

**Local networks with global reach:  
Sichuanese “citizen-journalists” reporting from the Paris peace conference and  
the formation of public opinion**

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The connection between the negotiations leading to the Versailles Treaty and the mass demonstrations on May 4, 1919 in Beijing and throughout China over a subsequent period of a month is widely seen as foundational for modern China. As it transpired in late April in Paris that the Allies would not support China’s claim to Germany’s interests in Shandong, the news reached China and ignited a popular protest movement, inspired by nationalist outrage at the territorial loss, as well as resentment against the lack of legitimacy of the successive Chinese governments who had failed to prevent the loss, or even actively signed secret agreements with Japan, undermining China’s claims in the negotiation.<sup>1</sup> Subsequent developments further complicate the analysis, as they involved police repression, defense of academic freedom in the universities that served as a base for the movement, and mobilization of workers and merchants in other cities.<sup>2</sup> In any event, on June 10 the government was forced to back down and dismiss the three pro-Japanese politicians targeted by the students (the minister of Communications Cao Rulin 曹汝霖, the Chinese ambassador to Japan Zhang Zongxiang 章宗祥 and the chairman of the Bank of Communications Lu Zongyu 陸宗輿). While the Beiyang government gave the negotiating delegation contradictory instructions, the negotiators ultimately decided themselves not to sign the Versailles Treaty. As John Dewey, who had arrived to Shanghai on 30 April 1919, observed: “popular opinion has taken things into its own hands.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Harvard UP, 1960); Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> For example, Chen Tingxiang develops the argument that initial protests against the decisions in Paris were less intense than against the 21 demands, but that they escalated mainly because of government repression. “1920 nian qianhou liangci zheng guoquan yundong de yiyang xingtai ji xingcheng yuanyin” (Disparate Forms and Causes of the two national rights movements before and after 1920), *Jindaishi yanjiu*, 2005.2, 38-77.

<sup>3</sup> John Dewey, “Justice and Law in China,” in *Characters and Events* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1929): 1:251; quoted in Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement*, 168-169. Dewey made several similar comments: “while the [Republic of China’s] legislature is a perfect farce, public opinion, when it does express itself, as at the present time, has remarkable influence” (June 6), “You can’t imagine what it means here for China not to have

Building on Dewey's observation, the present essay attempts to take a closer look at the formation of public opinion, and its different dimensions: national, but also global and local. Most previous studies have tended to focus on either the national or the global dimension. The May Fourth movement was of course for a long time considered the foundational moment of modern Chinese nationalism and an inflection point in China's "century of humiliation."<sup>4</sup> More recently, the global turn has given rise to a historiographical narrative in which Woodrow Wilson's ideals of self-determination first ignited and then disappointed national sentiments around the world. In this view, events in China are connected to a series of nationalist movements in India, Korea, or Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> In both of these narratives, the unfulfilled promises of the new order are said to have paved the way for an embrace of communism by intellectual elites and broader groups within society. As has been noted elsewhere, these narratives tend to be colored by teleology or Eurocentric assumptions.<sup>6</sup> By shifting the lens to the question of public opinion formation, the present essay, by contrast, tries to connect and balance the global, national and local dimensions, as well as questioning the teleology that leads toward a growing embrace of Marxist anti-imperialism. It also builds on recent work on the history of communications to provide a more concrete understanding of how different spheres of public-opinion formation were able to connect with each other.

First, on the global level, the context of World War I and the subsequent "Wilsonian moment" of early 1919 were undoubtedly conducive to forming an "international public opinion" which combined the aspiration to a fairer international order and to the internal democratization of each of its constituent nation-states. Shakhur Rahav notes

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signed. The entire government has been for it—the President up to ten days before the signing said it was necessary. It was a victory for public opinion, and all set going by these little schoolboys and girls." (July 4) in *Letters from China and Japan* (New York: Dutton, 1920), <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/31043/31043-h/31043-h.htm>

<sup>4</sup> In a more recent version of this narrative, Tze-ki Hon argues that May Fourth marked a shift in the understanding of the nation-state in China from a "hierarchy in time" (a political ideal to be achieved through progress) to a "hierarchy in space" (gaining wealth and power by securing land and resources). Tze-ki Hon "Global Competition for Power and Wealth: The Chinese Views of the World before and after the Great War," in Tosh Minohara, Tze-ki Hon, and Evan Dawley, eds. *The Decade of the Great War. Japan and the Wider World in the 1910s* (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 504–520.

<sup>5</sup> Erez Manela, "Imagining Woodrow Wilson in Asia: Dreams of East-West Harmony and the Revolt against Empire in 1919," *American Historical Review* 111:5 (December 2006): 1327–1351; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-determination and the international origins of anticolonial nationalism* (Oxford: OUP, 2007); Tim Harper, "Victory! 1917-1919" in *Underground Asia: Global Revolutionaries and the Overthrow of Europe's Empires in the East*, Cambridge: Harvard Belknap, 2021: 317-361.

<sup>6</sup> Tosh Minohara and Evan Dawley point out that Wilson was not the architect of the protest movements of 1919 in China and Korea, much less of Japan's own challenges to the world system. Tosh Minohara and Evan Dawley, "Introduction: 1919, East Asia and the Dawning of a New Era," in Minohara and Dawley, eds., *Beyond Versailles. The 1919 Moment and a New Order in East Asia* (Lanham: Lexington, 2020): 1-20.

that that the peace negotiations, with their worldwide real-time reporting, created an alternative global imaginary challenging modern mass society and advocating utopian communities, often closely connected to local groups.<sup>7</sup> Wang Guangqi 王光祈, the founder of the Young China Association, wrote in December 1918 to deplore the unjustifiable losses of the war, welcome the Russian and German Revolutions and the idea of an “international society” (*guoji shehui* 國際社會), but also to express hope for a different type of new order:

I support the creation of an international society based on autonomous groups of common people...I advocate overcoming national and racial boundaries, sweeping aside the authority of those capitalists, warlords, and aristocrats, a view which has many fundamental differences with the International League currently under discussion. The international society I mean would be a network of local autonomous groups. ... Now let's talk about this International Peace Conference organized by the myriad evil governments. ... The type of International League advocated by the American President and many other countries appears as quite undesirable. ... If everyone continues with the old and backward routine, this planet will truly become uninhabitable! The civilization of this twentieth century will truly become impossible to create! The dead of this great war will have died in vain! Not only will humankind refuse to progress, it will surely become extinct!<sup>8</sup>

Wang's intervention demonstrates that, even before the beginning of the peace negotiations, some Chinese intellectuals—even among those who like Wang Guangqi never became Marxists—were not in the throes of the “Wilsonian moment” but already critical of the new “international order,” and were prepared to take its creation into their own hands, by promoting connections between grassroots groups.

