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# DISCOVERING WANG YANGMING

## Scholarship in Europe and North America, ca. 1600–1950\*

GEORGE L. ISRAEL

*The Ming dynasty Confucian philosopher Wang Yangming (1472–1529) has been the subject of a European and North American literature since at least the 18th century. But the rich history of writing about him in the West has been largely obscured by an English-language scholarship published in the 1960s and 1970s. This earlier literature nevertheless provides one window into the broader history of intellectual encounter between China and the West, shedding light on it from the angle of the discovery of one of late imperial China’s most influential scholar-officials. This article’s goal is to provide a history of writing about Wang Yangming in Europe and North America from the 17th century to 1950, demonstrating both how historical circumstances shaped his reception and interpretation, and that these earlier accounts shared valuable insights yet worthy of our attention today.*

KEYWORDS: Wang Yangming, Neo-Confucianism, Sinology, Ming dynasty

### INTRODUCTION

The volume of scholarship on Wang Shouren 王守仁 (Wang Yangming 王陽明, 1472–1529) has grown substantially over the last two decades. Yet, while some bibliographical essays on the Chinese-language scholarship have recently been published in both Chinese and English, few comprehensive accounts covering the literature written in Europe and North America are available.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> By Europe and North America, I am referring primarily to French-, German-, and English-language scholarship. Clearly, circumscribing the literature in this way is not complete, given that scholarship may exist in other European languages or have originated in English-speaking countries outside these continents. Also, I will use “West” to refer to this literature, even if that term is imprecise. What makes this approach workable is the fact that most scholarship on Wang Yangming published in Europe and North America was published in these languages. For the Chinese-language scholarship on Wang Yangming, see [Qian Ming 2009](#), pp. 545–604; [Israel 2016](#), pp. 1001–1019. The most complete essay for earlier work in English is [Chan 1972](#), pp. 75–92.

The story of writing about Wang Yangming in English, French, and German is, however, long and complex, making it difficult to provide a meaningful literature review in one article. That is especially the case if the goal is not only to explain the content of major work and the issues it addresses but also to sketch out a general history of writing about Wang Yangming. Given that this writing extends as far back as the 17th century, such a history potentially provides one window into the broader, more complex history of intellectual exchange between China and the West, shedding light on it from the angle of the discovery of one of China's most influential Ming dynasty (1368–1644) philosophers, statesmen, and military commanders.

The substantial volume of English-language work about Wang Yangming published since the 1980s provides a natural dividing point for breaking this history into manageable chunks. This scholarship usually relies on and takes as its point of reference translations of and publications about Wang Yangming written in the 1960s and 1970s, rarely citing work published before that time. In fact, in the 1960s, several historical factors converged to lead to a substantial growth in the publication of a distinctive scholarship on Neo-Confucianism in the United States.<sup>2</sup> For Wang Yangming scholarship, the most important factor was the work of Chinese scholars who, owing to the vicissitudes of China's 20th century history, chose to relocate from China to the United States, Australia, or Canada, and then to spend a lifetime introducing Chinese thought to an English-reading audience. Carsun Chang (Zhang Junmai 張君勱, 1886–1969) published his introduction to Wang's life and thought in 1962,<sup>3</sup> Wing-tsit Chan (Chen Rongjie 陳榮捷, 1901–1994) published his translation of the *Chuan xi lu* 傳習錄 (Instructions for Practical Living) in 1963,<sup>4</sup> Tu Wei-ming (Du Weiming 杜維明, b. 1940) published his study of Wang Yangming's youth in 1976,<sup>5</sup> and Julia Ching (Qin Jiayi 秦家懿, 1934–2001) published her study of his philosophy in 1976.<sup>6</sup>

However, these books (and numerous articles written by a larger circle of scholars) overshadowed a longer history of writing about Wang Yangming in the West. The obvious reason this happened is that these later scholars went straight to primary sources, only referencing the earlier works tangentially or as a matter of good practice. Since their work, as measured by scope, also generally surpassed what had gone before and became more widely available in the English language, scholars who wrote about Wang Yangming after the 1980s took it as their point of reference, making little use of what had gone before. This article excavates and discusses the earlier, less-referenced scholarship, which nevertheless offers a window on the history of the many interpretive frameworks brought to bear on the thought of one of China's most distinguished Confucian philosophers.

<sup>2</sup> See Cui Yujun 2010, pp. 93–94.

<sup>3</sup> Chang 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Chan 1963.

<sup>5</sup> Tu 1976.

<sup>6</sup> Ching 1976.

## WANG YANGMING IN WESTERN LITERATURE PRIOR TO 1916

In a review of the Protestant missionary Frederick Goodrich Henke's *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming* published in the *International Journal of Ethics* in 1917, Kia-Lok Yen states that, "In this volume, English students of philosophy are introduced for the first time to one of the most influential Chinese thinkers. It is doubtful whether they knew him in even the most indirect way before the appearance of Dr. Henke's presentation of his work."<sup>7</sup> Indeed, Henke's English translation (published in 1916) of the first volume in Shi Bangyao's 施邦曜 (1585–1644) *Yangming xiansheng jiyao* 陽明先生集要 (Collected Essential [Writings] of Sir Yangming) was an important turning point in the study of the Ming philosopher. Prior, his work had received little attention in Europe and North America. In his annotated bibliography, Wing-tsit Chan listed only two earlier publications.<sup>8</sup> In fact, if the parameters of the search are defined as scholarly articles and monographs, his list is not incorrect. But if those parameters are broadened to include other types of literature published prior to 1916, then we do find that Wang Yangming was by no means entirely absent from scholarly work.

That might come as a surprise to those familiar with the history of European Sinology. It is well known that from the late 16th century, when Jesuit missionaries first began to translate and introduce Chinese philosophy, up to the second half of the 20th century, during which the entire history and full range of Chinese thought became available in the West, Song and Ming Confucian philosophy received far less attention than ancient Chinese philosophy.<sup>9</sup> But here too a distinction must be drawn, because whereas some Song dynasty *Daoxue* 道學 (Learning of the Way) philosophers were discussed by the Jesuits, Ming philosophy, especially as developed by Wang Yangming and his followers, was largely neglected.<sup>10</sup> In the literature on Confucianism in Chinese history predating Henke's translation, the development of this tradition is typically characterized as having waned after the classical period, and having entirely ceased after the Song dynasty.

Even as late as the early 1900s, when the first English-language introductions to the history and characteristics of Chinese philosophy were published, Wang Yangming and his followers were not included. In the "Introduction" to his *A Brief History of Early Chinese Philosophy*, which was published in 1914, D.T. Suzuki (Suzuki Daisetsu 鈴木大拙, 1870–1966) offers a brief historical overview. Concerning the "re-awakening of Chinese philosophy during the Song Dynasty," he judged that "this period of Chinese renaissance did not bring out any new philosophical problems outside of the narrow path already beaten by the earlier Confucians."<sup>11</sup> In fact, Zhu Xi 朱熹 (Zhu Yuanhui 朱元晦, 1130–1200) is mentioned only in endnotes. As for Ming developments, he does speak positively of Wang Yangming as "a great moral and intellectual character":

<sup>7</sup> Yen 1917, p. 24.

<sup>8</sup> Chan 1972, pp. 82–87.

<sup>9</sup> Cui Yujun 2010, pp. 51–52.

<sup>10</sup> For the period under discussion in this article, Song dynasty *Daoxue* primarily refers in a very narrow sense to Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤, Cheng Hao 程顥, Cheng Yi 程頤, and Zhu Xi 朱熹.

<sup>11</sup> Suzuki 1914, p. 6.

He was a worthy heir to the thoughts that stimulated and rejuvenated the Chinese mind at the time of the Song renaissance. Though he was not an independent thinker in the sense of being a non-Confucian, he was original enough to find a new path to the confirmation and realization of the old time-honored doctrines. After the passing of this luminary, the Chinese intellectual heavens were once more overcast with clouds, and from his time until the present day nothing significant or deserving special mention has ever stirred Chinese serenity.<sup>12</sup>

However, because D.T. Suzuki believed that the most important Chinese philosophy was to be found in Daoism, Buddhism, and pre-Qin Confucianism, his exposition did not include discussion of Song and Ming developments, hence the name of his book.

In *The Three Religions of China: Lectures Delivered at Oxford*, Methodist minister, missionary, and Sinologist William Soothill (1861–1935) follows a similar pattern in his presentation of the history of Confucianism, albeit with some differences. In his lecture on “Confucius and His School,” Soothill states that after Confucius’s and Mencius’s time, “three great schools of commentators” arose – one each during the Han, Song, and Qing dynasties.<sup>13</sup> Surprisingly, he does not even mention the Ming dynasty. His exposition then focuses on Confucius, Mencius, and Zhu Xi. But even here, although he gives extended treatment to Confucius and Mencius, Soothill has little to say about Zhu Xi, noting that “extremely little of his work has been translated into English, nor has it ever been thoroughly studied by Europeans.”<sup>14</sup> For that reason, although he found “justification for saying that he [Zhu Xi] added nothing to the religious life of this nation,” Soothill nevertheless proposed reserving judgment about him for future research.

Another example is Paul Carus’s (1852–1919) *Chinese Philosophy: An Exposition of the Main Characteristic Features of Chinese Thought*, which was published in 1902. Concerning broad trends in the history of Chinese philosophy, Carus states:

It shows us a noble beginning and a lame progress; a grand start and dreary stagnation; a promising seed time and a poor harvest. The heroes of thought who laid its foundations were so much admired that none dared to excel them, and thus before the grandeur of the original genius which looms up in the prehistoric age, the philosophy of all later generations is dwarfed into insignificance.<sup>15</sup>

This short book begins with an extensive discussion of Chinese cosmology, based primarily on the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) and the “Hong fan” 洪範 (Great Plan) chapter of the *Shujing* 書經 (Book of Documents). Carus presents a Chinese cosmology wherein *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 and the eight trigrams evolve out of the Great Ultimate (*taiji* 太極). Using Western philosophical terminology, he saw in this “a decided tendency towards monism,”<sup>16</sup> as well as the “the eternal in the transient, the absolute in the relative, the universal in the particular, and rest in

<sup>12</sup> Suzuki 1914, p. 6.

<sup>13</sup> Soothill 1913, p. 40. These lectures were delivered in 1912.

<sup>14</sup> Soothill 1913, p. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Carus 1902, p. 1.

<sup>16</sup> Carus 1902, p. 25.

motion.”<sup>17</sup> Carus continues with a discussion of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (Zhou Lianxi 周濂溪, 1017–1073) and Zhu Xi, stating that it was Zhou who worked out the monism implied in the unitary principle of the Great Ultimate and Zhu Xi and his school who “systematized and completed the philosophical world-conception of the Chinese.”<sup>18</sup> Drawing from the *Taiji tushuo* 太極圖說 (Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate Explained) and *Tong shu* 通書 (Penetrating the Book [of Change]), Carus explains Zhou Dunyi’s cosmology. Drawing on selections from the *Zhuzi quanshu* 朱子全書 (Complete Works of Master Zhu), he explicates Zhu Xi’s philosophy of *li* 理 and *qi* 氣. He concludes by asserting that “the monistic school of Cheu-tsz [Zhouzi = Zhou Dunyi] and Chu Hi [Zhu Xi] are in the history of Chinese thought what Kant is in the Western world.”<sup>19</sup> Carus, however, never once refers to any Ming philosopher.

