well as the historical cultural encounters between China and Europe. All these efforts show the author's good awareness of the importance of contextual factors of the data in qualitative social research.

The primary source of the articles in *New Youth* were firstly written in traditional Chinese. From Volume 4, the language was gradually changed to vernacular. But it was still more close to the traditional Chinese rather than modern simplified Chinese. Since it was the beginning for the Chinese to introduce and discuss the Western ideas and principles, many Western notions and terms including "democracy" had not had universally agreed Chinese translations. The author herself does not hold a solid knowledge of the modern Western ideas and principles either. All those factors make it a huge challenge to properly translate the Chinese sources into English to present how the early May Fourth intellectuals interpreted the Western values of democracy, the rule of law, and human rights. To improve the quality of the English translation, the author refers to the English version of half of John Dewey's lectures of social and political philosophy in Beijing in 1919 which can be found in "European Journal of Pragmatism and American Philosophy, VII-2 | 2015"¹¹. Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan sometimes mentioned which part of which Western philosopher's work was referred to in their articles. The author attempts to find these original English works to be consistent with in the writing up of this research, such as Albert Venn Dicey's *Introduction to the Study of the Law of the Constitution* (1897) and Bernard Bosanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State* (1923)¹².

¹¹ Dewey's sixteen lectures were translated into Chinese and published in *New Youth* Volume 7 and 8.

¹² The first edition was published in 1899.

4. Analysis and Findings

4.1. How did the Early May Fourth Intellectuals Perceive ‘Universal Values’?

Why did the May Fourth intellectuals ardently introduce the Western thoughts and ideas in China? We can find the answers in *New Youth*. Firstly, the Western civilization could be a mirror for China to reflect the strength and weakness of her own culture and political and social philosophy (Gao 1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 2). Secondly, given that the political problems resembled in many respects those of Europe in the beginning of the eighteenth century, Gao Yihan (1918 Vol. 4, Iss. 1, 1) suggested that China could learn from the evolution of the Western social and political philosophies for her own domestic political and social reforms so China did not need to repeat the failures in the West during the past two centuries. Thirdly, the 1911 Revolution only changed the name of China to the Republic, but “the masses still had the outworn imperial thoughts in their minds”. Hence, China still needed a thought revolution to transform it to a true Republic (Chen 1917 Vol. 3, Iss. 3). The radical intellectuals around *New Youth* aimed to accomplish a cultural and intellectual transformation in China through both an attack on the old Chinese traditions and a learning of the Western ideas and values.

The Western term of “universal values” was not prevailing among the May Fourth intellectuals. Neither did the May Fourth writers directly and systematically elaborated their understandings of democracy, rule of law, or human rights in their articles in *New Youth (1915-1920)*. However, the elements of “universal values” were scattered in the articles in *New Youth*.

4.1.1. Human Rights, Individual Liberty, and New Conception of the State

When the author examines the articles in *New Youth*, her first impression is that both Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan repeatedly stressed the importance to formulate a new conception of the modern state and a new relationship between individuals and the state, which should be a precondition for individual liberty and human rights. From Gao’s perspective (1918 Vol. 5, Iss. 6, 551), the 1911 Revolution did not achieve its republican goal since “the republic cannot be established only through overthrowing the monarchy. A successful republic transformation must be accompanied by theoretical and philosophical reforms” which could be exemplified by the experience in the West. He said that “before the French Revolution, the liberal ideas such as natural right and equality had been disseminated among the French people by Rousseau, Voltaire, Montesquieu, and other philosophers. Naturally, once the feudal regime was abolished, the republican doctrines took root in the people’s minds”. The traditions and customs were still so strong in the infant Republic of China that Gao called on thought emancipation among the masses in order to “destroy the authoritarian customs and communications”.