Second, within China, there was a shared hope that the dawn of a new era would abolish secret diplomatic protocols, and that important decisions would not be taken by an un-elected government without any form of democratic control.<sup>9</sup> This aspiration was shaped by two dynamics: the decisive growth of a modern press, and early stages of an embryonic civil society, often based on networks of hometown ties.<sup>10</sup> Newspapers and

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<sup>7</sup> Shakhar Rahav, “How Shall We Live?: Chinese Communal Experiments after the Great War in Global Context,” *Journal of World History* vol. 27, no. 3, 521-548 (September 2016): 546.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Guangqi, “Guoji shehui zhi gaizao” (The Creation of an international society), *Meizhou Pinglun* no. 1, 22 December 1918; reprinted in *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshi ziliao jianbian*, volume 1 ed. Zhu Weizheng, (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Renmin, 1982): 445-447. Wang provides a list of a dozen existing grassroots international groups, like the Society for the Abolition of Slavery.

<sup>9</sup> See Erez Manela, “Asia in the Global 1919. Reimagining Territory, Identity and Solidarity,” *Journal of Asian Studies* vol. 78 no. 2 (May 2019): 409-416. Paul Reinsch, the American Minister to China, also described the high expectations in China in American leadership and Wilson's principles. *An American Diplomat in China*, (London: Allen and Unwin, 1922): 361.

<sup>10</sup> For a related argument, see Anne Chao, “The Local in the Global: The Strength of Anhui Ties in Chen Duxiu's Early Social Networks, 1901–1925” (*Twentieth-Century China*, vol. 42 no. 2, 2017): 113-137.

civil society groups played a central role in transmitting news from Paris to China in late April 1919: they mobilized students and other groups in protest in Beijing, Shanghai and other cities. While the importance of elite texts like Liang Qichao's 梁啟超 warning telegram of 24 April is well recognized, there were also less well-known, more local groups active in both Paris and China. A handful of "citizen journalists"—writers and students not permanently employed by any of the established newspapers in China but mobilized by political concerns—set up the Paris News Service (Bali tongxinshe 巴黎通信社) in early 1919. This makeshift organization connected to the Young China Association (Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui 少年中國學會) and rooted in Sichuanese hometown networks, was the first press agency established by Chinese journalists in Europe. It too played a role in transmitting information and constructing public opinion in China, including on a more local level in Sichuan.

By retracing the details of how the news of the Versailles negotiations reached China, this essay attempts to highlight the role of both the modern press and traditional hometown networks. In doing so, it seeks to qualify the importance of both the "moment" of 1919 and its "global" dimension, which was embedded not only in national trends, but also in local networks. More generally it tries to reassess the role of the global events in World War I and the subsequent Paris peace conference in provoking a turn within China toward nationalism and the formation of a nation-wide public opinion.

### **Public opinion and the Paris Peace Conference**

The tensions, controversies and diplomatic intricacies of the Paris Peace Conference have been studied in great detail, but it is worth highlighting once again that the conference generated unprecedented public scrutiny. While it was to some extent modelled on the Congress of Vienna that took place a century earlier, its participants were no longer autocratic monarchies, but for the most part democratic governments accountable to voters back home and subject to close monitoring by the press and public opinion on both national and international levels.<sup>11</sup> Governments were also increasingly able and willing to use leaks or targeted releases of information to influence public

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<sup>11</sup> Margaret MacMillan. *Paris 1919. Six Months that Changed the World* (New York: Random House, 2001): xxx. Naoko Shimazu calls it a summit of "elected representatives of the newly emerging liberal democratic world." See "A Cultural History of Diplomacy: Reassessing the Japanese 'Performance' at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919," in Urs Matthias Zachmann, ed., *After Versailles: Asian Perspectives on the Paris Peace Conference and the Interwar Order, 1919-1933* (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 2017), 101-123: 105-106.

opinion and use it as a bargaining chip.<sup>12</sup> In a context where newsreels were continuously being sent out around the world, “courting international public opinion was a *sine qua non* of peace conference diplomacy,”<sup>13</sup> indeed in some ways, the peace conference became a kind of performance in public diplomacy for the benefit of both domestic and international audiences.

With much difficulty (and only after sending over 100,000 laborers to support the war effort in Europe<sup>14</sup>), China had succeeded in obtaining the Allies’ consent to enter the war, and in passing the measure through the divided Chinese parliament in August 1917,<sup>15</sup> and 15 months later celebrated the Armistice with a 3-day holiday, a victory parade joined by 60,000 people in Beijing and the dismantling of the von Ketteler memorial (a *pailou* 牌樓 arch in Beijing commemorating China’s defeat in the Boxer uprising).<sup>16</sup> In thrall to Wilsonian idealism, China sent a high-level delegation to Paris, led by the Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang 陸徵祥 (Lou Tseng Tsiang),<sup>17</sup> and including prominent figures like Wellington Koo (Gu Weijun 顧維鈞, China’s ambassador to the USA, whom Wilson invited to travel to France on his own boat), as well as representatives of the Southern (Canton) government dominated by the Nationalist Party (KMT) like C.T. (Thomas) Wang (Wang Zhengting 王正廷), a Columbia Law graduate. They settled in the Hôtel Lutétia, close to the Chinese embassy on rue de Babylone and the Quai d’Orsay where negotiations took place (the American delegation occupied the Hôtel Crillon, while the Japanese plenipotentiaries stayed in the Hôtel Meurice).<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Already at the time of the Twenty-One Demands in 1915, the young Chinese diplomat Wellington Koo had leaked the Japanese demands to the American media. See Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005): 72.