What must be noted here is that Paul Carus did not read Chinese proficiently. He relied on German and English translations and scholarship. For Zhou Dunyi, he consulted Georg von der Gabelentz’s (1840–1893) *Thai-Kih-Thu, des Tscheu-tsi Tafel des Urprinzipes*, a translation of the *Taiji tushuo* with commentary by Zhu Xi,<sup>20</sup> as well as Wilhelm Grube’s (1855–1908) translation of the *Tong shu* with commentary by Zhu Xi.<sup>21</sup> For Zhu Xi, he consulted translated material and expositions available in several English-language works, but primarily Thomas Taylor Meadows’s *The Chinese and Their Rebellions*.<sup>22</sup> In 1856, Meadows – who interpreted Chinese for the British civil service – had already published an extensive introduction to and exposition of Chinese philosophy, including the metaphysics and cosmology of Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi. To do so, Meadows states, he had relied on a 1717 Kangxi edition of the *Xing li da quan* 性理大全 (Great Compendium on Human Nature and Principle) and a 1718 edition of the *Zhuzi quanshu*.

Thus, even with the language barrier, Carus could still speak in an informed way about two Song *Daoxue* philosophers. During the 19th century, European and American sinologists had some understanding of the importance of Zhu Xi, had translated some of his work, and had written about his life and thought.<sup>23</sup> However, Carus was uninformed about Wang Yangming and his philosophical movement, the most likely reason being that both the German- and English-language scholarship he had encountered did not discuss Wang’s philosophy and its influence. More examples could be given demonstrating the absence of discussion of Wang Yangming in the literature on Chinese philosophy and religion in Europe and the United States in the early 20th century.<sup>24</sup>

With some notable exceptions, the same situation held true for literature on China dating to the 19th century. Much previous scholarship has shown how the unequal treaties brought a new stage in the study of China in the West. A growing number

<sup>17</sup> Carus 1902, p. 27.

<sup>18</sup> Carus 1902, p. 29.

<sup>19</sup> Carus 1902, p. 35.

<sup>20</sup> Gabelentz 1876.

<sup>21</sup> Grube 1880.

<sup>22</sup> Meadows 1856, pp. 334–352. Carus also references Williams 1848, pp. 550–552, and the entries for Zhu Xi and Zhou Dunyi in Mayers 1874, pp. 23–26.

<sup>23</sup> See, for example, Le Gall 1894.

<sup>24</sup> In his Hibbert Lectures, which were delivered in London in 1914, Herbert Giles also discussed Zhu Xi but not Ming philosophy. See Giles 1915, pp. 233–241.

of foreign-service officers and missionaries – especially Protestant missionaries from Great Britain and the United States – spent time living and working in China, while also writing about it.<sup>25</sup> Consequently, scholarship on China burgeoned, as did the institutional study of it. This scholarship also dates the foundation of academic Sinology to the 19th century because universities in Europe and the United States established professorships for the study of China and offered courses about it.

However, although translations and studies of pre-Qin Confucian and Daoist philosophy were produced in abundance, as well as studies and partial translations of Mohist philosophy, other pre-Qin philosophers and military strategists, and some Song philosophers, Wang Yangming and his movement received little attention. He is not, for example, discussed in major studies by such scholars as Joseph Edkins (1823–1905), James Legge (1815–1897), J.J.M. de Groot (1854–1921), Edouard Chavannes (1865–1918), and the French savant Guillaume Pauthier (1801–1873), among others. In his *Esquisse d'une histoire de la philosophie chinoise*, for instance, Pauthier speaks at length about the metaphysics and cosmology of Zhou Dunyi and Zhu Xi, but then claims that after their time no important thinkers appeared.<sup>26</sup>

However, this does not mean Wang Yangming was unknown in the literature. A preliminary search in nineteenth-century English, German, and French scholarship on China has yielded a few results.<sup>27</sup> Interestingly, some lengthy nineteenth-century histories of China, which are primarily political and military histories of dynasties, mention the 1519 rebellion by the Prince of Ning, Zhu Chenhao (Ning *wang* Zhu Chenhao 寧王朱宸濠 [d. 1521]), during the reign of the Zhengde 正德 emperor. Both the German Lutheran missionary Karl Gützlaff (1803–1851) and the British author Demetrius Charles Boulger (1853–1928) refer to this event but only indicate that imperial armies energetically suppressed it, without mentioning Wang Yangming's role.<sup>28</sup> In his *History of China*, on the other hand, the Irish Protestant missionary John Macgowan (1835–1922) explains that when the rebellion began a certain Wang Shen was quelling uprisings in Fujian, and then led his forces into Jiangxi, battled the prince, and captured him.<sup>29</sup> But while Macgowan speaks at some length about the philosophical importance of Zhu Xi during the Song dynasty, he does not say anything about Wang Yangming and his school. Lastly, in *The Middle Kingdom*, in a section with the heading “Opposition of the Literati to Buddhism,” the American missionary and Sinologist Samuel Wells Williams (1812–1884) includes a discussion of Wang Yangming's edict remonstrating with the Zhengde emperor over his decision to send an embassy “to India to fetch Buddhist books and priests.” Williams notes that Wang compared Buddhism and Confucianism, “proving to his own satisfaction that the latter contained all the good there was in the former, without its evil and nonsense.”<sup>30</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Bays 2012, pp. 66–92. For general studies, see Cui Yujun 2010, pp. 22–92; Mo Dongyan 2006; and Cayley – Ming 1995.

<sup>26</sup> Pauthier 1844, p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> I have reviewed publications listed in or provided at Cordier 1968; the website Bibliotheca Sinica 2.0, <http://www.univie.ac.at/Geschichte/China-Bibliographie/blog/>; and the website Chine Ancienne, <https://www.chineancienne.fr/> (both accessed July 2, 2018).

<sup>28</sup> Gützlaff 1834, vol. 1, p. 272; Boulger 1881, p. 468.

<sup>29</sup> Macgowan 1897, pp. 493–494. Wang Shen may refer to Wang Shouren.

<sup>30</sup> Williams 1883, p. 227. Williams does not, however, mention the fact that this memorial was never submitted to the Ming court.

Wang Yangming also shows up in other types of literature. One of these is the *Chinese Biographical Dictionary* compiled by the British diplomat and Sinologist Herbert Giles (1845–1935). Published in 1898, this dictionary contains 2,579 entries, including one for “Wang Shou-jen” as well as other Ming scholars, such as “Ch’en Hsien-chang” (Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章, 1428–1500). The entry for Wang Yangming is brief – less than one page – but provides a reasonably objective synopsis of his life and importance.<sup>31</sup> More significant is the lengthier discussion of Wang Yangming in Thomas Watters’s (1840–1901) *A Guide to the Tablets in a Temple of Confucius*. From 1863 to 1895, Watters served in consular positions in China and Korea for the British Government; he also published much scholarship on China. His *Guide to the Tablets* provides a thorough introduction to the layout and history of these temples, as well as competent biographies for all individuals for whom tablets were provided. The entry for Wang Yangming is six-pages long and can count as the first significant writing in English about his life, thought, and status in Chinese intellectual history. A very capable reader of Chinese, Watters worked directly with primary sources; for Wang Yangming, that was an 1826 edition of the *Wang Yangming xiansheng quanji* 王陽明先生全集 (Complete Works of Sir Wang Yangming).<sup>32</sup>

Drawing from the first *juan*, Watters provides a brief, factual biography. He then explains the origins of the edition he was using, also praising Wang Yangming’s writing style: “The style of his prose compositions is charming from its clearness and simplicity and his sentences have an easy graceful flow which is all of their own.”<sup>33</sup> Watters proceeds to explain his importance to China’s intellectual history – how, for example, Wang attempted to mediate the ongoing debate among scholars over the relative merits of Zhu Xi and Lu Jiuyuan 陸九淵 (1139–1192). He concludes that “Yangming was very courageous in his defense of Lu and succeeded, to use his own figure, in clearing the mud of his philosophical reputation. For this he has gained the lasting gratitude of all liberal and true-minded Confucianists.”<sup>34</sup>

Watters also sensitively discusses the meaning of *liangzhi* 良知 in Wang Yangming’s philosophy. He suspects that Jame Legge’s translation of this term in the *Mengzi* as “intuitive knowledge” is inadequate because “with Yang-ming it has a large and varied use, and it sometimes answers to conscience and sometimes to consciousness, while at other times it is apparently instinct.”<sup>35</sup> Watters also notes that Wang was accused of being a Buddhist and “renouncing allegiance to the Sages,” but insists he “was strictly orthodox and considered that he was only taking the rational and proper interpretation of the words of Confucius and Mencius.”<sup>36</sup> Highlighting his ecumenical thinking, Watters notes as well that Wang was unwilling to reject “touches of goodness and hints of truth” in Buddhism and Daoism merely because they were heterodox traditions. Lastly, he explains that although the editors of the *Wang Yangming xiansheng quanji* fiercely defended Wang against

<sup>31</sup> Giles 1898, pp. 839–840. William Frederick Mayer’s *The Chinese Reader’s Manual* also contains a brief entry for Wang Yangming. See Mayers 1874, p. 246.

<sup>32</sup> Watters 1879, pp. 211–216.

<sup>33</sup> Watters 1879, p. 214.

<sup>34</sup> Watters 1879, p. 214.

<sup>35</sup> Watters 1879, p. 215.

<sup>36</sup> Watters 1879, p. 215.



the charge of heresy, Wang's writings "are not much read at present, for Yang-ming criticized Zhu Xi's text and commentary." Watters concludes by comparing Wang Yangming to René Descartes (1596–1650), claiming that "both held that the mind possessed an innate faculty for knowing high truths and taught the great importance of self-dependence."<sup>37</sup>

Insofar as it accurately summarizes Wang Yangming's life and major features of his thought and status in Chinese intellectual history, Watters's encyclopedia-style entry is a notable exception for the 19th century. Looking back even further at the 17th and 18th centuries, we find similar patterns in the literature on Song and Ming philosophy. Here too, with only a few exceptions, whereas Song dynasty *Daoxue* philosophers and their metaphysics and cosmologies receive some limited attention in the European literature, Ming philosophy is almost entirely absent. Thus, for example, much scholarship has addressed the minor impact of Neo-Confucianism on the Enlightenment, and especially such German philosophers as Christian Wolff (1679–1754) and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1694–1778).<sup>38</sup> But that impact was limited to Song dynasty *Daoxue* moral philosophy as it was presented to them in Jesuit translations and explanations of Chinese philosophical texts.

As David Mungello has pointed out, the Enlightenment philosophers and savants had no direct contact with China and therefore relied on the manuscripts, published works, and letters of Jesuits. Consequently, knowledge of China during these centuries was refracted through the Jesuit prism.<sup>39</sup> In fact, several features of the Jesuit episode may have lessened the likelihood that Wang Yangming's philosophy would receive close attention. Much scholarship has demonstrated that Jesuit missionaries first encountered Song *Daoxue* philosophers primarily through Zhu Xi's commentaries on classical texts and the *Xing li da quan* (first published in 1415 by the court of the Yongle emperor). These were the principal channels through which the Jesuits learned about later developments in the history of Confucianism and why their discussion of it is almost entirely limited to Zhu Xi and his immediate predecessors. Furthermore, Jesuit missionaries distinguished pre-Qin (ancient) Confucianism from the work of these later Confucians, whom they disparagingly referred to as "Neoterics" (modern commentators).<sup>40</sup> They assessed that ancient Confucianism contained the equivalent of a natural theology and admirable moral philosophy, but believed that Song *Daoxue* thinkers perverted this truer Confucianism. These Jesuits saw materialism and atheism in the ideas of Song *Daoxue* thinkers.