Through his writings in *New Youth*, Gao emphasized that a new conception of the state should be established to replace the contemporary outdated one:

The current conception of the state in China is passed down from thousands of years ago. Its essence is to surrender individual’s interests to the extreme extent of leaving nothing for himself in order to benefit the state. The state is the purpose of the individual’s life. The individual is born for the state and live for the state. There is no boundary for the state to take action (in relation to the individual’s life). And the individual is not eligible to be juxtaposed with the state. (Gao 1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 4)

How should the new conception of the state look like? At the end of his article titled ‘The State is not the End of Life’, Gao highly recommended Garner’s version that ‘the state should be simply an institution, an agency or instrumentality by means of which the collective ends of society may be realized, instead of itself being the end’. In another article entitled of ‘Outline of the Differences between Modern Conception of State and Ancient Ones’, Gao made some reflections on Bluntschli’s theory of the state in conjunction with the Chinese history as following:

The modern principle that the existence of the state is for the people has been well elaborated in the West. All the purpose of the (modern) state is to protect the rights and interests of the people. The more the people are enlightened about this principle, the higher the culture of the state will become. If the advance of (Chinese) national civilization could be driven by the people, from now on, everything would be changed. The cycles of order and chaos, and prosperity and decay in Chinese history could permanently terminate. Only in this way can the Chinese civilization never go backwards again. Nevertheless, the nature of the modern state is to protect human rights. (Gao 1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 2)

Chen Duxiu (1916 Vol. 1, Iss. 6) pointed out that the people in the Republic of China still suffered from autocratic ruling which could be embodied in the facts that they had no clue about the nature of a modern state, they did not know that the state should be the “public property” of the people in modern societies, and they thought that the state, the government, and the politics were not their business.

In the article titled “Contract Theory and The Nature of the State” (*minyue yu bangben*), Gao Yihan (1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 3) referred to modern political thoughts and made a rather holistic statement what the modern state should be as following:

The state is an abstract concept. It can only be materialized through some specific institutions to fulfil its functions. The constitution derives from the state sovereignty and is promulgated to restrict the scope of government organs. ...The state sovereignty is almost equivalent to popular sovereignty. The government is only the agencies of exercise of authority. The power of legislation is permanently held by the people. (Gao 1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 3)

In the modern society, the power of the state and the government can only derive from the general will of the people. This is still to be disseminated among the common people under the Republic of China according to Chen and Gao.

To the early May Fourth intellectuals, the conception of human rights was closely associated with European modernity and should be advocated in China. In the first issue of *New Youth*, Chen Duxiu (1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 1) wrote that the Chinese culture in the early Republic of China was very close to that in the ancient times and the Chinese people still suffered from the “autocratic ruling” even though they were already living in “the Republic” with an elected President. By contrast, the true modern civilization had been invented by the Europeans. Chen Duxiu highlighted “human rights” together with evolutionism and socialism as the hallmarks of modern civilization which completely transformed human society from the ancient to a modern one. However, when he explained the notion of human rights, Chen (Ibid) first stressed the abolishment of slavery, then he said that “in a modern democratic society, all are equal before the law, even though the economic inequality does still exist”. It seems that “human rights” was interpreted by Chen as no slave and equality of all before the law. In another essay, Chen (1916 Vol 2. Iss. 3) proclaimed that the spirit of the Western rule of law was that “all are equal before the law and are entitled without discrimination of any kind, superior or inferior, noble or common”. Chen added that “to model the West to build a new state and a new society so China can survive in the contemporary world, the primary task is to import the foundation of the Western state and society, namely the faith in equal human rights”.

Both Chen and Gao suggested that to emancipate the Chinese from the ancient autocratic way of thinking, the modern conception of the state should be imported to protect human rights. They embraced equality before the law.