<sup>13</sup> Naoko Shimazu, “A Cultural History of Diplomacy,” 109

<sup>14</sup> Around 135,000 according to Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 114-154.

<sup>15</sup> It is sometimes forgotten that the split in Parliament and the establishment of the dissident “southern” government in August-September 1917 by Sun Yat-sen and members of the first assembly was a direct consequence of the legislative chaos triggered by president Li Yuanhong’s insistence that Parliament approve the declaration of war. Sun Yat-sen at this time opposed entering the war, as he feared it would strengthen Premier Duan Qirui. Duan in turn needed Japanese loans to continue fighting the Southern government which led him to recognize Japan’s claims. See Xu Guoqi, “The War Within”, in *China and the Great War*, 203-244.

<sup>16</sup> Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 245.

<sup>17</sup> The most comprehensive discussion of Lu’s career (culminating in a disastrous speech given as prime minister in which he lectured the Senators on the immorality of politics) is by David Strand: “Losing a Speech,” *An Unfinished Republic. Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China*. Berkeley: UC Press, 2011, p. 186-235.

<sup>18</sup> Various members of the Chinese delegation also engaged in a form of “soft power” cultural diplomacy by promising funding for Chinese studies in France. See Ge Fuping and Pierre-Etienne Will, “Paul Pelliot et l’Institut des Hautes Études chinoises (1919-1945),” in Jean-Pierre Drège and Michel Zink, eds., *Paul Pelliot: de l’histoire à la légende*, Paris, Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres, 2013, p. 271-312.

China's most pressing demand at the conference was to recover the German interests in Shandong that had been taken over by Japan in late 1914, just weeks after entering the war. The issue was first discussed on 27-28 January 1919, when Wellington Koo made an impassioned plea to remove the "dagger pointed at the heart of China," then again from April 22, by which time a series of secret agreements acknowledging Japan's claims in Shandong, signed by the Allies as well as the Beiyang government, had come to light. After a slight concession by Japan (renouncing military occupation and giving an unwritten promise to hand political control back to China at a later date, in exchange for broad economic rights in Shandong), the Allies, needing Japanese support for the League of Nations despite rejecting the racial equality clause Japan had proposed, accepted Japan's demands on Shandong on April 26. This position was officially communicated on April 30 and the treaty text was sent to the printers on May 4.<sup>19</sup>

China's official delegation was accompanied by a number of prominent intellectuals who played a role in alerting domestic public opinion to the situation in Paris. After news of the agreement leaked out, one of them, Wang Jingwei 汪精衛, gave a fiery speech in English on April 29 to an assembly of Chinese students who had rented a hall on rue Danton.<sup>20</sup> The famous journalist Liang Qichao, affiliated with the Progressive Party (Jinbudang 進步黨), was also in Paris as an independent observer and adviser to the Chinese delegation (some suspicion of Liang was expressed among students because he had been involved in negotiating the Nishihara loans with Duan Qirui 段祺瑞).<sup>21</sup> Since the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95, a practice had developed in China of influential individuals or citizen groups drafting "public telegrams" (*gongdian* 公電), which were printed in newspapers.<sup>22</sup> On April 24, Liang sent such a telegram to the Citizens' Diplomatic Association (Guomin waijiao xiehui 國民外交協會) in Peking, describing the danger that the Allies would not support the Chinese claims and calling on citizens to show their resolve in opposing the treaty. Lin Changmin 林長民, the head of the

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<sup>19</sup> The Chinese delegation was officially informed on April 30<sup>th</sup> (Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 338) and minister Lu cabled back on May 3 (Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 255). The American reaction to Wilson's "betrayal" was also negative, with the resignation of his advisor Williams and ambassador to China Paul Reinsch. It was also a question later raised in the US Senate, during the ill-fated ratification procedure.

<sup>20</sup> Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919*, 340.

<sup>21</sup> Others in attendance included Li Shizeng, Ye Gongchuo, Chen Youren. See: Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, p. 250.

<sup>22</sup> This new form of political participation reached its peak in the constitutionalist movement of the last years of the Qing dynasty. Yongming Zhou, *Historicizing Online Politics: Telegraphy, the Internet, and Political Participation in China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2006): 120.

association (a former minister of justice under Duan Qirui and head of the Progressive Party<sup>23</sup>), quoted Liang in an article for the Beijing *Chenbao*, published on May 2 under the title “Diplomatic alarm: a call to the nation,” pointing out: “Our government and our envoys do not represent the views of the entire nation” (我政府我專史非代表我舉國人民之意見).<sup>24</sup> Lin’s article was followed by the text of two telegrams to the Four Powers and to the Chinese negotiators, calling to “rely on worldwide public opinion” (全世界上人民之公論) to find an acceptable solution.<sup>25</sup> On the following day, the *Chenbao* stressed the importance of public opinion.<sup>26</sup> Liang’s cable was quoted in full in the *Shenbao* on May 4;<sup>27</sup> he later also wrote op-eds for Western publications describing China’s “weakness and her belief in international justice”<sup>28</sup> and calling on the Chinese to “depend upon ourselves for our own salvation.”<sup>29</sup> The involvement of the unofficial Diplomatic Association (one of many similar civil society organizations that mobilized in the course of the movement) and the modern press provides an indication of the mechanisms of public opinion formation.<sup>30</sup> On May 5, a gathering in Paris convened by the Chinese Society for International Peace and the French Ligue des Droits de l’Homme protested the decision; American speakers were heckled.<sup>31</sup> In this manner, public opinion became part of the diplomatic equation: when Lu Zhengxiang cabled Peking on May 14, he cited public opinion and recommended that China should not sign the treaty.<sup>32</sup>

### **Sichuan Networks in the New Culture Movement**

Broader networks of students, workers, and other observers of the Peace conference who were present in Paris were also instrumental in the formation of Chinese public

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<sup>23</sup> Lin’s daughter, the poet Lin Huimin, later married Liang’s son, the architect Liang Sicheng.