The timing for early Jesuit missionary writing about China counts as another factor. The first works on Chinese philosophy and history date to the late 16th and 17th centuries, the point at which the climate in China for adherents of the school of Wang Yangming was becoming less favorable. Thus, when considering broader factors – historical, textual, philosophical, and religious – it makes sense

<sup>37</sup> Watters 1879, p. 216.

<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Mungello 1977; Mungello 1991, pp. 99–127; Lundbaek 1983, pp. 19–30.

<sup>39</sup> Mungello 1991, p. 100.

<sup>40</sup> Mungello 1991, p. 115. For treatment of Confucian traditions in influential Latin and French texts of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when the tradition was viewed primarily as a moral and political philosophy and the classical texts received the most attention, see Lundbaek 1983, pp. 21–25.

that Wang Yangming's work would not have received close attention. Indeed, in a study dating to the 1980s, Knud Lundbaek concluded that "Wang Yang-ming does not figure in seventeenth-century Jesuit printed texts."<sup>41</sup>

However, this is a topic that has received more attention in recent years and should continue to bear fruit. That is, even if Wang Yangming was not identified by name in seventeenth-century Jesuit literature, to what extent were his ideas known by Jesuits and alluded to in their writing? Although Wang Yangming's philosophy fell into disfavor in China during the late Ming dynasty and the Qing dynasty, the Jesuits who arrived during the late Ming did interact with followers of the school of Wang Yangming. For example, Matteo Ricci met and held discussions with such followers as Zhang Huang 章潢 (1527–1608), Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), Zhu Shilu 祝世祿 (1539–1610), Jiao Hong 焦竑 (1540–1620), and Zou Yuanbiao 鄒元標 (1551–1624). When Zhang Huang was presiding over the White Deer Grotto Academy, he repeatedly extended invitations to Ricci to come there and discuss philosophy with literati. Such interaction suggests that Ricci should have been familiar with elements of Wang Yangming's philosophy.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, a recent translation of Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven) demonstrates that he quotes Wang Yangming several times, albeit without identifying him by name.<sup>43</sup>

For the late 17th and early 18th centuries, when the French Jesuits at the Qing court dominated cultural exchange with China, I have found only two historical works that discuss Wang Yangming. Less important is the *Histoire générale de la Chine, ou annales de cet empire, traduites du Tong-Kien-Kang-Mou* (hereafter: *Histoire générale*). This twelve-volume history of China was written by Joseph Anne-Marie de Moyriac de Mailla (1669–1748), one of many French Jesuits who went to China as part of officially sponsored missions that commenced in the 1680s. He arrived in 1701 and served at the court of Qing emperors, remaining in China until his death. He wrote his *Histoire générale* in the 1730s and sent it to France, where it remained unpublished until the 1770s. For a time, it became one of the most important reference works on Chinese history.

Wang Yangming is discussed in the *Histoire générale* only because of his role in suppressing the rebellion by the Prince of Ning.<sup>44</sup> Nevertheless, de Mailla's account provides the most complete coverage of this event written prior to the 20th century, including discussion of Wang Yangming's use of stratagem as well as his deliberations with officers concerning occupying Nanchang 南昌 (home to the prince's establishment) and confronting the prince upon his return. Concerning the climactic battle on Lake Poyang (Poyanghu 鄱陽湖), he wrote that "never was a victory more complete or more decisive."<sup>45</sup>

More notable is Jean-Baptiste du Halde's *Description géographique, historique, chronologique, politique, et physique de l'empire de la Chine et de la Tartarie*

<sup>41</sup> Lundbaek 1983, p. 28.

<sup>42</sup> Huang Wenshu 2010, p. 127. Frédéric Wang also notes that prior to settling in Beijing, Ricci's closer literati acquaintances were sympathisers of the school of Wang Yangming. See Wang 2013, p. 41.

<sup>43</sup> See Ricci 2016, pp. 186–187.

<sup>44</sup> Moyriac de Mailla 1779, pp. 294–298.

<sup>45</sup> Moyriac de Mailla 1779, p. 297.

*chinoise* (hereafter: *Description*). This four-volume encyclopedic account of China was first published in 1735. Du Halde (1674–1743) was a French Jesuit living in Paris at the very moment French Jesuits and France were at the center of research and writing about China in Europe. While compiling this work, he was residing at *La Maison professe de jésuites*, which was established in 1580 to accommodate Jesuit fathers in a setting that allowed them to investigate and write about the pressing religious and social issues of the day. Du Halde turned his energies to compiling, editing, and publishing material that was coming in from Jesuit missions around the world. The principal purpose of this work was to advance the mission by furthering cross-cultural inquiry.<sup>46</sup>

Du Halde, however, never went to China; rather, for the *Description*, he compiled information gathered from twenty-seven Jesuit missionaries who went there as members of the French missions. The first volume is devoted to geography and travel but also provides extracts from Chinese texts. The second volume contains six articles about China and extracts from eighteen Chinese texts.<sup>47</sup> One of those texts is a 1538 edition of *Wang Yangming wenji* 王陽明文集 (Collected Writings of Wang Yangming).<sup>48</sup>

The Jesuit from whom du Halde received his translations of Wang Yangming's work was Julien-Placide Hervieu (1671–1746). Hervieu went to China as a member of the French China mission and spent the last forty-five years of his life there. He produced numerous translations of Chinese texts and sent them to Paris. It was these texts that du Halde incorporated into the *Description*. The original French manuscript with this translation of Wang Yangming's work is currently held at the Manuscript Division of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France.<sup>49</sup>

According to Isabelle Landry-Deron, the reason Hervieu translated these documents and du Halde chose to include them in his *Description* was the Jesuit interest in Confucian moral philosophy. Indeed, moral philosophy had always been one of the principal vehicles through which Jesuits and the literati were able to generate mutual interest in their respective traditions, and Landry-Deron believes this is what they admired about Wang Yangming's writing. Chinese Christians understood that although he endured severe challenges throughout his life, Wang courageously maintained his integrity, firmly adhering to the morals he espoused. The selection of writings in the *Description* emphasizes Wang Yangming's ethics, including his writing about the importance of reticence in speech, suppressing desires and overcoming the self, adhering to principle, self-examination, correcting mistakes, and the evils of arrogance versus the good that comes from humility. In Wang Yangming's work, the Jesuits found echoes of their own practices of moral and spiritual self-discipline.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Foss 1979, pp. 56–60.

<sup>47</sup> Löwendahl 2008, pp. 180–181.

<sup>48</sup> Du Halde 1735, pp. 654–667. For a detailed discussion see Landry-Deron 2002, pp. 227–228.

<sup>49</sup> The manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale de France is identified as Ms. FR. 17240; the Wang Yangming translations are located on pp. 235–242. The record may be found at <http://archivesetmanuscrits.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cc46915b> (accessed July 2, 2018). A digitalized edition is available at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9061534s/f245.item>, pp. 472–494 (accessed July 2, 2018). In addition, a *Wang Yangming wenji* is listed in Étienne Fourmont's catalogue of the French Royal Library. See Fourmont 1742, p. 480; Landry-Deron 2002, p. 227.

<sup>50</sup> Landry-Deron 2002, pp. 318–321.

In sum, prior to the 1910s, Wang Yangming was not the specific subject of an article or book in the West. However, his life and philosophy, and even some of his writing, do appear in other types of literature, such as histories, dictionaries, works of an encyclopedic nature, and specialized monographs. In the second decade of the twentieth century, this limitation was overcome.

#### STUDIES OF WANG YANGMING, CA. 1914–1950

In his 1972 bibliography, Wing-tsit Chan states that “studies in the West of the leader of the Neo-Confucian *Xinxue* 心學 (School of Mind) began with Frederick Goodrich Henke,” while also pointing out that “very little was written about Wang in Western languages before World War II.”<sup>51</sup> Chan estimated that prior to 1940 only four publications had appeared, while no others were published until after 1955.

His estimate was largely correct. So was his belief that although the quantity was bleak, as “studies,” they were reasonably academic in nature. In fact, beginning in the 1910s, the study of Wang Yangming entered a new stage in Europe and North America. Books include Frederick Henke’s *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*,<sup>52</sup> the Chinese Jesuit Wang Tch’ang-tche’s (Wang Changzhi 王昌祉, 1899–1959) *La philosophie morale de Wang Yang-ming*,<sup>53</sup> and the Chinese scholar and president of Tsinghua College (1918–1920) Chang Yü-chüan’s (Zhang Yuquan 張煜全, 1879–1953) *Wang Shou-jen as a Statesman*.<sup>54</sup> Articles include Henke’s “Wang Yang-ming: A Chinese Idealist” and “A Study in the Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming,”<sup>55</sup> the Dutch sinologist J.J.L. Duyvendak’s “Een Herleefd Wijsgeer [A Resurrected Sage],”<sup>56</sup> and the American Protestant missionary Lyman V. Cady’s “Wang Yang-ming’s Doctrine of Intuitive Knowledge.”<sup>57</sup> Surveys of Chinese philosophy by the French Jesuit missionary and Sinologist Léon Wieger (1856–1933),<sup>58</sup> French historian René Grousset (1885–1952),<sup>59</sup> German author Ernst Viktor Zenker,<sup>60</sup> German Sinologist and professor at the University of Amsterdam Heinrich Hackmann (1864–1935),<sup>61</sup> French Jesuit Henri Bernard (1889–1975),<sup>62</sup> and the German Sinologist and professor at Hamburg University Alfred Forke (1867–1944)<sup>63</sup> are also of interest because they include, for the first time, accounts of Wang Yangming.

<sup>51</sup> Chan 1972, p. 75.

<sup>52</sup> Henke 1916.

<sup>53</sup> Wang Tch’ang-Tche 1936.

<sup>54</sup> Chang Yü-chüan 1939–1940, pp. 30–99, 155–252, 319–374, 473–517. These articles were also published as a book in several reprints. See Chang Yü-chüan 1946.

<sup>55</sup> Henke 1913, pp. 46–63; Henke 1914, pp. 17–34.

<sup>56</sup> Duyvendak 1927.

<sup>57</sup> Cady 1928, pp. 263–291. Cady also privately printed a revised and slightly expanded edition of this article, retaining the original text but adding three new sections. The publisher’s name is not indicated, and the book states that the content consisted of two lectures delivered at “the school of Chinese studies, Peiping, Jan. 15th and 17th, 1936.” See Cady 1936.

<sup>58</sup> Wieger 1917, pp. 663–670. This book was translated into English. See Wieger 1927.

<sup>59</sup> Grousset 1923, pp. 355–359.

<sup>60</sup> Zenker 1927.

<sup>61</sup> Hackmann 1927, pp. 356–373.

<sup>62</sup> Bernard 1935, pp. 82–88.

<sup>63</sup> Forke 1964, pp. 380–399.

