

## Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military

This is the first English translation of Lei Haizong's study of the Chinese army, reappraising Chinese civilisation from a military perspective. Born out of concern for China's military circumstances during the Second Sino-Japanese War, Lei traces the development of military culture from the ancient world to the 1930s. Completed during the second year of the war, Lei wrote in direct proximity to harrowing events that were taking place in China, attempting to lay out a more hopeful path which resonated greatly with its readership at the time. Avoiding traditional national narratives and employing a new system of periodisation that uses neither dynastic cycles nor Western ideas, Lei's study emphasises unique features of Chinese history whilst embracing the broader global context. Although today China has risen as a global military power, Lei's work stands as a powerful assessment of Chinese military history from the stance of a scholar writing during the Japanese occupation.

LEI HAIZONG (1902–62) was Professor of History at Tsinghua University and Director of World History at Nankai University.

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# Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military

Lei Haizong

With an Introduction by Xin Fan

*The State University of New York at Fredonia*

Translated by George Fleming



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## Introduction to the English Edition

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In the era of globalisation, cultural exchange between China and the West has been one-sided. As Chinese readers are devouring translated books on humanities and social sciences from the West ranging from classical works on moral philosophy to recent debates on artificial intelligence, their Western counterparts have yet had little access to even the most fundamental works written by Chinese scholars. To make up for this void, the Cambridge China Library Series is both a timely and a laudable effort in this cross-cultural enterprise.

Among the titles in this translation series, *Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military* is a modern classic of twentieth-century Chinese historiography. It contains a collection of scholarly articles and political essays written by historian Lei Haizong. Lei (1902–62) was a celebrated historian in China with an unusual family upbringing. His father served as a reverend in a county near Beijing that held a long Christian tradition. When Lei Haizong was eleven years old, his father was ordained by British missionary Charles Perry Scott (1847–1927), the first bishop in North China. In accordance, the church provided free primary and secondary education for his children. Excelling in his studies, Lei Haizong earned a Boxer Indemnity Scholarship in 1922 to study in the United States. At the University of Chicago, he studied with James Westfall Thompson (1869–1941), who was an established scholar of medieval and early modern Europe and later served as president of the American Historical Association in 1941. Lei wrote a PhD thesis on ‘The Political Ideas of Turgot’, a progressive thinker and statesman in eighteenth-century France (1727–81). Lei returned to China in 1927, taking up a teaching position at National Central University in Nanjing. He moved to Wuhan University in 1931 and taught there for a short period. In 1932, Lei joined his alma mater, Tsinghua University. From there, he eventually served as chair of the Department of History. After the Communist takeover, Lei decided to stay on the mainland despite an invitation to Taiwan. He was relocated from Tsinghua University in Beijing to Nankai University in Tianjin in the early 1950s. In the following Anti-Rightist campaign of 1957, he was politically persecuted. Although his rightist title was removed in 1961, he soon died of illness in 1962.

As a historian, Lei Haizong is known for his groundbreaking work in studying China within a wider world-historical context. He was also actively

engaged in scholarly politics in a time of national crisis during the Sino-Japanese War of Resistance (1937–45). *Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military* includes his scholarly articles and political essays written during this time. The first edition of this book was published by the Commercial Press in 1940, and since then it has remained an influential book among Chinese readers. This English translation is based on a revised edition in 2001 with the addition of two essays written by historian Wang Dunshu, Lei Haizong's student and a leading authority on Lei Haizong studies in China today.

Readers are encouraged to start with the two essays by Wang. The first one takes up the *nianbiao* genre in Chinese historiography, which offers an annotated chronicle of Lei Haizong's scholarly life. Lei Haizong was a private person, and he rarely mentioned some of his achievements in early life. Even worse, he had to destroy his diaries during the political campaigns. As such, historical records on Lei Haizong are meagre at best, and this biography is the most comprehensive one that I have seen so far. It is an outstanding piece of scholarly research on its own. The second essay is an overview of Lei Haizong's scholarly achievements and of the significance of *Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military*. Placing it within the Chinese historiographical tradition, Wang points out that Lei Haizong's scholarship stands out in the following four aspects: its interdisciplinary methods, its world-historical gaze, its patriotic passion and its creative energy.

Reading *Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military* in a Western context, readers might be surprised at the massive scale of Lei Haizong's historical narratives. In the first part, he offers an overview of five general aspects of traditional Chinese culture, including the rise and fall of militarism, the evolution of the family system, the evolution of state leadership, the impact of the absence of military culture, and Chinese cultural cycles, each of which might well call for multiple volumes of monographic research in today's professionalised and specialised discipline of China studies. Lei Haizong's writings are also intertwined with wartime politics. Moving into Part II, for instance, Lei praises the role of the Sino-Japanese War of Resistance in reshaping the Chinese cultural cycle. In the appendices, Lei further explores various approaches to studying ancient China within a world-historical context, from political institutions and musicology to cultural concepts and historical periodisation. As such, the essays included in the last section are indicative of Lei Haizong's interest in interdisciplinary methodology in historical studies.