<sup>24</sup> Lin Changmin, “Waijiao jingbao jinggao guomin” (Diplomatic Alarm to Alert the Nation), *Chenbao*, 2 May 1919, 2.

<sup>25</sup> “Guomin waijiao zhi fenqi” (The Uprising of Citizen Diplomacy), *Chenbao*, 2 May 1919, 2.

<sup>26</sup> “Yulun dui Shandong wenti zhi fenkai” (The Indignation of Public Opinion regarding the issue of Shandong), *Chenbao*, 3 May 1919, 2.

<sup>27</sup> “Qingdao wenti shibai jinghao” (Alarming news of failure on the Qingdao question), *Shenbao*, 4 May 1919, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Liang Qichao, “China and the Shantung Settlement, a Tragic Disappointment,” *Manchester Guardian*, 16 June 1919, cited in Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 190 (the clipping is preserved in the Hornbeck papers).

<sup>29</sup> Liang Qichao, “Causes of China’s Defeat at the Peace Conference,” *Millard’s Review*, vol. 9, no. 7 (19 July 1919): 267-268. Quoted in Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 273.

<sup>30</sup> Chow Tse-Tsung notes that from February 7 to April 10, the Chinese delegation received 86 telegrams from Chinese groups all over the world in protest against Japan’s case, as well as 32 commercial and industrial organizations and labor unions, Shandong provincial assembly, etc. *The May Fourth Movement*, 90. Xu Guoqi also points out that the new interest in foreign policy that emerged during the war was made possible by the rise of a new elite educated in modern schools. *China and the Great War*: 70.

<sup>31</sup> Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 265.

opinion. Chinese anarchist groups had been active in Paris since the early years of the century: Li Shizeng 李石曾 (1881-1973), who first came to Paris in 1902 as the son of a Qing minister, founded the Paris group of Chinese anarchists in 1906 and its journal *New Century* (*Xin Shiji* 新世紀) in 1906.<sup>33</sup> Li established the Frugal Study Society (Jianxuehui 儉學會) in 1912 in Montargis; it was the earliest incarnation of the work-study movement, which brought several thousand Chinese men and women to France as student-workers until 1927. Among the three preparatory schools for the program established in China, one was in Chengdu (the other two were in Beijing and Shanghai) and Sichuanese networks were well represented.<sup>34</sup> Their presence was reinforced during the war, when French military recruiters were actively hiring in Southwest China for the Chinese Labor Corps. Just as the Peace conference began, the work-study movement, which had been officially launched in 1915 but interrupted by the war, was being restarted. The first ship sailed from Shanghai for Marseille on 17 March 1919, followed by 20 further departures in 1919.<sup>35</sup> In this movement too, many students were from the poorer Southwestern provinces of Sichuan and Hunan (whereas Chinese students in the US were mainly from the richer coastal provinces of Jiangsu, Zhejiang and Guangdong), and tended to study law and humanities (whereas students in Germany studied science).<sup>36</sup> Therefore, in 1919, there was already a distinct Chinese public in Paris active in opposing the demands on Shandong. Later, Zhao Shiyan 趙世炎, another Sichuanese member of the Young China Association who arrived to Paris in 1920, was instrumental in establishing the European branch of the CCP in May 1922.

Anarchists were particularly influent due to their long presence in France and their connection with the work-study movement. For example, China's "first woman lawyer" Tcheng Yu-hsiu (Zheng Yuxiu 鄭毓秀, also known as Soumé 蘇梅 Tcheng), who after meeting Li Shizeng had enrolled in the work-study program in 1912, taken part in

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<sup>33</sup> See Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). Li Shizeng was also a scientist and promoter of soy products. In Republican times he taught at PKU, became director of the Palace Museum in 1924, an influential KMT elder, and founder of Labor University in Shanghai. He was mostly overseas between 1932 and 1954, when he moved to Taiwan where he stayed until his death.

<sup>34</sup> Marilyn Levine, *The Found Generation. Chinese Communists in Europe During the Twenties* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993): 24-32. Chapter 1 provides a full presentation of the work-study movement. See also the table of political affiliation as correlated to regional origins among students of the Sino-French institute in Marilyn Levine, "Chinese politics in France during the 1920s," in Jean-Louis Bouilly, ed., *Ouvrages en langue chinoise de l'Institut franco-chinois de Lyon* (Lyon, Bibliothèque municipale, 1995): xxxiv.

<sup>35</sup> Nora Wang, *Emigration et politique: les étudiants-ouvriers chinois en France : (1919-1925)* (Paris: Les Indes savantes, 2002): 113.

<sup>36</sup> M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 32.



anarchist activities in China, and come to Paris in 1914, was attached to the official delegation.<sup>37</sup> In her memoirs, Tcheng Yu-hsiu described her own role as both official and unofficial: “to aid the delegate from the South, Dr C.T. Wang, in carrying out the work of the people’s diplomacy, but also to keep in close contact with the Peking representatives. Unofficially, I had two other jobs: to represent the women of China, and to act for the Chinese press in obtaining and distributing information.”<sup>38</sup> Tcheng accordingly acted as the informal press officer of the Chinese delegation, giving interviews to the French press to explain the Chinese position, though she regretfully notes the difficulty in making her message heard.