Prior to considering the content of this scholarship, important shared characteristics should be highlighted. First, because these authors make a serious effort to engage with Wang Yangming's thought as well as to situate it in historical and biographical context, he becomes the object of serious academic inquiry in the West. Second, because these authors understood his significance and wished to produce scholarly writing about him, they worked as closely as possible with primary sources. Wang Tch'ang-tche and Léon Wieger drew primarily from an edition of the *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* 王文成公全書 (Complete Works of Sir Wang Wencheng). Henke relied on an edition of Shi Bangyao's 施邦曜 (1585–1644) *Yangming xiansheng jiyao* 陽明先生集要 (Collected Essential [Writings] of Sir Yangming). Also, as he explains in the preface to his book, Henke was assisted by "a Chinese scholar of the old school" as well as three of his associates on the faculty of Nanjing University.<sup>64</sup> Forke consulted several Ming and Qing sources, but he primarily cites the *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* and *Yangming xiansheng ji yao*. Chang Yü-chüan frequently cites the *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu* and other standard Ming histories, but he also makes ample use of Henke's translated material in his *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*. The remaining authors (Grousset, Zenker, Bernard-Maitre, Hackmann, and Cady) appear to have relied on English and French scholarship listed above.

Third, these authors keenly grasped the influence of Wang Yangming and his school of thought in both Japan since the Tokugawa Period and Republican China. This means that knowledge of Wang Yangming by no means progressed in a linear fashion during the early 20th century. At the very moment many Sinologists yet remained unaware of his contribution to Chinese philosophy, these authors had an altogether different understanding. Henke wrote that the philosophy of Wang Yangming "is today held in high esteem by the Japanese," while in China "a tide of rising popularity is rapidly bringing it out of obscurity into the forefront."<sup>65</sup> Duyvendak explains that while Wang Yangming fell into obscurity after the Ming dynasty, his school of thought further developed in Japan, where it had a profound impact. He found it odd that a rich spiritual treasure that Japan had obtained from China was now being rediscovered by China in Japan.<sup>66</sup>

As Duyvendak recounts it, when he was at a bookstore in Beijing looking for literature on the contemporary scene in China, a Chinese student whom he did not know recommended a book on Wang Yangming. The student told him that "nowadays everyone reads him," and that this had been the case in China for the last twenty years.<sup>67</sup> Thus, Duyvendak concluded that publishing an article about him would be timely.

Léon Wieger, who was staying in Japan while writing his book, also offered contemporary anecdotal evidence:

<sup>64</sup> Henke 1916, p. xiv. The scholar of the old school is not identified; the associates were three professors: Liu Jingfu 劉敬甫 (or 劉敬父), Alexander Y. Lee (also an American missionary), and a certain Liu Jingpan.

<sup>65</sup> Henke 1914, p. 19.

<sup>66</sup> Duyvendak 1927, p. 64.

<sup>67</sup> Duyvendak 1927, p. 65.

At present the doctrine of Ōyōmei [Wang Yangming] is the preferred doctrine of the Japanese Confucianists, whether philosophers or educators. It is especially the preferred doctrine of the successors of the samurai, of the brave officers of the Japanese army. I can bear personal witness to this little known fact. At Tokyo, a group of the most select Japanese scholars questioned me regarding the esteem in which Wang Yangming is now held in China. I had to reply that he is considered somewhat of a heretic, scarcely known, and not read at all. Well, I immediately received this reply: Bah! With us his works are the bedside book of all the officers.<sup>68</sup>

Grousset echoed similar themes. He stated that the doctrines of Zhu Xi and Wang Yangming had divided up the Sino-Japanese world. But whereas China had remained faithful to Zhu Xi because his comprehensive philosophy, objectivity, and scientific character suited Chinese inclinations, Wang Yangming's philosophy appealed to the Japanese because of its individualism and pronounced moral character. Grousset wrote:

The man and his work, in the words of Father Wieger when he was speaking of Wang Yangming, have something high and noble about them that is made to please a chivalrous people. In fact, the Japanese elites loved Wang Yangming for the same reasons that they loved the Zen masters, because in him, as in the Zen practitioners, they found a prescription for the perfection of the humane person, and a moral breviary for the individual. Zhu [Xi] made encyclopedic erudites and materialist functionaries; Wang Yangming assisted in the fashioning of samurai.<sup>69</sup>

As for the Chinese scholars, Wang Tch'ang-tche was intensely aware of Wang Yangming's profound importance to East Asian history, and wrote about him not only for this reason but also because he bemoaned the fact that he was little known in the West.<sup>70</sup>

In fact, Wang Yangming's importance to Japanese intellectual history during the Tokugawa and Meiji periods, and the revival of interest in him in China at the end of the Qing dynasty and during the early Republican period, are two of the most likely reasons why the above list of authors produced scholarly work about him. In "Wang Yang-ming: A Chinese Idealist," for example, Henke specifically cites Paul Reinsch's *Intellectual and Political Currents of the Far East* as evidence that Wang Yangming's ideas were profoundly influencing students in China and Japan.<sup>71</sup> Reinsch (1869–1923) was an American diplomat who served as an ambassador to China from 1913 to 1919. His book, which was published in 1911, includes discussion of Wang Yangming, and repeatedly highlights and even exaggerates his importance to contemporary intellectual trends. He claimed that China, a normally unassertive country, was becoming more nationalistic and militaristic. He linked these developments to a revival of interest in the Ming philosopher:

<sup>68</sup> Wieger 1927, p. 703. I have slightly altered the text of the English translation.

<sup>69</sup> Grousset 1923, pp. 358–359.

<sup>70</sup> Wang Tch'ang-tche 1936, p. 195.

<sup>71</sup> Henke 1914, p. 30.

This philosopher of action had fallen into relative oblivion in China, when, a century ago, the Japanese discovered him and found in his pages the inspiration that carried them far on the way to new national life and strength. His works were at that time, and have been since, read even more intently in Japan than those of Confucius himself. ... His revival in China is more recent, falling within the last decade; but the Chinese found in him what they needed most, inspiration to an active life and to what would be, compared to the former passive attitude, aggressive firmness. His works are no longer studied only by the learned, but they are being multiplied in thousands on thousands of copies and spread over the land, so that every schoolboy is becoming familiar with the old Ming general and philosopher. A certain insight into his ideas is essential to an understanding of the Chinese people. Wang Yangming has suddenly become a modern author in China.<sup>72</sup>

For this reason, Reinsch devoted five pages to explaining Wang's concepts of mind, intuitive knowledge, and the unity of knowledge and action. With much admiration, he conjectured that in Wang Yangming's practical philosophy "lies the secret of his great importance to the present age, when a philosophy of action is called for, and when the Far East is becoming wearied of the crushing weight of authority."<sup>73</sup> He further emphasized that Wang stood for "individuality in reasoning," "trueness to life and one's self," a "belief in equality among men," and supplementing the life of contemplation with the life of action.<sup>74</sup>

Other authors were familiar with Japanese scholarship on Wang Yangming. Both Grousset and Forke cited work by the Wang Yangming scholar Takase Takejirō 高瀬武次郎 (1869–1950).<sup>75</sup> Zenker consulted a German-language article by the Japanese philosopher Inoue Tetsujirō 井上哲次郎 (1855–1944).<sup>76</sup> Zenker also cited an eight-page review of Inoue's *Nihon Yōmeigakuha no Tetsugaku* 日本陽明學派之哲學 (The Philosophy of the [Wang] Yangming School in Japan) published in the *Transactions of the Asiatic Society in Japan*.<sup>77</sup> This society was established in Yokohama in 1872 by a group of British and American diplomats, businessmen, and missionaries living in Japan with the aim of promoting the study of Japan and exchanging information about it. Members held monthly meetings with lectures and printed this annual publication.<sup>78</sup> Brief discussion of Wang Yangming and his school in Japan date to an 1893 volume. Thereafter, he is mentioned periodically, although this lengthy review was the next useful introduction to him. In all cases, one impetus behind discussion of him was the work of Inoue. For example, in "A Japanese Philosopher," an article published in the 1893 volume, George Knox surveys the Chinese roots of Japanese philosophy, giving brief treatment to Wang Yangming, his ideas, and his followers in Japan.<sup>79</sup> In a

<sup>72</sup> Reinsch 1911, pp. 132–133.

<sup>73</sup> Reinsch 1911, p. 134.

<sup>74</sup> Reinsch 1911, pp. 138–139.

<sup>75</sup> His citations, as footnotes, state "Takejiro III" with page numbers. Grousset cited Tetsujiro Inoue 1897.

<sup>76</sup> He cites Inouye 1909, pp. 104–106.

<sup>77</sup> Dening 1908, pp. 111–118.

<sup>78</sup> "History of the Asiatic Society of Japan," <http://www.asjapan.org/web.php/about/history> (accessed July 2, 2018).

<sup>79</sup> Knox 1893, pp. 10–15.

footnote, Knox states that he gathered his information from a lecture Inoue gave on Wang Yangming at Tokyo Imperial University in 1892.<sup>80</sup>

In fact, publications including discussion of the Wang Yangming school in Japan written by Americans living in the country predated articles and books on Wang Yangming and his school in China. A good example of this is Robert Armstrong's *Light from the East: Studies in Japanese Confucianism*, a book published in 1914, two years prior to Henke's translation. Armstrong had served as a Methodist missionary in Japan from 1903 to 1910. Between 1912 and 1919 he served as a professor of philosophy and then as dean at Kwansai Gakuin University. He wrote numerous articles and four books about Japanese religion and philosophy. In the preface for *Light from the East*, he says that he wished to "throw light on some of the formative elements of Japanese civilization" – in this case, the history of Japanese Confucianism.<sup>81</sup> But he gave this book the title *Light from the East* because he found that to understand Japanese thought one needed knowledge of the Korean, Chinese, and Indian background, especially Song and Ming Confucianism. Over all, his goal was to achieve mutual understanding between two cultures that were "neighbors."<sup>82</sup>

*Light from the East* contains major headings, each with several chapters, for early Confucianism, the Zhu Xi school of Confucianism, the Wang Yangming school of Confucianism, the classical school of Confucianism, and what he calls the "eclectic school." Part III ("Studies in the O-Yomei School of Confucianism") counts as the first substantial English-language introduction to Wang Yangming and his Tokugawa and Meiji Period followers.<sup>83</sup> Armstrong states that in writing about them he relied on the work of Inoue Tetsujirō and Yamaji Aizan 山路愛山 (1864–1917). In fact, Inoue – who was then serving as a professor of philosophy at Tokyo Imperial University – wrote a preface for his book. The first chapter in Part III introduces Wang Yangming, and the following ten are devoted to his Japanese followers.

Regarding Wang, Armstrong first explains the background to his thought in Mengzi's and Lu Jiuyuan's philosophies, highlighting the centrality and universality of the "heart [*xin* 心]," "Heavenly *ri* [*tian li* 天理]," and "intuitive knowledge [*liangzhi* 良知]."<sup>84</sup> He then describes essential features of Wang's philosophy: Men are by nature good and capable of virtue. The source of this goodness is their heart, which is the *li* they have received from Heaven. When a person follows the spontaneous movement of the heart, he does his duty, actualizing the *li*. This movement of the heart is the operation of "intuitive knowledge of good and evil." It is a man's duty to clarify this knowledge so that lusts disappear and they are able to put this knowledge into practice in the world. To reveal this knowledge, a man must engage in quiet meditation and introspection, purify the conscience, and perfect morality.