One can appreciate Lei Haizong's extraordinary skills of historical synthesis even more when placing his work within the context of the development of modern Chinese historiography. Lei Haizong was a transitional figure in the professionalisation of historical studies in the Republican period in China (1912–45). While pursuing his PhD degree at the University of Chicago, he was not trained as a China historian. Instead, he completed a dissertation on European history, and was hired as a professor of Western history when he



returned to China in 1927. In the following years, he had to cover both Chinese history and world history in teaching while serving as chair of the Department of History at Tsinghua University. As a pioneer in world-historical teaching, Lei Haizong escaped the professional boundaries between ‘foreign’ and ‘national’ histories, and taught extensively from ancient and medieval world histories to the general surveys of Chinese history. In research, he also published on many diverse topics, including early Chinese history, Western classical antiquity, European medieval history, early modern European history, the history of Christianity in China, Chinese historiography, the history of nomadic peoples, terminology and periodisation in Chinese and world history, Buddhism, medieval European philosophy and international politics. In doing so, he developed a ‘macroscopic’ view of history, to borrow his student Ping-ti Ho’s word, to grasp some essential characteristics of Chinese culture through a world-historical gaze.

*Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military* is a remarkable work in Chinese historiography especially because of its unique perspective on Chinese history. In China the documentation of history has been traditionally centred on dynasties. In premodern times, the rising new dynasties often entrusted their court historians with the task of editing the official histories of the previous fallen ones. As a result, the twenty-four official histories framed within dynastic cycles became the foundation of traditional Chinese historiography. Entering the twentieth century, some Chinese historians, such as Liang Qichao (1873–1929), accepted the Western notion of the nation via Japanese translations and adopted it to replace dynastic history.<sup>1</sup> The formation of the Chinese nation and its modern transformation became central questions of nationalist history over the course of the twentieth century. By the 1950s, the Communist takeover changed the dynamics of Chinese historical studies. In collaboration with the Communist state, party historians introduced Karl Marx’s historical materialism from the Soviet Union. They divided Chinese history according to five rigid stages of historical development, including primitive, slavery, feudal, capitalist, and communist societies.

Lei Haizong offers a master narrative of Chinese history in *Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military* that is an alternative to these three dominant frameworks. As readers will see in this volume (especially Chapter 5, ‘The Two Cycles of Chinese Culture’), he criticised nationalist history for its Eurocentric bias. By the same token, he rejected historical materialism in the 1950s, too, despite political

<sup>1</sup> For example, the famous public intellectual Liang Qichao read about the notion of the nation through Japanese political thinker Katō Hiroyuki’s translation of Johann Kaspar Bluntschli’s *Allgemeines Staatsrecht* (1868). Philip C. Huang, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (Seattle: University of Washington University Press, 1972), 56–64; for more recent work on this issue, see Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885–1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 197–244, 297–317.

pressure from the party state. During the Hundred Flowers campaign of 1956 he was one of the most outspoken voices against adopting slavery as a common stage in world-historical periodisation. Holding fast to this belief, he received severe retribution from the party state in the following Anti-Rightist campaign. Writing about Lei's suffering, some public intellectuals in China today celebrate him as a liberal thinker who dared to challenge the authoritarian state despite political pressure. Be that as it may, Lei Haizong had already developed a strong belief that historians could only grasp the rhythm of Chinese history through understanding the evolution of Chinese culture in its entirety by the 1930s.

Lei Haizong divided the world into seven cultures/civilisations: Egyptian, Babylonian, Indian, Chinese, Graeco-Roman, Islamic and Western European. All these cultures shared five equivalent stages of world-historical development (see 'Part II Overview: Resistance against Japan and State Building'): the religious age, the philosophical age, the emergence of schools of thought, the deconstruction of philosophy and its replacement by formal academic institutions, and cultural disintegrations.

The significance of Lei Haizong's work has to be understood within the context of cultural exchange between China and the wider world, as this cultural-history approach reminds us of Lei's contemporary thinkers, such as the German historian Oswald Spengler (1880–1936). In his *Der Untergang des Abendlandes* (The Decline of the West (or the Occident)) published between 1918 and 1922, the then high-school teacher imagined culture as a superorganism and divided its lifespan into five stages. Drawing from his observations from world history, he predicted the inevitable downfall of Western civilisation.