In the aftermath of the 1911 Revolution, Sichuan had developed a vibrant press and publication culture closely connected to the world of politics and local intellectuals. The events of 1911 had unfolded in a dramatic manner in Chengdu, where large-scale demonstrations took place as part of the Railroad Protection Movement throughout the spring and summer of 1911, violently repressed by the imperial governor in September.<sup>39</sup> In the early years of the republic, modern journalists like Li Jieren 李劫人, print entrepreneurs like Fan Kongzhou 樊孔周, and educators like Lu Zuofu 盧作孚 (later a Young China member) established a series of influential newspapers: *The Sichuan People* (*Sichuan Qunbao* 四川群報) in 1915, followed by *Sichuan* (*Chuanbao* 川報) in 1918, were emblematic forums of public discussion.<sup>40</sup> The local press was therefore well prepared to play a central role in the events of May 1919.

Sichuanese networks were active among the civic associations that formed throughout China before and after the May Fourth protests. In this respect, the importance of native-place networks in the New Culture movement is still underestimated, although certain studies have long underscored that, despite “the

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<sup>37</sup> Gotelind Müller, “Versailles and the fate of Chinese internationalism: reassessing the anarchist case,” in Zachmann, *Asia after Versailles*, 197-211: 201; Tcheng Yu-hsiu, *My revolutionary years: the autobiography of Madame Wei Tao-ming* (New York: Scribner, 1943). She describes a mass meeting held in the amphitheatre of the Sorbonne in November 1917 to celebrate China’s entering the war, in presence of the Minister of War Paul Painlevé (108). She later received a doctorate in law from the Sorbonne in 1924 with a thesis on “The New Chinese Draft Constitution” (139) and practiced law in Shanghai. She and her husband emigrated to Brazil in 1948, and later to the US. See also Geneviève Barman and Nicole Dulioust, “Un groupe oublié : les étudiantes-ouvrières chinoises en France,” *Études chinoises*, vol. 6, n°2 (1987), pp. 9-46.

<sup>38</sup> Tcheng Yu-hsiu, *My revolutionary years*, 114.

<sup>39</sup> The Railroad Protection Movement was directed against the planned nationalization by the Qing Court of a railway line held by Sichuan shareholders, with a view to selling it to foreign interests. See Zheng Xiaowei, *The Politics of Rights and the 1911 Revolution in China* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2018).

<sup>40</sup> Sebastian Veg, “Creating Public Opinion, Advancing Knowledge, Engaging in Politics: The Local Public Sphere in Chengdu, 1898-1921,” *The China Quarterly* 246 (2021): 331-353.

presuppositions about the withering of particularistic and traditionalistic ties we have imposed on our understanding of this period, contemporaries did not view native-place ties as an obstacle to the strengthening of China as a modern nation.”<sup>41</sup> The Paris News Service grew out of one of these groups, the Young China Association, which had been informally convened in Peking on 30 June 1918 by Wang Guangqi, Zeng Qi 曾琦, Chen Yu 陳滄, Lei Baojing 雷寶菁, Zhang Shangling 張尚齡, and Zhou Taixuan 周太玄 (Li Dazhao 李大釗 was invited to approve the charter and sign as a founding member although he was not physically present).<sup>42</sup> All of the founding members in attendance were Sichuanese (Li Dazhao was not).<sup>43</sup> Three of them (Wang Guangqi, Zeng Qi, Zhou Taixuan) had been classmates in the same cohort in the same high school in Chengdu, the Sichuan Gaodeng xuetang fenshe zhongxuetang, where Zeng Qi and Wang Guangqi had reportedly set up a poetry club.<sup>44</sup> Chengdu member Li Jieren was also an alumnus, along with Guo Moruo (1892-1978). Zeng Qi, Zuo Shunsheng 左舜生, and Li Huang 李璜, who were all from Chengdu, had also been classmates at Aurora University in Shanghai. Several others were returnees from Japan (Li Dazhao became part of the group at Waseda), who had left Tokyo in 1918 as part of the student protests against Japanese encroachment in China. Like other important place-based May Fourth groups, Young

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<sup>41</sup> Bryna Goodman, “New Culture, Old Habits. Native-place organization and the May Fourth movement,” in Frederic Wakeman Jr and Wen-hsin Yeh, eds. *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley, IEAS, 1992), 76-107: 79-80. See also Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s discussion of the role played by a women’s volleyball association from Canton at Fudan University in the Shanghai protests. *Student Protests in Twentieth Century China*, 142. On the role of *huiguan*, see also Richard Belsky, *Localities at the Center: Native-place, Space and Power in Late Imperial Beijing* (Cambridge: Harvard CEAS, 2005).

<sup>42</sup> Wang Guangqi, “Benhui faqi zhi zhiqu jiqi jingguo qingxing” (The objectives of establishing this association and the circumstances it went through), *Wusi shiqi de shetuan* (Associations in the May Fourth Era), Beijing: Sanlian, 1979, vol.I, 219. On Shaonian Zhongguo, see also Shakhar Rahav, *The Rise of Political Intellectuals in Modern China: May Fourth Societies and the Roots of Mass-Party Politics* (Oxford: OUP, 2015); Choh Kwong-huen, *A Study of the Young China Society* (Hong Kong: HKU MA Thesis, 1997); Ch’en Cheng-mao, *Lixiang yu xianshi de chongtu. Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui shi* (A conflict between ideal and reality: history of the Young China Association) (Taipei: Hsiu Wei, 2010).

<sup>43</sup> Out of 42 founding members, 27 were Sichuanese. Qin Xianci, “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui shimoji” (The complete story of the Young China Association), *Zhuanji wenxue*, vol. 35, no.1 (1979): 17. Li Huang highlights the local flavor of the early meetings at Chen Yusheng’s home: “Yusheng was a typical Sichuanese, fond of eating, fond of guests, indulging in high-flown talk. Thus, each week, prepared food would be left to eat. After we discussed association business, we members would congregate and eat, casually talking, becoming very well acquainted with each other.” Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu*, quoted in M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 46. Zhao Shiyan also stayed in a Sichuan hometown organization in Beijing when he contributed to setting up the Association (M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 74).