Armstrong saw in Wang Yangming's philosophy an eastern pantheism and "cosmological idealism." He stated that Wang Yangming thought Heaven, the Way, *li*,

<sup>80</sup> Knox 1893, p. 10.

<sup>81</sup> Armstrong 1974, p. vii.

<sup>82</sup> Armstrong 1974, p. vii.

<sup>83</sup> Armstrong 1974, pp. 119–195.

<sup>84</sup> Armstrong 1974, p. 120. I have retained his translations.



and the heart were each all-inclusive. Hence, by following the intuitive knowledge and entering the Way, a person arrives at unity – “a revelation of one nature.” But on this point Armstrong was critical: “Yomei’s [= Yangming’s] system, like most pantheistic systems, does not logically provide for evil.”<sup>85</sup> If all things are one nature, how is the origin of evil to be explained? He also believed that such a pantheistic philosophy ultimately made individuality an illusion, and should therefore be balanced by a complementary monotheism. What should be noted here, however, is that he concluded this chapter with an observation about the courageous individualism of Wang Yangming’s followers in Japan: “Many of them were strong, brave men who contributed much to their country and its development. Some of them may be counted among the world’s best men.”<sup>86</sup>

Although he doesn’t reference Armstrong, Henke published his book on Wang Yangming two years after Armstrong’s came out. As we have seen, he too was aware of Wang’s importance to East Asian history. Born into the family of a Methodist minister in 1876, Henke traveled to China in 1900 to work as a missionary in Jiangxi Province, first in Nanchang and then Jiujiang. From 1904 to 1907, he served as a professor of homiletics at Tongwen Academy (after 1906, William Nast College). He returned to the United States in 1907 and completed a doctorate at the University of Chicago. That same year, he accepted a position as a professor of philosophy and psychology at Nanjing University.<sup>87</sup> In 1911, at the invitation of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society (located in Shanghai), Henke began researching Wang Yangming’s work.

The North China Branch was established by British and Americans residing in Shanghai who were seeking to advance the study of and intellectual engagement with China. One of their most important activities was sponsoring research on China that would result in public lectures and the publication of articles.<sup>88</sup> It seems likely, though not provable in detail, that a growing awareness among members of the society of the importance of Wang Yangming to East Asian history was at the root of this request. In any case, in autumn 1912, Henke presented the preliminary outcome of his research to the society in Shanghai. This paper – “A Study in the Life and Philosophy of Wang Yangming” – was then published in the society’s journal the following year.<sup>89</sup> This was the first scholarly article about Wang Yangming to be published in an academic journal in the West.

Henke begins by offering his English-language readers a frame of reference in European history, explaining that he lived contemporaneous with the voyages of discovery and the beginning of the Reformation, as well as that his revolutionary ideas predated the work of such philosophers as Hobbes, Descartes, and Spinoza by a century. Henke explains that Wang Yangming was a reformer whose concerns were largely ethical. Deeply worried by the great moral, religious, and political issues in his time, he sought to place learning on a firm, bedrock foundation,

<sup>85</sup> Armstrong 1974, p. 126.

<sup>86</sup> Armstrong 1974, p. 126.

<sup>87</sup> “Henke, Frederick Goodrich, 1876–1963,” <http://iagenweb.org/boards/floyd/obituaries/index.cgi?read=235386> (accessed July 2, 2018).

<sup>88</sup> For a history of this branch, see Wang Yi 2004.

<sup>89</sup> Henke 1913.

“which meant finding the very source and life of the universe.”<sup>90</sup> Although he searched intensely in Buddhism, Daoism, and Zhu Xi’s philosophy, he failed to find a satisfying solution. It was only when he took office in faraway Guizhou that he found the answer he sought in a “state of realization” that led him to understand that “my nature is sufficient.” “Upon this foundation,” Henke asserts, “the whole structure of his ontology, cosmology, psychology, and ethics rests.”<sup>91</sup>

Henke then explains what Wang Yangming meant by nature, providing quotes from the *Chuan xi lu* (Instructions for Practical Life), and concluding that “this subtle something he calls nature is so profound, so rich, so all-inclusive, that viewed as a whole, [F.H.] Bradley, [E.F.] Taylor, or [Josiah] Royce would probably greet it as their old friend the absolute, even though it be in Chinese garb.”<sup>92</sup> In other words, all three of these philosophers had similarly formulated an absolute idealism, the metaphysical view “that all aspects of reality, including those we experience as disconnected or contradictory, are ultimately unified in the thought of a single all-encompassing consciousness.”<sup>93</sup>

Henke also explains that Wang Yangming’s primary interest was the mind. Mind is the “embodiment of natural law” and “heaven-given principles.” The volitional activity of mind is the creative activity that constitutes things in the world. Things become things by virtue of coming within the realm of the mind’s purposes.<sup>94</sup> Here too, he found evidence for Wang’s idealism. For much of his early life, Henke notes, Wang was frustrated by his inability to solve the problem of knowledge and consequently to arrive at a satisfying answer to the meaning of exhausting principles, investigating things, and extending knowledge to the utmost. He only found relief during his stay in Guizhou, where he realized that the answer was thorough devotion to nature and understanding and developing the mind: “Not things without, but mind itself, offers the solution.”<sup>95</sup>

Lastly, Henke explained that for Wang Yangming, the source of knowledge within mind is the “intuitive faculty” or “intuitive knowledge.” The problem of knowledge is solved by depending on and developing this knowledge. As the “point of clearness that natural law attains,” the intuitive knowledge naturally knows right and wrong, and good and evil, thus marking out a path of duty.<sup>96</sup> By developing it to the utmost, a person can achieve absolute moral perfection, reaching the highest good, and hence become a sage. The sage, Henke explains, “is completely dominated by Heaven-given principles and wholly unhampered by passion, his integrity and moral worth are of the quality of the finest gold.”<sup>97</sup>

In 1913, on account of health issues, Henke returned to the United States, taking an appointment at Allegheny College in Pennsylvania the next year, where he remained until he retired. But upon returning, Henke began corresponding with Paul Carus – then chief editor at Open Court Press – about his book project as

<sup>90</sup> Henke 1913, pp. 55–56.

<sup>91</sup> Henke 1913, pp. 55–56.

<sup>92</sup> Henke 1913, p. 56.

<sup>93</sup> Parker 2014.

<sup>94</sup> Henke 1916, pp. 56–57.

<sup>95</sup> Henke 1913, p. 56.

<sup>96</sup> Myers 1964, p. 60.

<sup>97</sup> Myers 1964, p. 61.

well as publishing another article on Wang Yangming in *The Monist*. This was a wise choice. Open Court was established in LaSalle, Illinois, in 1887 by Edward Carl Hegeler, a German-American engineer and businessman who had made his fortune on zinc manufacturing in this town. But Hegeler was also deeply interested in matters of theology and science, and sought to promote the scientific study of religion and ethics. To achieve this goal, he opened the press and began publishing two journals – *Open Court* (from 1887) and *The Monist* (from 1890) – as well as academic books on religion, philosophy, and science.<sup>98</sup>

In 1888, Paul Carus joined the press as an editor. He was an apt choice. Born in Prussia in 1852, Carus obtained his Ph.D. in philosophy and theology at the University of Tübingen in 1876. Because both he and Hegeler were quite open-minded about religious ideas, they threw open the pages of their journals to comparative religious studies, scientific articles, and the study of Oriental religions, willingly including the work of contributors with controversial philosophical ideas.<sup>99</sup> They also held unconventional beliefs: convinced that religion and science could be reconciled, both found that monistic philosophy was the most suited to achieving this goal. According to Constance Myers, Carus was a Kantian but sought to go beyond him: “The central idea of Carus’s philosophy was an attempt to solve Kant’s problem of dualism – of the unknowability of the thing-in-itself. He sought to bridge the chasm between subject and object and, in this attempt, he reached his monistic conception.”<sup>100</sup>

Not surprisingly, Carus became particularly interested in Oriental thought. In 1893, at the First Parliament of Religions in Chicago, he met Abbot Shaku Soyen 釋宗演 (1860–1919) of the Engaku Monastery (Engaku-ji 圓學寺) in Japan, who further spurred his interest in Buddhism. In the ensuing two years he wrote *The Gospel of Buddhism*, a kind of primer for readers in the West. When he sent proofs of his work to Shaku Soyen, because Shaku could not read English, he handed them to his student D.T. Suzuki for assistance. In 1897, when Carus needed help translating the *Dao De Jing*, he brought Suzuki to LaSalle, where he would remain for twelve years as a writer and translator.<sup>101</sup> As we have seen, these were the years both men produced scholarship on the history of philosophy in China, including Buddhism, Daoism, ancient Confucianism, and some Song *Daoxue* philosophers.

Thus, under the guidance of Paul Carus, a clear connection between Open Court Press and the study and publication of work on Eastern thought was established. The press editor “came to be regarded as an authority on Oriental religion, and an expert transmitter of the ideas and ethos contained therein to the English-reading public.”<sup>102</sup> That is the likely reason why Henke sent him a letter in August 1913 announcing that he had just returned from China and informing him that he had made a critical study of Wang Yangming, producing a manuscript of about 115,000 words, a translation that he “much desired to publish.” Henke made the case that Wang “is the most important and influential Chinese philosopher since

<sup>98</sup> Myers 1964, p. 59.

<sup>99</sup> Myers 1964, p. 61.

<sup>100</sup> Myers 1964, p. 62.

<sup>101</sup> Myers 1964, p. 61.

<sup>102</sup> Myers 1964, p. 62.

the period beginning with the Reformation and the maritime discoveries,” so he expected that his work would “represent a distinct contribution to the subject of Oriental philosophy.”<sup>103</sup> He also submitted a revised version of the article he had published in the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society* for publication in *The Monist*.

It may be the case that Carus still did not quite realize the impact of Wang Yangming on the history of Chinese philosophy. After all, neither he nor D.T. Suzuki had included him in their surveys. In his reply, Carus said he feared that the manuscript was too long, especially given that he already had several Chinese translations awaiting publication. He recommended publication of extracts in the form of a short book or a series of articles.<sup>104</sup> Nevertheless, by mid-September both the article and book were accepted for publication. Carus suggested changing the title of the article from “Wang Yang Ming as a Chinese Philosopher” to “Wang Yangming, the Chinese Idealist” or “A Kantian before Kant.”<sup>105</sup> Given Carus’s own philosophical proclivities and the history of this press, reading Wang Yangming in this way would indeed have made scholarship about him apt material for publication.

Consequently, in 1914, Henke’s article “Wang Yangming: A Chinese Idealist” was published in *The Monist*, and in 1916, his translation of Wang Yangming’s work, *The Philosophy of Wang Yang-ming*, was published by Open Court. After a brief preface, this book provided a biography of Wang edited from Qian Dehong’s 錢德洪 (1496–1574) *Nianpu* 年譜 (Chronological Biography). Four “Books” follow. The first book is a translation of the first and second *juan* of the *Chuan xi lu*. The second book consists of selections from the third *juan* of the *Chuan xi lu* and the *Daxue wen* 大學問 (“Inquiry Regarding the Great Learning”). The third book is a selection of twelve of Wang’s letters, and the fourth book contains thirty-eight letters and twelve prefaces and essays.