4.1.2. Rule of Law

The 1911 Republican Revolution subverted the rule of emperor, but the “emperor” still lived in the minds of the people. China still needed a “thought revolution” to replace the traditional doctrine of the rule of man by the rule of law. In his essay titled “A Critique of Emperor-Teacherism”, Gao Yihan pointed out that the ancient “Emperor-Teacherism” that the people should be submitted to the decrees

or words of the ruler was still engraved in the minds of the Chinese. In a republic, it should be replaced by new perceptions of the state and the government with a stress on the rule of law. He said:

In the past few months, I did not talk about politics; I did not read the presidential decrees. Because the government has not been acknowledged nationwide and the President is not esteemed nationwide. What we demand is the rule of law rather than the rule of man (the President) The states in Europe have established the rule of law for a long time while in China we still follow the doctrine of the rule of man and have virtues as the purpose of the state. It seems that our present political philosophy resembles that of Europe in ancient times. (Gao 1918 Vol. 5, Iss. 6, 549-550)

Chen duxiu stressed the importance of free speech for the progress of civilization. He argued that “the law is to preserve the present civilization while free speech is for creating the future civilization” and further explained:

What we should remember is that on the one hand, the government itself should abide by the law; on the other, the government should not only respect the people’s right of free speech which had been stated in the promulgated law but also not oppress the freedom of speech which is not stated in the law. The purpose of the law is to regulate the people’s behaviours apart from their speech. People’s speech demands absolute freedom without any restriction. Otherwise, the freedom of speech cannot produce a better civilization and a better law. (Chen 1919 Vol. 7, Iss. 1, 15)

In another short essay, Chen (1920 Vol. 7, Iss. 2, 157) criticized that civil law of the Republic of China was used to “hamper the people’s freedom of publication and assembly” rather than to “restrict the government from illegal activities, corruptions, monarchical restorations, and dissolving the parliament”. Here we can learn that the early May Fourth intellectuals judged the rule of law was not established yet in the Republic of China based on the principles that the law should on one hand protect the people’s rights to freedom of speech and publication, on the other hand restrict the power of the government.

Confucian doctrine was opposed by the May Fourth intellectuals as it hampered the establishment of rule of law. In his article titled “Constitution and Confucianism”, Chen (1916 Vol 2. Iss. 3) pointed out that Confucianism was “absolutely incompatible with the new forms of state, society, and believes” which China was modelling on that of the West. As the foundation of the rule of law in the West, equal human rights includes equal rights to freedom of thought, religion, and belief. Hence, Chen argued that it was completely wrong to add the special article of “respect on and promotion of Confucianism” into the constitution of the Republic of China.

To achieve the rule of law, Chen called on “the final awakening of the people” in China and argued:

The sole and exclusive precondition to establish constitutional government and democracy is that the majority perceive themselves as the masters of the state and politics. As the masters, they take it as their own responsibilities to construct the government, to promulgate the law as well as comply with them, to prescribe their rights and protect them. If the government but the people become the master of the state, not only the constitution will become a paper without supreme force but also the rights to freedom under the constitution will not be cherished and embraced by the people with their hearts and lives. Consequently, the spirit of constitutionalism can not exist any longer. (Chen 1916 Vol. 1, Iss. 6)

Gao (1915 Vol. 1 Issue 1) called on the youths to be aware of their rights to equality, liberty, and free speech. Gao added that “according to the law in a true republic, equal rights and liberty for all are prescribed by the law, and each person can express his opinions freely”.

In short, the early May Fourth intellectuals perceived the rule of law as one of the fundamental characteristics of a modern republican state which is incompatible with Chinese Confucian traditions and the outdated “rule-by-emperor” mindset. Equal rights of all before the law and free speech and publication were highly appreciated by those early May Fourth intellectuals.

4.1.3. Democracy

To discuss how the May Fourth intellectuals interpreted democracy in *New Youth*, we need to start with Chen Duxiu’s article entitled “Foundations of the Exercise of Democracy”. In fact, there was no article in *New Youth* with “democracy” as its topic until this article was published in December 1919. It is worth noting that this happened after John Dewey delivered sixteen lectures in social and political philosophy in Beijing at an earlier time in 1919. Hence, Chen seted forth his article with a summary of how Dewey interpreted democracy:

What is democracy? ... According to Doctor Dewey, democracy consists of four elements: (1) Political democracy, to protect rights through constitution and fulfil the will of the people through representation, etcetera; (2) Democracy of rights, to stress the people’s rights, such as freedom of speech, press, religion, residence, and so on; (3) Social democracy, equality which can be achieved via for example breaking down of class and status wall and barriers and abolishing ideological inequality; (4) Economic democracy, to break down of barriers between the rich and the poor and equalize the distribution of wealth. (Chen 1919 Vol. 7, Iss. 1, 13)