<sup>44</sup> Zhou Taixuan, “Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi” (Remembering how I took part in launching the Young China Association), in *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, vol. I, 537; as he notes, among later members of the society, many others were also from the same high school: Li Jieren, Wei Siluan, Hu Zhu, Zhao Shijiong, Zheng Shanglian. It is also known as Stone Chamber High School (Shishi Zhongxue 石室中學), which traced its history back to an academy established in Han times and is still extant today. The poetry club is mentioned in Xu Youchun, ed., *Minguo renwu dacidian* (Shijiazhuang, Hebei Renmin, 1991): 1191.

China was at its core a hometown network.<sup>45</sup> Finally, out of the seven founders, six were confirmed “first-rate journalists” who had already established their own newspapers or agencies.<sup>46</sup>

Young China was ideologically eclectic. Around 1918, Wang Guangqi notes, some members advocated “Anglo-American democracy,” others favored “Russian socialism” and others yet proposed “anarchism” as the most fitting ideology for the twentieth century, but this diversity was part of the youthful, progressive and creative spirit of the association.<sup>47</sup> The youth theme was inspired by Young Italy and Young Germany movements although Wang Guangqi stressed that Young China should be a movement “for the twentieth century.”<sup>48</sup> Youth was connected to the belief in fostering education and academic research as a basis for reforming society. Its aims were to be accomplished by publishing books and journals, organizing lectures and scholarly conferences, preparing materials for the discussion of social problems and setting up a network of friendly societies. Its four “tenets” were struggle, practice, tenacity and frugality (fendou 奮鬥, shijian 實踐, jianren 堅韌, jianpu 儉樸).<sup>49</sup>

Subsequently, the Young China Association was formally established on 1 July 1919, impelled by the May Fourth movement. Its bilingual mission statement proclaimed:

「本學會宗旨——本科學的精神，為社會的活動，以創造“少年中國”」  
Our Association dedicates itself to Social Services under the guidance of the Scientific Spirit, in order to realize our ideal of Creating a Young China.<sup>50</sup>

The Young China Association was in many ways the emblematic organization of the idealistic early days of the new culture movement, advocating a cultural revolution in Chinese society by embracing new lifestyles: mutual support to replace the family system, and new links between intellectuals and workers.<sup>51</sup> Self-cultivation and personal reformation were central to its project, as was the belief in youth, as expressed in a

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<sup>45</sup> This is also pointed out by Shakhar Rahav, *The Rise of Political Intellectuals*, 109-110.

<sup>46</sup> Qin Xianci, “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui shimoji,” 21.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Guangqi, “Benhui faqi zhi zhiqu jiqi jingguo qingxing,” 220. The official version presents it as a “United Front” of Marxists, patriotic petit bourgeois intellectuals and reactionary bourgeois intellectuals (statists). “Preface” to *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, p. ii.

<sup>48</sup> Wang Guangqi, “Benhui faqi zhi zhiqu jiai jingguo qingxing,” 219. Qin Xianci mentions Giuseppe Mazzini’s Young Italy as a model in “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui shimoji,” 14.

<sup>49</sup> “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui guiyue” (Regulations of the Young China Association), in *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, I, 225.

<sup>50</sup> *Shaonian Zhongguo* 1:1 (15 July 1919), back cover.

<sup>51</sup> See Wang Guangqi, “Shaonian Zhongguo zhi chuangzao” (The establishment of the Young China Association), *Shaonian Zhongguo* vol. 1, no. 2 (19 August 1919) and the discussion in M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 45. Levine particularly highlights the generational connection between all members, expressed in the recurrent term “wubei” (48).

poem written by Wang Guangqi aboard a boat to Europe: “Only we youth have the purity to save the nation.”<sup>52</sup> The notion of “purity” (*chunjie* 純潔) was understood to refer both to its non-partisan and not-for-profit character. Freedom to embrace different “isms” or doctrines was one of its foundational tenets. One of Young China’s beliefs was in not imposing ready-made solutions from above: “Previously, most reformers have tried to take action from the top downward; our generation will work from the bottom upward, in order to achieve happiness for the greatest number.”<sup>53</sup> For Wang Guangqi, China’s youth had the ability to become the vanguard of the new century: “China’s youth is the creator of the world’s new culture, the reformer of China’s old society. It is only because of the thought tide among China’s youth that the Young China Association appeared.”<sup>54</sup> Zhou Taixuan later described it as being united by three shared feelings: distress at the collapse of Chinese politics and the decline of China, lack of trust in the older generation’s ability to save the nation, and skepticism that the West could offer a way out of the predicament.<sup>55</sup>

Similar skepticism about the west appears in a letter dated 20 May 1919, in which Wang Guangqi describes the United States as a country governed by money-worship and money-lords just as China is governed by war-lords. The letter concludes with Wang’s preference for what he calls a “social democracy” based on equality of condition rather than a “political democracy” based on institutions, like the US, while at the same time criticizing Leninist “state socialism” as too restrictive of people’s freedoms.<sup>56</sup> Young China and its publications played an important role in the first years after May Fourth in bringing together a broad spectrum of political agendas. Although it was disbanded over political conflicts in 1925, many of its members continued to follow their own political pathways, leading some to the CCP and others to the Third Force parties in the 1930s.

Five members of Young China were directly involved in reporting on the Paris peace conference; they serve as the main focus of the discussion below. They were all born

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<sup>52</sup> Wang Guangqi, “Zi Yinduyang zhong shangyan” (A letter from the midst of the Indian Ocean, 1920), in *Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui Zhounian Jiniance* (Shanghai: Yadong Tushuguan, 1920): 56-61. The letter includes a 5-stanza poem, with the last line of each stanza beginning with “Only our youth” (57-58). Levine quotes these lines, *The Found Generation*, 203.

<sup>53</sup> “1919 nian 1 yue 23 ri Shanghai huiyuan zai Wusong Tongji Xuexiao kaihui jilue” (Minutes of the meeting of Shanghai members on 23 January 1919 at Tongji College in Wusong), *Wusi shiqi de Shetuan*, I, 287.

