

SCHOLARSHIP ON RUSSELL'S VISIT TO CHINA

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Bertrand Russell visited China from October 1920 to July 1921, where he lived in a courtyard house in Beijing with Dora Black, returning to Britain in August. Russell's invitation to lecture at Peking University had come from professors who were members of the New Culture Movement, a movement of students and intellectuals dedicated to modernizing China in the aftermath of the 1912 revolution that ended the Ching dynasty. Young Chinese had been educated at Western universities as part of the Boxer Indemnity forced on China in the aftermath of the invasion of China some years before. Among those "returned overseas" students were Hu Shi (Hu Shih), a philosopher who had studied with John Dewey at Columbia University.¹ Another such student was Zhao Yuanren (Yuan Ren Chao), who would serve as Russell's principal interpreter during the visit.

Russell's academic lectures consisted of a course titled "Problems of Philosophy", an introductory series loosely following *The Problems of Philosophy*, a course closely following *The Analysis of Mind*, which was already in press in 1921, and two lectures on mathematical logic of a projected four that were cut short by Russell's serious pneumonia that ended his lecturing in March of 1921. In addition to academic lecture courses, Russell delivered numerous lectures on education, communism and social issues while Dora Black lectured on the status of women and on the chapters of the book that they were to collaborate on upon returning from China, *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization*. Russell first lectured in English with Zhao interpreting into Chinese. Almost all were then published in a series of periodicals, both important newspapers and in specially designed periodicals.

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¹ I follow the recent practice of romanizing Chinese family names first, followed by given names, as in "Mao Zedong", even when a Chinese name is quite familiar in the West in the other order. Thus Wang Hao, the Harvard trained logician, is familiar to Anglophones as "Hao Wang".

have translated several essays and letters to the editor that accompanied the visit and debated the significance of Russell's philosophy for China. They have added interpretive essays of their own to address the issue of the significance for later academic philosophy and logic in China. Although the Communist Party of China (CPC), founded soon after Russell's departure in 1921, was opposed to Russell's political views, his theory of knowledge and logic continued to influence what are to this day the leading universities in China, Qinghua [Tsinghua] University and Peking University in Beijing. Wang Hao had studied with Lin Juelin at Qinghua and then later at Harvard with Willard Van Quine. An echo of Russell's visit to China can be heard in Wang's 1960 essay on computer-generated proofs of the theorems of *Principia Mathematica*. Other than the end of this long thread of influence, little is known in the West of Russell's influence in China, or indeed in China itself, after a number of Russell's followers were denounced in the 1950s and 1960s, and all "foreign" philosophical influence was replaced by the Maoist orthodoxy.

Recent developments in China have led to an increase of interest in Russell's lectures at their centenary. The philosophy lectures are still not translated into English, although there is a project to collect and translate authoritative versions of the Chinese reports of the lectures to join the collection of Zhao Yuanren's complete works. The centenary of Russell's visits was marked by two conferences in Beijing and a series of lectures at Peking University. From North America we have a thoroughly researched Harvard MA thesis by John Paisley, *Bertrand Russell and China during and after His Visit in 1920*. The Covid epidemic appears to have interfered with some other planned conferences on the visit. Paisley's thesis, an issue of the journal *Contemporary Chinese Thought*, and this collection by Vrhovski and Rošker are so far the most substantial records of the visit in English since the publication of *Collected Papers* 15.

A list of the contents of Vrhovski and Rošker will be an occasion to discuss how these reports supplement the process of making materials related to Russell's visit available to Russell scholars. Only the essay "Between Russell and Confucius" by Vera Schwarcz has been published before (in this journal).

(1) "Welcome Banquet for the Great Philosopher Russell", reports of the speeches of welcome to Russell at a banquet held on 13 October 1920 in Shanghai. In his response Russell announces that his goal is to support the new culture movement by assisting China to develop through education, but adopting only the best parts of European culture while maintaining the best of the traditional culture. One of his hosts, Zhu Jingzi, responds with the remark that Russell is "almost like a new Confucius" for the Chinese. Russell's response (p. 62) has not been previously available in English.

(2) "Welcome Speech for Russell at the Chinese Lecture Society" by Liang Qichao at a banquet to honour Russell and "Miss Black" to one of the organizations that were involved in the invitation and fund-raising for the visit. The

speaker stresses the importance of educational reform, including the adoption of a romanization scheme or *pinyin* to make education more widely available.

(3) “The Inaugural Meeting of the Russell Study Society”, 4 December 1920. Two discussion groups were organized at Peking University, one to operate in English and the other in Chinese, to have organized discussions of Russell’s philosophy. The records describe how Russell organized the seminars and invited scholars to attend.

(4) “Records from Sessions of the English Section of Russell Study Society”. This summary of three sessions of the Society, with quoted remarks by Russell, report on the process and questions raised. John Paisley cites the fall-off of attendees at this meeting as evidence that Russell’s technical philosophy did not raise nearly the same interest as the non-academic lectures on social and political philosophy. Russell’s place in Chinese political thinking, and then with British foreign policy in the 1920s, are the focus of Paisley’s thesis. Vrhovski and Rošker, on the other hand, focus on the thin stream of influence of Russell’s academic philosophy in Beijing at Peking and Qinghua universities.

Vrhovski and Rošker follow with the largest section of their collection, titled “Chinese Interpretations of Russell’s Philosophy”. Their interest is in the long tradition of influence of Russell’s visit on Chinese academic philosophy after his visit.