As David Nivison has pointed out, although these documents can be found in the *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu*, the way Henke divided and ordered them is entirely different. In his preface, Henke states that “the volume herewith presented is a faithful translation of volume one of the four volume edition of Wang’s works distributed by the Commercial Press of Shanghai.”<sup>106</sup> In fact, the edition he was using was compiled by Shi Bangyao, a Wang Yangming follower who was also from Yuyao 余姚, Zhejiang. His *Yangming xiansheng jiyao* consisted of three major volumes, each with several *juan*, and was first published in 1635. The first volume, the *Lixue bian* 理學編 (Compendium of the Learning of Principle), consisted of four *juan* and was intended as an introduction to Wang’s philosophy. This is what Henke translated. The other two volumes,

<sup>103</sup> Frederick G. Henke, letter to Dr. Carus, August 20, 1913, Open Court Company Publishing Records, Correspondence, Box 15, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center.

<sup>104</sup> Paul Carus, reply to Mr. F. C. [sic] Henke, August 23, 1913, Open Court Company Publishing Records, Correspondence, Box 15, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Carus, letter to Mr. Frederick G. Henke, September 11, 1913, Open Court Company Publishing Records, Correspondence, Box 15, Southern Illinois University Special Collections Research Center.

<sup>106</sup> Henke 1916, p. xiv.

which were intended to introduce Wang's political and literary achievements, were not included.<sup>107</sup>

Several journals reviewed Henke's book shortly after it was published. Reviewers all recognized the importance of his work, given that Wang Yangming and his compelling life and philosophical ideas were so little known. But some also criticized Henke for failing to offer a systematic overview of his thought. One reviewer, Anesaki Masaharu, was highly critical of Henke's translation. He believed that without a proper introduction and annotations, something this book lacked, Wang Yangming's philosophy would remain obscure.<sup>108</sup>

Furthermore, Anesaki found the translation of technical terms too plain and modern, or more in accord with Zhu Xi's connotations, insofar as they implied conceptually dualistic thinking or empiricism. Translating *liangzhi* as "intuitive knowledge" and "intuitive faculty of the good," for example, risked reducing this "cardinal point in the whole system of Wang's philosophy and ethics" to something too "strictly psychological."<sup>109</sup> Furthermore, he found translating *zhi liangzhi* 致良知 as "to extend knowledge to the utmost" and "to extend the use of intuitive knowledge to the utmost" highly misleading. The phrase is better translated as "to realize the *liangzhi*" or "to bring the *liangzhi* to full light and efficiency." Finally, translating *gongfu* 工夫 as "task" or "work" is also misleading because the term really refers to engaging in a type of meditation or spiritual exercise both while quiet sitting and doing things.

Anesaki's review was useful insofar as it pointed out the extent to which Henke may have shifted the conceptual horizon through which Wang Yangming would now be understood by individuals relying on the English translation. The language barrier was formidable, and yet remains so. Similar questions could be raised about Henke's use of Western conceptual frameworks to assess his thought. For example, Henke believed that Wang's idea that each person's mind was a microcosm of the universe would naturally lead to ideas of liberty and equality similar to those of the Enlightenment in Europe.<sup>110</sup> Also, like almost every other scholar who wrote during this period, he labeled Wang's philosophy monistic idealism, contrasting it with Zhu Xi's realism. Although these readings were highly problematic, they shaped how Wang Yangming was understood in Europe and North America until new scholarship appeared from the 1960s.

Although Henke receives credit for being the first person in the West to publish a translation of Wang Yangming's writing, the first person to publish a book-length study of his philosophy was Wang Tchang-tche. From Songjiang in Jiangsu, he entered a Catholic Seminary in Xujiahui 徐家匯, Shanghai, in 1918 and then entered the Jesuit Order in 1921. In 1928, he moved to Europe, where, after studying at a Catholic seminary in Lyon, he became a priest. One year later, he entered the Institut Catholique de Paris, where he became the first Chinese priest to obtain a doctorate in theology at this school. That was in 1935; the following year, he also

<sup>107</sup> Nivison 1964, pp. 436–442.

<sup>108</sup> Anesaki 1918, p. 595.

<sup>109</sup> Anesaki 1918, p. 596.

<sup>110</sup> Henke 1916, p. xiv.

obtained a doctorate in philosophy.<sup>111</sup> The title of his dissertation – which was published as a book in 1936 – speaks to the subject: *La Philosophie morale de Wang Yangming*. The first chapter provides an account of Wang Yangming’s life in historical context. The second chapter (“L’Immanence de la norme dans notre coeur”) explains Wang Yangming’s doctrine of the identity of mind and principle and the human capacity for moral perfection; how this doctrine diverged from Zhu Xi’s thought; and why the aberrant behavior of scholars in his time had led him to put forward this theory.<sup>112</sup> The ensuing five chapters (3 to 7) are devoted to explaining the meaning, practice, and realization of *liangzhi*, a term he chooses not to translate, rather leaving it Romanized as “*liang-tche*.”

In his introduction, Wang argues that Chinese thought is unique in making the search for moral perfection a principal goal. Chinese philosophers also believe that moral acts are the highest expression of moral knowledge, and therefore insist that true philosophy is a philosophy of praxis. Consequently, he believed that making known one of the great masters of Chinese moral philosophy was timely, and he chose Wang Yangming because he found him to be exemplary of this strain in Chinese thought. He also stated that his goal was, insofar as possible, to present Wang Yangming on his own terms without engaging in comparative philosophy. All too often, he believed, comparison amounted to fitting Chinese thought into a European framework – in the case of Wang Yangming, for example, Bergson’s intuitionism or Kantianism.<sup>113</sup>

Because he believed that Wang Yangming’s “definitive teaching late in life” and the “central concept in his moral philosophy” was *liangzhi*, Wang Tchang-tche devotes nearly the entire book to explicating the meaning of it.<sup>114</sup> By nature, people have this good knowledge, and they can actualize it by acting upon moral intuition. This knowledge is not objective or external; rather, it is intimate and personal, consisting of moral principles immanent within the heart. Realizing this natural goodness requires concrete practice and an almost religious attitude towards the existence and infallibility of *liangzhi*. One must have a firm faith in it, obeying the guidance of moral intuition and actualizing it in the most concrete challenges of life.<sup>115</sup> This means humbly and resolutely doing what is good and rejecting evil in our actions, according to the guidance of *liangzhi*.

Wang Tchang-tche recognizes that Wang Yangming did not explicitly and formally philosophize about what *liangzhi* is in itself. Rather, his concerns were practical and not metaphysical. He developed his ideas from life experience and from what he believed would become self-evident, should the individual pay careful attention to moral awareness: “[...] it [*liangzhi*] was constructed solely upon the immediate terrain of our conscience.”<sup>116</sup> In this regard, Wang Tchang-tche’s work points in

<sup>111</sup> “王昌祉 (Wang Tchang-tche) (1899–1959),” *Shanghai shi difangzhi bangongshi*, <http://www.shtong.gov.cn/node2/node2245/node75195/node75207/node75222/node75230/userobject1a190248.html> (accessed July 2, 2018).

<sup>112</sup> Wang Tch’ang-Tche 1936, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> Wang Tch’ang-Tche 1936, pp. 5–7.

<sup>114</sup> Wang Tch’ang-Tche 1936, p. 187.

<sup>115</sup> Wang Tch’ang-Tche 1936, p. 187.

<sup>116</sup> Wang Tch’ang-Tche 1936, p. 190.

the direction of later trends comparing Wang Yangming's method of philosophizing to phenomenology.<sup>117</sup>

Chang Yü-chüan wrote the only other scholarly monograph about Wang Yangming published prior to the 1960s. But unlike Wang Tchang-tche's work, the focus was not the quintessence of Wang Yangming's philosophy but rather his political life. Chang's book was the first to present a detailed study of his life as an official and military commander, as well as his political and military thought.<sup>118</sup>

Chang initially published his study between 1939 and 1940 as a series of articles in *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review*. The review was a quarterly magazine published by the Chinese Social and Political Science Association, which was established in Beijing in 1915 to encourage the study of law, politics, sociology, economics, and administration, as well as to promote fellowship among individuals with such interests. The *Review* was to be a venue for English-language articles about these subjects.<sup>119</sup> Interestingly, Chang Yü-chüan was not only a founding member of the association's executive council but also served on the first editorial board. Prior to 1939, he also repeatedly contributed articles and reviews. Other members were indeed influential figures: the first president of the association was Premier Lu Zhengxiang 陸徵祥 (1871–1949), and the first vice president was none other than Paul S. Reinsch, American Minister to China, whom we have already met.<sup>120</sup>

Because he spent his life at the intersection between East and West, Chang Yü-chüan's background made him a fitting candidate for these roles and for the book about Wang Yangming he authored. Born in Nanhai, Guangdong, between 1890 and 1898, Chang studied at the Anglo-Chinese College in Fuzhou, Queen's College in Hong Kong, and then at the Imperial University of Peking. In 1898 he went to Japan to study at Tokyo Imperial University, where he met Sun Zhongshan 孫中山 (Sun Yat-sen, 1866–1925) and Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929). Then, in 1901, he traveled to the United States where, until 1906, Chang studied at the University of California and then Yale, where he completed a master's degree in law. In 1906, Chang was invited by the Qing government to participate in a special examination in law and government offered to students who had studied in Europe and the United States, and was awarded a *jinshi* degree. This successful educational background launched him into a long series of official positions in the educational and foreign affairs ministries of the Qing, early Republican period, and Nationalist governments. Perhaps the most prominent position he held was as the president of Tsinghua College, from 1918 to 1920.<sup>121</sup>

Chang acknowledged the importance of Henke's translation work for studying the philosophy of Wang Yangming, but he found that it covered only about half of Wang's writing, leaving untouched his collection of official documents, poems,

<sup>117</sup> The earliest comparative study is Jung 1965.

<sup>118</sup> Chang Yü-chüan 1939–1940. These articles published as a book in several reprints. See Chang Yü-chüan 1946.

<sup>119</sup> Scott 1916, pp. 375–376.

<sup>120</sup> "Editorial Notes," *The Chinese Social and Political Science Review* 1 (April 1916) 1, pp. 1–2.