<sup>54</sup> Wang Guangqi, “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui zhi jingshen jiqi jinxing jihua” (The spirit of the Young China Association and its plans for development), 15 December 1919, *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, I, p. 317.

<sup>55</sup> Zhou Taixuan, “Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi,” 539.

<sup>56</sup> “Wang Guangqi zhi Junzuo” (From Wang Guangqi to Junzuo [Yi Jiayue]), 20 May 1919, *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, I, 293-294.

between 1891 and 1895 in Sichuan, studied first in Chengdu and then abroad, and are connected by a shared generational experience. Li Jieren 李劫人 (1891-1962), a writer, journalist and translator of French literature born in Chengdu, was the oldest among them. He took part in the 1911 Railway Protection movement<sup>57</sup> and began writing vernacular fiction as early as 1912 (well before it was advocated by the new culture activists in 1917). From 1915 he edited *The Sichuan People* and its influential cultural supplement *Yuxianlu* 娛閒錄; after it was closed down in June 1918, Li established *Sichuan* as chief editor and publisher (August 1918). Most Chengdu papers at the time were cash-strapped, and therefore did not give much place to news from outside Sichuan. Li Jieren took the opposite view and signed on three of his close colleagues as correspondents, with Zhou Taixuan reporting from Shanghai, Wang Guangqi from Beijing and Zeng Qi from Japan. *Sichuan* ran stories from outside the province almost every day and Li set up a special fund to cover the cable costs so journalists would not excessively shorten their stories. Later he studied in France (1919-24), lectured at Sichuan University in Chengdu, ran a restaurant, and wrote a momentous trilogy of historical novels about the 1911 Revolution.<sup>58</sup>

The main force behind the Young China Association was Wang Guangqi 王光祈 (1892-1936), born in Wenjiang county just outside Chengdu, the grandson of a famous local poet named Wang Zeshan 王澤山.<sup>59</sup> He has been described as “among the most poignant and enigmatic of the apolitical youth,”<sup>60</sup> but it may be more accurate to highlight that his often passionate politics, which epitomized the spirit of 1919, did not fit the increasingly rigid nationalist-communist dichotomy of the 1920s; rather for him “the ethos of the Young China Studies Association never lost its value and meaning.”<sup>61</sup> In 1914 he left Chengdu and tested into China University (Zhongguo Daxue) Law faculty in Peking, auditing classes in Peking University (PKU) at the same time.

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<sup>57</sup> See note 39 above.

<sup>58</sup> Li Jieren remained in China after 1949 and held official positions, including as vice-mayor of Chengdu, although he was the target of attacks in the Anti-Rightist movement. See Kenny K.K. Ng, *The Lost Geopoetic Horizon of Li Jieren* (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 213-215.

<sup>59</sup> Li Jieren, “Shiren zhi sun” (Grandson of a poet) in Zuo Shunsheng, ed., *Wang Guangqi jiniance* (Shanghai: Wenhui, 1936): 15.

<sup>60</sup> M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 42

<sup>61</sup> M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 62. Levine concludes that Wang “emphasized the more comprehensive area of societal transformation from the bottom up led by the egalitarian intellectual, who must have the patience and foresight to lead the social revolution—but not as a revolutionary, who would only become polluted by contact with sordid politics.” p. 141. See also Wang Guangqi, “Jiaoyujia dui Zhongguo xiankuang yingyou zhi sanda juewu” (The three awakenings about China’s current situation that educators must experience), *Zhongguo jiaoyujie* 16 (May 1927): 2-13.

Although he was not a journalist by training, he excelled at writing journalism, according to Li Jieren.<sup>62</sup> From 1916, he became Peking correspondent for *The Sichuan People*, the editor of *Capital Daily* (*Jinghua ribao* 京華日報) and frequent contributor to Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu's *Weekly Review* (*Meizhou Pinglun* 每週評論).<sup>63</sup> During this time, he also worked as a secretary in the Office of Qing History under his benefactor Zhao Erxun 趙爾巽 (former imperial governor of Sichuan; his brother Zhao Erfeng who succeeded him was killed by the revolutionaries).<sup>64</sup> From 1918 Wang became the organizer of the incipient Young China Association. In March 1919, Wang established the Work-Study Mutual Aid Corps (*Gong-du huzhutuan* 工讀互助團) and became an advocate of the New Village Movement.<sup>65</sup> In 1920, he left Beijing for Germany, studying political economy at the University of Frankfurt while also writing for *Shenbao* and *Chenbao*.<sup>66</sup>

Zeng Qi 曾琦 (1892-1951), a native of Longchang county in Southern Sichuan, was a long-time admirer of the Ming loyalists Wang Fuzhi 王夫之, Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 and Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲, and member of Sun Yat-sen's Tongmenghui 同盟會 (Revolutionary Alliance). In 1912, he established *The People* (*Qunbao* 群報) in Chongqing and was elected to the first national Parliament. After its dissolution during Yuan Shikai's crackdown on the press, he fled to Shanghai in 1914, from where he wanted to sail to France, but was prevented by the outbreak of the war. Instead he enrolled at Aurora University, where he met Li Huang and Zuo Shunsheng. In 1916, he continued to Japan to study government and law at Chûô University. In 1918, he founded the Overseas Chinese news service (*Huaying Tongxinshe* 華瀛通信社) in Tokyo to report on secret negotiations between Duan Qirui and Japan; and was involved in the

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<sup>62</sup> Li Jieren, "Huiyi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui Chengdu fenhui zhi suoyou chengli" (Remembering how the Chengdu Branch of the Young China Association was established), 31 May 1960, *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, I, 551.

<sup>63</sup> Zhou Taixuan, "Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi," 538.

<sup>64</sup> His grandfather Wang Zeshan had been a tutor in Zhao Erxun's household. Li Huang *Xuedunshi Huiyilu*, (Taipei: Zhuanji wenxue, 1975): 27.