(5) “The Spirit of Russell’s Philosophy” is an essay by Zhao Yuanren published in the first issue of the Peking University periodical, *Luosu Yuekan* [*Russell Monthly*]. Zhao, had been appointed as a lecturer at Qinghua university upon his return from Harvard, where he had completed a thesis in philosophy on mathematical continuity. The essay introduces the characteristic features of Russell’s philosophy at this time, stressing the importance of his method of analysis and empiricism, logical atomism, and the use of Occam’s razor in the constructional part of his philosophy, explaining the example of the construction of the number 2 as the class of pairs, quoting Russell’s description of this as the “principle which does away with abstraction”.

The next two essays on Zhang Shenfu begin the project of tracing the influence of Russell in Chinese academic philosophy. Jan Vrhovski begins with:

(6) “Zhang Shenfu—China’s First Popularizer of Russell’s Philosophy and Mathematical Logic”. Zhang Shenfu with his colleague of Li Dazhao were among the founders of the CPC. Zhang Shengu worked in the library at Peking University, along with the young Mao Zedong, in 1918 and so was in Beijing for Russell’s visit. Zhang went on to teach at Qinghua between 1929 and 1936, when, after a falling out with Mao, he was retired to a position as librarian and removed from academia. In later years he made a series of interviews with the Western scholar Vera Schwarcz, described in the next essay:

(7) “Between Russell and Confucius: China’s Russell Expert Zhang Shenfu (Chang Sung-nian)”, by Schwarcz, is reprinted from this journal from 1991.

Schwarcz presents Zhang Shenfu as spending his life as a scholar searching for a synthesis of Russell's philosophy with traditional elements of Confucian thought.

The next essays include a contemporary essay on Russell by Zhang Dongsun of Qinghua University, and a retrospective essay by Jana Rošker on the influence of Russell again on a distinctively Chinese synthesis of his ideas:

(8) "Logicism of New Realism" was published before Russell's visit in 1917 by Zhang Dongsun, who later joined the CPC and served in the government until he was denounced and imprisoned during the Cultural Revolution before his death in 1973. Zhang's essay presents Russell as an advocate of the New Realism and places that philosophy in contrast with Pragmatism and Bergson. Zhong uses Russell's *Our Knowledge of the External World*, which had been translated into Chinese before Russell's visit, as the basis for a faithful exegesis of Russell's views about empiricism, logical form and logical atomism. Zhang, however identifies Russell's philosophy with the views of Holt and Spaulding's *New Realism* volume, which did not include a contribution by Russell. Zhang describes himself as advocating a position between Bergson and the neo-Kantian Rickert and, although presenting an accurate account of the new realism, in the end faults him for falling short of Rickert's position.

(9) "Russell's Inference and Zhang Dongsun's Compatibility—Two Models of Structural Perception". In this interpretive essay, Rošker identifies Zhang Dongsun's philosophy as a variant of the structuralism that has recently been found in Russell's philosophy of the 1920s.

Russell's influence in China is to this day secondary to that of John Dewey who was present in China for the years before and during Russell's visit. Hu Shi had written his PHD dissertation with Dewey, and went on to dominate the department of philosophy at Peking for a generation. Dewey appears to have encouraged Russell's invitation through two lectures on "Russell's Philosophy" and "Russell's Ethics and Political Philosophy" given in Peking in March of 1920. While praising his ethical views and moral psychology, Dewey is contemptuous of the pessimism and elitism that he finds in Russell's emphasis on the objective and not human-centric nature of Russell's metaphysics. He is defended against Dewey's criticisms in an essay:

(10) "My Expectations for Russell" by Li Zhenying appeared in October 1920 just as Russell arrived in China. He explicitly refers to Dewey's lectures and describes Russell as an unlikely aristocratic elitist given his political sympathies with the anarchist Emma Goldman, and his need to earn a living due to his place as a second-born son after his brother Frank.

The last two essays were published as Russell was leaving China:

(11) "Wishing Russell to Survive", anonymously published 29 March 1921 in *The Republican Daily News*, Shanghai, defends Russell against the charge that he put economic development for China ahead of the goal of socialism,

and includes a quotation from the “Science of Social Structure” lectures in which Russell argues that “communism” is the only way forward for China.

(12) “Russell’s Contribution to Us”, by Qu Shiyung, the editor of the fourth and final issue of *Russell Monthly*, summarizes Russell’s contributions to China through his personal example of the scholarly attitude and analytical method.

Russell’s involvement with China did not end with his departure in 1921. In addition to his publication of *The Problem of China* in 1922 and *The Prospects of Industrial Civilization* in collaboration with Dora Black in 1923, Russell contributed to the debate within Britain about relations with China and, in particular, the winding up of the “Boxer Indemnity” debts. This is beyond the scope of Vrhovski and Rošker, and for a collection of translations of Chinese materials and materials from Russell, including papers for the UK Foreign Office, one must consult Paisley.

Anglophone Russell scholars should be grateful to Vrhovski and Rošker for using this occasion to present works on China in the English language in a venue devoted to advancing scholarship in Slovenian. Their work, and that of Paisley, are available online without charge. Ken Blackwell, the editor of this journal when the Dewey lectures on Russell were published in 1973, wrote that “The translations read so well that we hope people of similar ability will be found to translate Russell’s Chinese lectures”. We repeat them here. This work has begun with Zhang Lianghua’s translation of the lectures on mathematical logic, and we only hope it will continue with the remainder of Russell’s Addresses and Lectures in China.

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