<sup>121</sup> Zhang Yonghang n.d., pp. 1–21. These are unpublished papers emailed to the author of the present article on May 5, 2017. Zhang Yonghang is a grandson to Chang Yü-chüan. See also Jin Fujun 2014, pp. 32–36.

and additional literary work. Chang therefore proposed to give an account of “what he believed and what he did as a government official.”<sup>122</sup> His study begins with a detailed account of Wang Yangming’s life and then analyzes his political life and thought topically, according to the following subheadings: “His Political Theories,” “Wang Yang-ming as an Educator,” “Wang Yang-ming as a Civil Administrator,” and “Wang Yang-ming as a Soldier.” Chang concludes with some interesting judgments. As an advocate of the unity of knowledge and action, Wang was “different from the common run of the literary class of people in that he practices what he knows, under the sole guidance of his so-called intuitive faculty.” The “secret of his success in his capacity of an educator, of a civil administrator or of a soldier” was doing “what he thinks is right, even at the risk of his own life or liberty.” In those roles, Chang estimates, Wang had “no ulterior object to serve except in the interest of the people”: “We have failed to discover a single instance in which he is not acting for the best interest of the country and the people, nor can we take exception with him for having an ax to grind.”<sup>123</sup> For all these reasons, he calls on his readers to “faithfully emulate his example, see things by his view point and do things by his standard of ethics.”<sup>124</sup>

While Chang Yü-chüan was serving his first year as president of Tsinghua, J.J.L. Duyvendak was serving his last as interpreter for the Dutch Embassy in Beijing. As we have seen, he published an essay on Wang Yangming in 1927 because he had encountered a resurgence of interest in the great Ming philosopher in contemporary China. As he saw it, modernity had compelled the Chinese to stand at a distance from their Confucian tradition and look at it critically. But owing to the Western encounter, the Chinese realized just how varied their traditions were. In keeping with the Chinese pattern of maintaining continuity within change and looking for authoritative guidance within their own traditions, they rediscovered the work of such thinkers as Mozi and Wang Yangming.<sup>125</sup> Duyvendak saw this in a positive light because he believed that Wang Yangming’s spirit of independent, critical thinking would have a positive impact on youth.<sup>126</sup>

Duyvendak ought to have had some insight into the contemporary intellectual scene in China. After all, he had served at the Dutch embassy from 1912 to 1918. Prior, he had studied in Leiden, Berlin, and Paris under such famous Sinologists as J.J.M. de Groot, Edouard Chavannes, and Henri Cordier (1849–1925). Upon returning to Leiden in 1919, he took up a position as a lecturer in Chinese at Leiden University. That placed him in what would become one of the most important centers of Chinese studies in Europe. It is well known that Dutch Sinology developed in the 19th century in concert with the growing needs of the Dutch colonial government in Southeast Asia.<sup>127</sup> The government needed interpreters and experts in overseas Chinese affairs to deal with communities of Chinese residing in its territories. As a part of that effort, a Chair of Chinese Language and Literature was established at Leiden (along with several other chairs in “Oriental” and

<sup>122</sup> Chang Yü-chüan 1975, p. 2.

<sup>123</sup> Chang Yü-chüan 1975, p. 267.

<sup>124</sup> Chang Yü-chüan 1975, p. 268.

<sup>125</sup> Duyvendak 1927, p. 63.

<sup>126</sup> Duyvendak 1927, pp. 97–98.

<sup>127</sup> For a thorough study, see Kuiper 2017.



“Indological” subjects). Duyvendak first studied Chinese with the second occupant of this chair, the renowned J.J.M. de Groot.

Publication of *China Tegen de Westerkim* (China against the Western Horizon) and a philological study and translation of the *Book of Lord Shang* (1928) cemented Duyvendak’s credentials, and he became full professor in 1930. *China Tegen de Westerkim* included several studies on contemporary China, such as a survey of the literary renaissance and a study of Wang Yangming.<sup>128</sup> “Een Herleefd Wijsgeer” (A Resurrected Sage) provides an introduction to the influence of Zhu Xi’s philosophy on Wang Yangming, his life as an official and military commander, his fundamental philosophical concepts – especially *liangzhi* and *zhi xing he yi* 知行合一 (the unity of knowledge and action), and his methods of self-cultivation.

Turning now to surveys of the histories of Chinese philosophy, we note that three of these were originally published in French, and three were published in German. The earliest French survey was Léon Wiegier’s *Histoire des croyances religieuses et des opinions philosophiques en Chine* (later published in English as *History of the Religious Beliefs and Philosophical Opinions in China*). Wiegier was born in Strasbourg, France, and entered the Jesuit order in 1881. In 1887, he traveled to a mission in Southern Zhili, China, where he practiced medicine. He also mastered the language and produced numerous publications on Chinese history, language, culture, religion, and philosophy. Concerning the *History of the Religious Beliefs and Philosophical Opinions in China*, Wiegier states that the book’s seventy-four chapters (referred to as “lessons” in the table of contents) were written at the request of the Institut Catholique de Paris and “represented thirty years of researches and studies made in China, with a view to the propagation of the kingdom of God.”<sup>129</sup>

Although most of the short “Lesson” on Wang Yangming is devoted to his impact on Japan, Wiegier does introduce important elements of his thought. Referring to Wang’s enlightenment experience while serving at a courier station in Guizhou, Wiegier concluded that he “had as it were a revelation.”<sup>130</sup> He explained that Wang found that once the study of the masters is completed, a man can no longer search for the answers to his doubts in books; rather, he must draw them out of his own heart.<sup>131</sup> Regarding this “living word,” Wiegier continues:

That word, he said, is pronounced *liang-chih*, the innate knowledge, which he defines as “what one knows, without having ever learned it, without having ever thought on it.” Only the dictate of innate knowledge, heard and followed by man, gives him the supreme blessings, truth and peace. Once this inner word is heard in the secrecy of the heart, one must believe in it firmly, immovably. For that word is infallible, seeing that it is pronounced by that heart, which is the celestial norm.<sup>132</sup>

Wiegier further explains that Wang Yangming always insisted that because this infallible knowledge is “celestial reason,” the will must be obedient to its verdict, executing

<sup>128</sup> For Duyvendak’s life, I have followed Idema 1995, pp. 88–93.

<sup>129</sup> Wiegier 1927, preface.

<sup>130</sup> Wiegier 1927, p. 698.

<sup>131</sup> Wiegier 1927, p. 698.

<sup>132</sup> Wiegier 1927, p. 698.

it with determination and absolute faith. Acting in conformity with it is wisdom. A person has only to watch carefully over himself lest anything human be introduced, sullyng or falsifying this intuition, thus dividing the heart from the moral law: “To ignore this heart, is the great folly; to act contrary to it, is the great error.”<sup>133</sup>

Wieger does present Wang’s doctrine with a refreshing sensitivity. As a Jesuit, he may have been influenced by the affective turn in Catholic thought in France (Romantic Catholicism), according to which the practice of the faith should be rooted in the appeal to the heart as the site of connection to God. He likely also had in mind natural law, a concept held by the Catholic Church that had roots both in Stoicism and the Christian scriptures, particularly in Romans 1–2, where the Apostle Paul outlines the moral law that everyone knows intuitively. Romans 2:15–6 describes it as follows: “They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness.”

Such an interpretation would fit well with Wieger’s criticism of Wang Yangming. Having decided that *liangzhi* was like “conscience,” Wieger found it “strange that the man who held conscience in such high esteem, who preached so strongly the obligation to follow it did not rise above that conscience to Him who gave him it.”<sup>134</sup> He maintained that Wang considered it as a kind of vital function, making him materialistic in his thinking like Zhu Xi.

Because Henri Bernard and René Grousset both largely reproduce information and interpretations of Wang Yangming that they found in Wieger’s and Henke’s works, their surveys need not be covered in detail here. Rather, it is worthwhile to recall that the Ming philosopher had already, by 1940, been included in six such surveys. Both Bernard and Grousset were accomplished scholars of Chinese history and philosophy. Bernard was a French missionary and Sinologist. He went to China in 1924 and remained there until 1947, working as both a missionary and a researcher.<sup>135</sup> He wrote numerous books and articles about China. *Sagesse chinoise et philosophie chrétienne* consists of a series of lectures on the history of Chinese philosophy, the history of Jesuit missions in China and, more generally, the encounter between Occidental and Chinese civilization and philosophy. The book was originally written to provide instruction at the college of philosophy at the Jesuit mission in Xianxian 獻縣, Hubei, China. As such, Wang’s work was summarized under concise points: his philosophy as metaphysical idealism; the liberating quality of his philosophy as compared to the rationalism of Zhu Xi’s philosophy; subjectivity and intuitionism in his philosophy of mind and *liangzhi*; Wang Yangming’s philosophy in Japan; and selections from his poetry and letters.<sup>136</sup>

Grousset also produced a large oeuvre of historical work, but he wrote more broadly about “Eastern” civilizations. He spent most of his career as a curator in two different museums located in Paris, France.<sup>137</sup> Concerning Wang Yangming,

<sup>133</sup> Wieger 1927, p. 700.

<sup>134</sup> Wieger 1927, p. 700.

<sup>135</sup> Witek, “Henri Bernard-Maitre, 1889–1975.” For a bibliography of his publications and chronology of his life see Dehergne 1976.

<sup>136</sup> Bernard 1935, pp. 82–88.

<sup>137</sup> “René Grousset,” Académie Française, <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/les-immortels/rene-grousset> (accessed July 2, 2018).

he was most impressed by how his philosophy diverged from Zhu Xi's. Like all the other authors discussed here, he drew strong distinctions between the two based on a simplistic characterization of Zhu Xi's ideas that scholars would question today. Grousset explains that whereas Zhu Xi valued erudition, intellectualism, and acquiring knowledge through compiling and commenting on classical texts, Wang Yangming valued subjectivity and intuition. For Wang, through personal reflection, the individual must discover the infallible truths contained within the heart. For this reason, truth was almost like a kind of revelation, and ecstatic in nature.<sup>138</sup>

One area where German Sinology excelled in the first half of the 20th century was in publishing surveys of the history of Chinese philosophy. Whereas English-language introductory surveys neglect Ming philosophy, German surveys include at least some discussion of Wang Yangming and his school of thought. Zenker's *Geschichte der chinesischen Philosophie* and Hackmann's *Chinesische Philosophie* were both first published in 1927, while Forke's *Geschichte der neueren chinesischen Philosophie* was first published in 1938.

Both Hackmann and Forke had been deeply involved with China. Heinrich Hackmann studied Protestant theology at the University of Tübingen, served as a priest for the German community in Shanghai from 1894 to 1901, and then spent time traveling in China and Southeast Asia. In 1913, he was appointed professor of religious history at the University of Amsterdam. Alfred Forke – arguably one of Germany's most accomplished Sinologists prior to World War II – was born in 1867 in Braunschweig, the capital of the Duchy of Brunswick. While studying jurisprudence at the University of Berlin, he also attended the Seminar for Oriental Languages, where he learned Chinese. From 1890 to 1903, he worked for the German diplomatic service in China. In 1903, he took a position as a lecturer in the Department of Oriental Languages at Berlin University, and in 1923 he succeeded Otto Franke as a professor at the University of Hamburg.<sup>139</sup> Forke published numerous articles and books on Chinese literature and philosophy.

Ernst Zenker, on the other hand, wrote about China as a non-specialist. He was born in Bohemia, obtained his law degree in Vienna, and then went on to become a noted journalist, author, and politician, perhaps best known for his work on anarchism. Although he was not an academic Sinologist and did not work directly with Chinese-language sources, the fact that he could produce a basic survey of Chinese philosophy also speaks to the maturation of this field and the availability of translated sources.

Zenker discusses Wang Yangming in a chapter titled “The Heterodox Schools: Wang Yangming.” By heterodox, Zenker meant the *Xinxue* originating with Lu Jiuyuan during the Song dynasty, and not Buddhism and Daoism. Aside from introducing Wang Yangming's life and thought briefly, the questions that most exercised his curiosity were passages examining the relation between mind and body or ones that seemed to suggest that Wang's thought was similar to German idealism. The same held true for Hackmann and Forke. Here are two examples of passages from Wang Yangming's works these authors quoted at least in part:

<sup>138</sup> Grousset 1923, pp. 356–357.

<sup>139</sup> Erkes 1946, pp. 148–149.