Firstly, Chen classified Dewey’s four democratic elements into two clusters. Both political democracy and democracy of rights were the embodiment of democracy in political domain while social democracy and economic democracy fell into socio-economic domain. Even though he agreed that both clusters of democracy were the “means” to achieve a “better social life”, Chen stressed that socio-economic democracy was more important. From Chen’s point of view, without a good solution to the socio-economic issues, there was no way to solve political problems. Chen continued to elaborate the democracy that he advocated:

The socio-economic democracy explained by Doctor Dewey is a common view shared by different schools of socialism. I think nobody will oppose it as long as they embrace justice. But his explanation on political democracy seems insufficient. Since we are all liberal citizens already, the rights to freedom of speech, publication, belief, residence, and assembly are no doubt essential things of life. Constitution is also necessary. Representative system cannot be completely abolished. But I am afraid that those essential human rights would still be under the control of others but ourselves. We won’t be able to own those rights if we completely rely on “constitution to protect human rights” and “representative democracy to fulfil the will of the people”. This is how we understand democracy: The constitution is discussed and approved by the people directly, which will stipulate the rights. The will of the people will be fulfilled according to the constitution. In other words, the people should be both the ruler and the ruled through abolishing class walls between them. In essence, we should replace the passive bureaucracy with active self-government by the people. Until then, we can say that democracy is accomplished. (Chen 1919 Vol. 7, Iss. 1, 14)

Why did Chen emphasize that the people should directly participate politics and representative democracy was somehow insufficient for the infant Republic of China? He explained that there had been little dissemination of democracy among the people before the 1911 Revolution and the ruling parties in the Republican government of China did not understand the genuine democracy either. The exercise of the true democracy in China should start with fostering the people’s democratic mindset. That was, according to Chen:

The democracy that we are going to implement should model those in England and America. We should pay attention to both political and socio-economic democracies. We should focus

on the foundations of democracy. The foundations should be laid little by little by the people themselves. What are the foundations? They are the real self-government and association among the people directly. The spirit of such kinds of self-government and association is that everyone directly instead of through a representative to get involved in the public affairs. The forms of self-government and association are local autonomy and industrial association. (Chen 1919 Vol. 7, Iss. 1, 16-17)

What did “local autonomy” and “industrial association” mean? Chen suggested that local autonomy could start at the lowest administrative unit from the residential area and focus on local public affairs, for example, local education (primary schools and community libraries), local election, and local road construction, local public health, etcetera. Industrial members were suggested to start to associate with minimum size and scope. Hence, everyone could exercise their rights and directly engage in the decision-making process as a member of such civic communities.

By contrast, Gao Yihan (1915 Vol. 1, Iss. 2) thought that the representative democracy was the best political system within which the people could express their “opinions, emotions, wishes, or sufferings” which constituted the “state sovereignty”. He added that “as long as the people’s feelings were well expressed, the foundation of the state would be secured, and the social stability could be achieved permanently”. The problems in the infant Republic of China were that the state sovereignty was not composed of the “general will” and the representative government did not function according to “the people’s opinions, emotions, wishes, or sufferings” (Ibid). Gao believed in the universality of democracy and stated that “if democracy could be exercised in the rest of the world, it would be strange that it cannot work in China just because of our peculiar traditions and customs” (Ibid).