Although torn apart by internal political upheavals and external threats of war, the Republican period witnessed a robust internalisation of historical studies in China. During this period, a great number of Chinese intellectuals either studied abroad or stayed acutely abreast of the development of foreign academic scholarship. Some estimate that, by 1931, close to 40 per cent of faculty members at Chinese universities had studied abroad. Historians were not an exception. As they became well informed with scholarly trends in the West, they quickly introduced popular books on world history from the West into China with the support of Chinese publishing houses, such as the Commercial Press's massive translation project of H.G. Wells's *The Outline of History* (George Newnes, 1919–20).

Yet Lei Haizong's reception of cultural history was a dialogue with rather than a simple borrowing of Spengler. The key difference between the two is Lei's belief in the agency of culture. Spengler held that every culture has its inevitable demise as it grows from maturity to decadence. Lei contradicted this idea by asserting that Chinese culture had already experienced two cycles: the first was what he called 'dynamic China' (Shang dynasty to Eastern Jin) until 383 CE; the second he called 'stagnant China' (Eastern Jin to Qing dynasty)

until 1912. He argued that the rise and fall of militarism caused the divide in Chinese history. In Lei's eyes, the ongoing Sino-Japanese War of Resistance was a historic moment for the rejuvenation of Chinese culture.

Lei Haizong's view on war and history became a source for the rise of Chinese academic nationalism in later years. For instance, in his famous exchange with Evelyn Rawski, historian Ping-ti Ho (aka He Bingdi, 1917–2012) claimed that his passion for Chinese culture was inspired by his beloved teacher Lei Haizong.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Lei himself was deeply involved with politics in the 1940s. His support of the Nationalist concentration of power and his affiliation with culturally conservative groups such as the Zhanguo Ce clique resulted in Communist propagandists labelling him a 'cultural fascist' and openly criticising him in wartime media. This might have been a factor contributing to the treatment of Lei Haizong in the Anti-Rightist campaign in 1957, but more research is needed regarding Lei Haizong's experiences after 1949.

Readers need to be aware that Lei Haizong's macroscopic view of history invited criticism from his fellow historians in China as well. As mainstream historians of the Republican period relied upon evidential learning or textual criticism in research, Lei's cultural morphology, to a certain degree, served as an antithesis to mainstream historical research of the time. Some contemporaries were sceptical of the lack of specialisation in his world-historical approach, including the respected Chen Yinke (aka Yinke, 1890–1969). He once ridiculed Lei before students, speaking loudly that he could not understand how one could teach the general history of ancient China, a topic so broad and general, in one course – this was a course that Lei taught regularly.<sup>3</sup> Others claimed that Lei's teaching style was not serious enough for a professional historian. But by and large Lei is remembered by his students as a caring teacher and a model scholar.

There has been renewed interest in Lei Haizong among historians today. Some questions have remained unanswered, such as why Lei decided to stay on the mainland after 1949 and how his experiences with Christianity influenced his view of history and Chinese culture. Yet all things considered, *Chinese Culture and the Chinese Military* is a significant work for contemporary readers wishing to understand the historiography and scholarly politics of wartime China, as well as the origins of academic nationalism in China today.

**Xin Fan**

<sup>2</sup> Ping-ti Ho, 'In Defense of Sinicization: A Rebuttal of Evelyn Rawski's "Reenvisioning the Qing"', *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 57, Number 1 (Feb. 1998), 150.

<sup>3</sup> He Bingdi, *Dushi yueshi bashinian* (Eighty Years of Studying History and Experiencing the World) (Guilin: Guangxi shifan daxue chubanshe), 115.

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## Preface

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The chapters comprising Part I of this book were published as essays at Tsinghua University during the last three years preceding the war. The latest of these, ‘Chinese Clans’, was published on 1 July 1937. One night a week later, I was startled out of my slumbers on the Tsinghua campus by the sound of artillery fire at the Marco Polo Bridge.

‘China’s Heads of State’ (originally ‘The Establishment of the Imperial System’) was published in the *Tsinghua Journal*. ‘China’s Military’ and ‘Chinese Clans’ (originally ‘China’s Clan System’), ‘Alternatives to Dynastic Succession’, ‘A-military Culture’, and ‘The Two Cycles of Chinese Culture’ (originally ‘The Break in History and the Periodisation of Chinese History’) were all published in Tsinghua University’s *Social Science* journal. With the exception of one or two revised sentences, this edition preserves the originals in their entirety.

In Part II, ‘The Place in History of the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression’, is a monograph originally published in the Hankou *Saodang Bao* on 13 February 1938. ‘State Building: Hope for a Third Cycle of Culture’, along with the overviews prefacing Parts I and II, were written specifically for this compiled work.

**Lei Haizong, December 1938, National  
Southwest Associated University, Kunming**

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