A friend pointed to flowering trees on a cliff and said, “[You say] there is nothing under heaven external to the mind. These flowering trees on the high mountain blossom and drop their blossoms of themselves. What have they to do with my mind?” The teacher said, “Before you look at the flowers, they and your mind are in the state of silent vacancy. From this you can know that these flowers are not external to your mind.”<sup>140</sup>

I was doubtful and said, “A thing is external. How can it be the same as the personal life, the mind, the will, and knowledge?” The teacher said, “The ears, the eyes, the mind, the will, knowledge, and things are parts of the body. But how can they see, hear, speak, or act without the mind? On the other hand, without the ears, the eyes, the mouth, the nose, and the four limbs, the mind cannot see, hear, speak, or act when it wants to. Therefore, if there is no mind, there will be no body, and if there is no body, there will be no mind.”<sup>141</sup>

Nevertheless, Zenker doubts that Wang Yangming was a true idealist, stating that he never claimed that the phenomenal world is less real than the mental world. Zenker argues that Wang’s statement concerning the flowers does not mean that he was saying they are an illusion. He believes Wang simply meant that mind authors the appearance of the phenomenal world, not that there is no world apart from what the mind shapes. Here, Zenker’s interpretation is conditioned by arguments in Europe over Kant’s philosophy. Zenker claims that neither Kant nor Wang denied the existence of the world; they only proposed that mind shapes how the world appears: “[...] all perceptions pass through our minds, so that the entire world, in its phenomenal appearance, is indeed the work of our mind.”<sup>142</sup> For this reason, he suggests that their philosophies could be labeled transcendental realism.

Zenker also assesses Wang Yangming’s status within and contribution to the history of Confucianism. He states that Wang deviated a great deal from Zhu Xi. Whereas Zhu Xi was a rationalist, Wang was a voluntarist and intuitionist. Whereas Zhu Xi was the Thomas Aquinas of the Confucian Church, Wang Yangming was similar to the Christian reformers who sought to return the faith to its foundations in the pristine purity of the ancient texts. In Wang’s case, that meant returning to the original meaning of Confucius’s work. Zenker argues that Confucius privileged self-knowledge and the perfection of virtue over merely practical knowledge of the external world. Zhu Xi shifted Confucius’s focus from perfecting the self in virtue to the rational study of the external world and the improvement of society. Zhu Xi’s philosophy, however, bred a kind of prosaic, pragmatic rationalism that narrowed thinking, robbing it of substance.

Wang Yangming, on the other hand, tried to return the goal to the perfection of virtue. He believed that man contains an intuitive knowledge of the good. By developing this knowledge, man can return to his true nature, spontaneously accord with the law of Heaven (moral law), and participate in a universal unity. Since the divine and the highest good are present in human nature as the moral law, following the intuitive knowledge leads to true liberty.<sup>143</sup> However, desires and passions prevent

<sup>140</sup> Chan 1963, p. 222. Zenker and Hackmann discuss this passage. See Hackmann 1927, pp. 364–365; Zenker 2006, p. 625.

<sup>141</sup> Chan 1963, p. 189. Forke, Hackmann, and Zenker all discuss this passage. See Forke 1964, p. 385; Hackmann 1927, pp. 364–365; Zenker 2006, p. 623.

<sup>142</sup> Zenker 2006, p. 627.

man from returning to his true nature. These passions cause him to lose himself in things, and only through purifying himself and turning away from the material can he return to the freedom of true nature.

Zenker sees parallels between this kind of purification and spiritual purgation in Catholicism. He further argues that Wang Yangming's conception of human nature and purifying the self of desires were influenced by Daoist mysticism. However, he notes that Wang did not accept Daoist passivity and political inaction, rather rejecting such attitudes. For Wang, a person's state of mind is not determined by whether they are active or living in quiet repose; rather, this is determined by the extent to which they are governed by moral law or desires. If a person follows the intuitive knowledge and, consequently, lives according to the moral law present in their human nature, they will be at peace whether active or passive.<sup>144</sup>

Hackmann's coverage is somewhat less simplistic and shaped by European philosophical categories than was Zenker's. From what he learned of Wang Yangming's life in Qian Dehong's *Nianpu* (Chronological Biography), Hackmann was impressed by how deeply Wang's philosophy was tied to his life experiences. He saw that Wang was a person who yearned for authenticity and truth and who was averse to empty forms. Zhu Xi's philosophy, as official orthodoxy, was just such a hollow form, as it no longer provided the impetus for scholars to explore existence: it was a "dead system." Wang rather sought spiritual insight and wisdom, developing a philosophy that truly grew from within and from his personal and intimate experiences with life challenges.<sup>145</sup>

Hackmann sees in Wang's concept of nature an "all-embracing unity." All phenomena – all that exists and happens – ultimately derives from the same nature. That is why the world only becomes truly accessible to people when they turn to their inmost being. The path to finding this knowledge requires looking within the mind, where the design and law of the cosmos lies. In other words, the mind gives form to and conditions what is present to us in the world's appearance.<sup>146</sup> Judging from Wang's statement concerning the flowers, Hackmann recognizes that he appears to be an idealist. However, like Zenker, he also notes that Wang did not privilege either mind or body as being somehow more real.<sup>147</sup>

Most of Hackmann's survey is then devoted to explaining the meaning of *liangzhi*. He mentions the English translation of this term as "intuition," but wisely stresses that intuition should not be equated with a particular function of the mind – such as knowledge, feeling, and willing. Rather, *liangzhi*, as Wang Yangming understood it, was prior to any particular mental function, a kind of pure knowing inherent in Heavenly principle expressing itself through these functions. This inner light is the basis for moral discrimination, of knowledge of right and wrong. The metaphysical quality and grandeur of *liangzhi*, however, makes it more than mere conscience. Through it, a man attains spiritual perfection. Because all that is great and good in man is rooted in this knowledge, there is no greater task than to develop this inner guide. It is only that this inner light is concealed by a darkening covering.

<sup>143</sup> Zenker 2006, pp. 631–632.

<sup>144</sup> Zenker 2006, pp. 634–635.

<sup>145</sup> Hackmann 1927, pp. 361–363.

<sup>146</sup> Hackmann 1927, p. 364.

<sup>147</sup> Hackmann 1927, p. 365.

That covering is the impulses and passions springing from man's natural selfishness. By developing the inner light, one becomes naturally able, in one's likes and dislikes, and predilections and aversions, to follow the guidance of the natural law within the mind, as opposed to the impulses behind selfish intentions. In this way, knowledge and action are unified.<sup>148</sup>

Among surveys predating the 1950s, Forke's made the most systematic use of primary sources as well as offering the most complete treatment of Wang Yangming. In constructing his survey, he drew directly from an edition of the *Mingshi* 明史 (Ming History), *Wang Wencheng gong quanshu*, and the *Yangming xiansheng ji yao*. He also cites the work of Zenker, Hackmann, Henke, Xie Wuliang 謝無量 (1884–1964), and Takase Takejirō. For Forke, Wang was “the greatest philosopher after Zhu Xi and the most important one to appear during the Ming Dynasty.”<sup>149</sup> His synopsis of Wang's life – which includes his *Erleuchtung* (enlightenment) in Guizhou as well as his treatment at the hands of the courts of the Jiajing 嘉靖, Longqing 隆慶, and Wanli 萬曆 emperors – was drawn from Henke's translation of Qian Dehong's *Nianpu* and the *Ming shi* biography. Ensuing sections elucidate Wang's theories of *xin ji li* 心即理 (identity of mind and principle), *ge wu* 格物 (investigation of things), *liangzhi*, and the origins of good and evil.<sup>150</sup>

In his concluding appraisal of Wang, Forke summarizes how the scholarship had categorized his philosophy up to his time. Because Wang appears to suggest that everything in the world is in one's own mind, that outside the mind there are no things, and that thought creates the material world, Henke calls his philosophy absolute idealism, while Hackmann labels it epistemological idealism. Forke agrees with this analysis but recognizes that others, such as Zenker, saw in Wang's ideas an *Identitätsphilosophie*. Presumably, the authors had in mind Schelling, whose philosophy of identity “was grounded in his concept of the Absolute in which the ideal and the real, subjectivity and objectivity, are ultimately one.”<sup>151</sup> By positing the nature of the Absolute as the identity of subject and object, and the ideal and the real, Schelling had sought to overcome dualism.<sup>152</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In sum, prior to the twentieth century, Wang Yangming was little discussed in literature on China published in Europe and North America. The principal reasons for this were the timing for the Jesuit missionaries' arrival in China and how Jesuits read Chinese philosophical traditions. During the late Ming and early Qing Wang Yangming and his school of thought waned and fell into disfavor in China. Jesuits also privileged ancient philosophy over the “Neoterics” (modern commentators) who, in any case, they understood as those responsible for the Song commentarial literature. Nevertheless, as early as Matteo Ricci's time in China, but more clearly during the 18th century, Wang Yangming's writings did come to the attention of some Jesuits, such as Julien-Placide Hervieu and Jean-Baptiste du Halde. They

<sup>148</sup> Hackmann 1927, pp. 366–368.

<sup>149</sup> Forke 1964, p. 380.

<sup>150</sup> Forke 1964, pp. 380–399.

<sup>151</sup> Williamson 1984, p. 70.

<sup>152</sup> Williamson 1984, p. 70.

were struck by the similarities between his ethics and practice of moral self-cultivation and their moral traditions and Catholic religious practices. Also, as the field of Sinology matured in the 19th century and contacts with China burgeoned, Wang Yangming began to show up in other types of scholarly literature, such as political histories and dictionaries composed by foreign-service officers or missionaries who developed an expertise in the Chinese language.

All of this changed in the early 20th century. Owing to the influence of his thought on Tokugawa and Meiji Japan, as well as the revival of interest in him in China from the late 19th century, Wang Yangming came to the attention of missionaries living in East Asia as well as academics following the East Asian and Chinese scene. Frederick Henke produced the first major translation of his work, a few scholars wrote articles about him, and he was included in the first major German and French surveys of the history of Chinese philosophy. No doubt, in addition to these critical historical factors, both the religious quality of his notion of *liangzhi* and philosophy more generally, as well as his seeming idealism, paved the way for the reception and interpretation of his thought at this time.

Although this work is largely neglected today, it does present the basic contours of Wang Yangming's life and thought, as well as issues of interpretation and comparison. Readers will learn of his compelling life story, his rejection of elements of orthodox Cheng–Zhu Neo-Confucianism, how he drew upon the thought of Mencius and Lu Jiuyuan, as well as Daoist and Buddhist thought, his foundational ideas concerning mind, *liangzhi*, and the unity of knowledge of action, and, lastly, how his thought might be approached from the perspective of Western philosophical traditions.

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## CHINESE ABSTRACT

### 認識王陽明——1600–1950 年間歐洲和北美的學術研究

自十八世紀甚至更早以來，明朝的儒家哲學家王陽明（1472–1529）一直是歐洲和北美的研究對象。但是西方有關王陽明的著作的豐富歷史被二十世紀六七十年代發表的諸多英文著作極大地掩蓋住了。儘管如此，這些早前的文獻仍開啟了一扇窗，讓我們看到更加廣闊的中西方之間思想碰撞歷史，並從特定角度讓我們更容易理解這一歷史，這個角度即是以中華帝國晚期最具影響力的士大夫之一的王陽明為例。本文旨在提供從十七世紀到一九五零年間在歐洲和北美的有關王陽明著作的歷史，既表明歷史環境是如何影響西方對王陽明接納和詮釋的，同時證明這些較早的記載所分享的真知灼見至今仍值得我們關注。

關鍵字: 王陽明、理學、漢學、明朝

## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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