In his article titled “Evolutions of Three Major Modern Political Theories”, Gao gave a definite clarification of democracy:

In recent years, collectivism has replaced individualism and common interest is preferred over individual interest. The true democracy should be founded on the basis of responsibility for the society over individual. Individual interest is part of common interest. When a person becomes a member of a community, he will get his individual happiness through contributing to the common wellbeing of the community. The improvement of social welfare depends on not only popular suffrage, parliamentary government but also the agencies of communities which can integrate individuals into different civic communities. Hence, a democratic government is a responsible government which endows the people with the opportunities of participating politics. As responsible citizens, their capabilities of political participation can be improved through engaging in the election. Hence, democracy has an educative effect and to be eligible to vote does not require a minimum level of education. (Gao 1918 Vol. 4, Iss. 1, 3-4)

Even though Gao to some extent embraced representative democracy, he added that he was against the tyranny of the majority, and nobody should be asked to “surrender his own interest for the welfares of the rest” of the community. As a utilitarian, Gao stressed equal treatment of all members. To prevent a representative from pursuing his own interest over the public well-beings, Gao preferred the “proportional representation” electoral system over the majoritarian one and suggested that “direct democracy” was even better.

4.2. Other Discussions

4.2.1. Incompatibility between the Western Principles and Confucian Traditions

It is noticeable that Chen did not believe in the compatibility between the Western thoughts and the Chinese traditions. He stated:

The Western way is completely incompatible with the Chinese way, no matter it is about politics, scholarship, morality, or art. Which one is better is another question that we do not need to discuss it right now. However, either we continue with the Chinese traditional way, or we should change to model the West. This is the primary matter that the state should decide first. (Chen 1918 Vol. 5, Iss. 1, 3)

In his article titled “Letter of Refutation of this Magazine’s Crimes” which explicitly put forward *New Youth*’s advocacy of “Mr Democracy” and “Mr Science”, the well-known slogans of the May Fourth Movement, Chen (1918 Vol. 6, Iss. 1, 10) further elaborated himself that there was no choice but “to oppose Confucianism, the rites, women’s chastity, old moral principles and old politics since *New Youth* had supported Mr Democracy”. He proclaimed that only democracy and science from the West could transform China from her political, moral, academic, and ideological darkness to a completely new modern culture.

It is obvious that both Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan believed that the modern social and political thoughts could help to emancipate the Chinese from their traditional autocratic customs and practices. They believed that the implementation of true democracy could terminate the cycles of order and chaos in dynastic China for more than two thousand years.

4.2.2. Priority was Given to Thought Emancipation of the Masses

No matter what Chen and Gao talked about democracy, rule of law, or human rights, they always emphasized the importance of the thought emancipation of the masses. The common Chinese in the Republic of China should be transformed into modern citizens who know clearly that the state by law is to protect human rights and the power of the state and the government derives from the people. They needed to know that it was their natural rights to freely express their opinion, motions, wishes so that the public opinion and general will could be formulated as the basis on making national policies. Common people in the Republic were encouraged by Chen and Gao to actively join in the political activities. Direct democracy such as self-government in residential area and industrial association was a good way to practice the people’s skills of political participation.

4.2.3. Linguistic Uncertainty of the Western Values

Even though Roberto Frega (2017, 3) defines the May Fourth movement as a revolution to democratize Chinese politics and society, how to translate the term of “democracy” into Chinese was not agreed by the May Fourth intellectuals as we can see through the Chinese translation of Dewey’s sixteen lectures in social and political theory in *New Youth*. In Dewey’s lecture 9, “democracy” was translated into Chinese term of *minzhi zhuyi* (the philosophy that people rule) (Dewey, Hu and Gao 1920 Vol.7, Iss. 3, 131). Then in Dewey’s lecture 10 and 12 in *New Youth* Volume 7 Issue 4, “democracy” was translated into *minzhu* (people as masters or people decide). Chen Duxiu (1919 Vol. 7, Iss. 1, 13) used both *minzhi zhuyi* and *minzhi* (people rule) to render the term of democracy in the same article titled “Foundations of the Exercise of Democracy”. By contrast, Gao Yihan (1918 Vol. 4, Iss. 1, 3) selected the Chinese terms of both *minzhi zhuyi* and *pingmin zhengzhi* (politics of common people) to indicate democracy in his article titled “Evolution of Three Modern Major Political Theories”. On one hand, the different Chinese translations for the same term of democracy reflected the uncertainty of this imported Western notion among those early May Fourth intellectuals. On the other, all these different Chinese terms had a common feature of stressing the central role of “the people” in modern society. The people are not slaves any longer but the masters of public affairs and politics, which should but had not yet been disseminated in the infant Republic of China. Without such a mind emancipation of the masses, the rule of law, human rights, and democracy would not be concreted in China.

4.2.4. Universalism or Cultural Relativism?

Chen and Gao’s explicit statement of the incompatibility between the Western values and the Confucian traditions reflected their universalists’ position in their Western learning. However, the

author argues that their stress on the common people's thought emancipation to some extent implied their cultural relativist position as well. On one hand, the two early May Fourth intellectuals embraced the liberal democratic principles. On the other, they suggested that the Western principles could not be simply and directly transplanted into China. The common people were not ready, and their thoughts needed to be emancipated first. Their embracement of direct democracy of local autonomy and industrial association was based on the unique cultural context of the infant Republic of China when the traditional autocratic way of thinking was still dominant in the society and hampered the exercises of rule of law, democracy, and human rights fundamentally. It was from this cultural relativist perspective, the early May Fourth intellectuals suggested to start with the thought emancipation of the common Chinese in their import of Western ideas and principles.

5. Concluding Remarks

The purpose of this study is to explore how the early May Fourth intellectuals interpreted democracy, rule of law, and human rights in *New Youth* (1915-1920). The author finds that neither Chen Duxiu nor Gao Yihan made systematic explanations how democracy, rule of law, and human rights could be implemented in China. And their interpretations of those Western principles seemed shallow which could be exemplified by the Chinese linguistic uncertainty of the notion of democracy throughout their writings. But they did discuss these principles within their cultural context and emphasized the importance of the dissemination of the new conception of the modern state and the new relationship between the government and the people, which should not only be prescribed in the law but also be well understood and guarded by the people. Their priority was given to the thought emancipation of the masses in China. Also, the rule of law should replace the outdated rule by the emperor and civil laws of rights to freedom of speech and publication were stressed by the early May Fourth intellectuals. And pure democracy was preferred over representative democracy to educate the people of political participation. The research also finds out that the early May Fourth intellectuals were both ethical universalists and cultural relativists in their Western learning. And they were very similar to the European Enlightenment thinkers who were open-minded to study how the alien cultures could be used for their domestic social and political reform projects. Hence, both the two cultural encounters between China and Europe during the Enlightenment and the early May Fourth period respectively fell into Dallmayr's model of "partial assimilation through cultural borrowing".

Through the examination of Chen and Gao's articles in *New Youth* (1915-1920) regarding democracy, rule of law, and human rights, a more systematic picture of how the early May Fourth intellectuals dealt with their learning of the Western principles and ideas is mapped out which has not been done before. Due to the limited time and space, this study focuses on Chen Duxiu and Gao Yihan's writings in *New Youth* between 1915 and 1920. To draw a more comprehensive pattern of the early May Fourth intellectuals' perception of the Western values, the future study scope can be extended to add other May Fourth intellectuals, such as Hu Shi and Lu Xun, and beyond *New Youth* to add articles in other publications in the May Fourth period, such as the magazine of *New Tide*, another leading periodical with focus on introducing the Western thoughts during the May Fourth period.

How can this study help to interpret the current EU-China confrontation over "universal values"? Why could Xinjiang human rights issue not arouse the public debate in China as it did in Europe? The terms such as representative democracy, the rule of law, human rights, freedom of speech and publication, power deriving from the people are all prescribed in the constitution of the People's Republic of China (gov.cn 2018). However, there might be nobody to agree that China is a democracy, or that the people could enjoy free speech in China as their contemporary Europeans do in Europe. The early May Fourth intellectuals reminded us that the right conceptions of the modern notions such as the state and democracy and the master position of the common people in modern politics had not been sufficiently disseminated in the infant Republic of China. This might be still true in the Communist China today. Without the awakening of the masses and thought emancipation, true democracy, rule of law, and

human rights could not be established. And the dispute over “universal values” between China and Europe will remain.

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