<sup>65</sup> Shakhrah Rahav, "A May Fourth 'Peach Blossom Garden'," *Twentieth Century China* 33 (1): 81-103. The Mutual Aid Corps encapsulated one of the central tenets of the Young China group and other May Fourth groups like the one in Paris: "creating an alternative if ephemeral mode of sociability amongst Corps members...a community built around social bonds based on choice, rather than on inherited obligation" (103).

<sup>66</sup> In 1922 he changed his major to musicology and moved to Berlin, then to Bonn in 1926, where he obtained his doctorate and became a lecturer. He died of a stroke in the University library at the age of 44. Cai Yuanpei personally addressed a mourning ceremony held in Nanjing, and Xu Beihong painted his posthumous portrait. His ashes were buried on Zhou Taixuan's family land, close to Li Jieren's village near Chengdu, in 1941. The tomb was later destroyed, and today the only memorial to Wang is a plaque in the Chengdu Music Academy. Li Jieren, "Wusi zhuyi Wang Guangqi" (Remembering Wang Guangqi on May Fourth), 4 May 1950, in *Li Jieren Quanjì* (Chengdu: Sichuan chuban jituan, 2011), vol. 7, 47.

Chinese Students in Japan National Salvation Corps (Liu Ri xuesheng jiuguo tuan 留日學生救國團), who returned home to protest the Nishihara loans.<sup>67</sup> Upon arriving in Shanghai, he founded the *National Salvation Daily (Jiuguo Ribao 救國日報)*, in which he serially published his first famous article “The State and Youth” (Guoti yu qingnian 國體與青年) in August 1918 (it was later published as a book by the Association), calling on young people to defend the Republic.<sup>68</sup> In this context, he wrote to and eventually met with Liang Qichao to persuade him to set up a university for the returned students. He attended the founding meeting of the Young China Association in Peking in June 1918.

One year later, at the time of May 4, he was in Shanghai and, in late May, travelled to Peking as representative of the National Salvation Corps. In the latter part of 1919, he travelled to Paris and joined the Paris News Service, as well as writing for the *Shanghai News (Xinwenbao 新聞報)*, which supported the News Service because of Zeng’s close connection to the editor Guo Butao 郭步陶.<sup>69</sup> Zeng later toured Germany with Li Huang and after returning to Paris they founded the China Youth Party (Zhongguo qingniandang 中國青年黨)<sup>70</sup> in December 1923, before returning to Shanghai in 1924, where Zeng set up the *Awakening Lion Weekly (Xingshi zhoubao 醒獅週報)* with Zuo Shunsheng and taught at several universities.<sup>71</sup>

Zhou Taixuan 周太玄 (1895-1968) was a biologist, translator, and social activist, born in Chengdu, with an early interest in the press. In 1912 he set off to Shanghai, where he

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<sup>67</sup> “In March [1918], Zeng Muhan [Qi] initiated a boycott of Japanese news agencies because of their manipulation of public opinion in East Asia, which was detrimental to China’s international position. Together with [30 others] he founded Huaying News Agency, which dispatched eight reports a month...which were available for publication in domestic newspapers, in order to reveal and counteract Japan’s conspiracies.” Qin Xianci, “Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui shimoji,” 14-15. The plan to establish Huaying is mentioned in Zeng Qi’s journal for 1918 (March 10); on May 7 he notes the decision to stop Huaying and return to Shanghai to publish “diplomatic news.” See Zeng Qi, *Zeng Muhan xiansheng yizhu* (Taipei: Wenhai, 1971), 377 and 386.

<sup>68</sup> See Shen Yunlong, “Wo suo renshi de ‘Shao Zhong’ shiyou” (The friends and teachers of Young China as I knew them), *Zhuanji wenxue*, vol. 35 no. 1 (1979): 25.

<sup>69</sup> Li Huang, “Tongxue shaonian Li Jieren ji Li Zhesheng, Zhou Taixuan, Huang Zhongsu” (My Young China classmates Li Jieren, Li Zhesheng, Zhou Taixuan, Huang Zhongsu), *Dacheng*, vol. 106 (Sept 1982): 18.

<sup>70</sup> On the Qingniandang, see M. Levine, *The Found Generation* 179-184 and Hirayama, Nagatomi, “Staging China’s ‘Age of Extremes’: Divergent Radicalizations among Chinese Youth in Europe, 1922-1924” (*Twentieth-Century China* 44, no. 1, 2019): 33-52.

<sup>71</sup> Critical of communism and the notion of an international proletariat, Zeng Qi opposed the KMT’s united front with the CCP and alliance with the Soviet Union, and tried to win over Sun Yat-sen to his stance. After Sun’s death, he supported the right-wing Western Hills group. When the war broke out, he held positions in Chiang Kai-shek’s government, then took refuge in Hong Kong in 1941, where he edited *Brightness (Guangmingbao 光明報)* with Liang Shuming 梁漱溟. He again held office in the national government, assemblies and presidential office after 1945, but eventually left for the United States in late 1948 for medical treatment, where he died in 1951. Marilyn Levine, “Zeng Qi and the Frozen Revolution,” in Roger B. Jeans. *Roads not Taken. The Struggle of Opposition Parties in Twentieth-century China* (Boulder: Westview, 1992).

arrived penniless; his Sichuanese classmate Hu Xuanzhi introduced him to his older brother Hu Zhengzhi 胡政之 (1889-1949), who was teaching at China University (Zhongguo Gongxue 中國公學) and later edited the *Dagongbao*. Hu Zhengzhi served as Zhou's guarantor, allowing him to enroll, and repeatedly supported him in later years, including as a contributor to the *Dagongbao*.<sup>72</sup> After graduating, Zhou joined the Shanghai *Minxinbao* 民信報, as well as acting as Shanghai correspondent for Li Jieren's papers *The Sichuan People* and *Sichuan*. In the fall of 1916, Zhou moved to Beijing, where he worked for several newspapers and Hu Zhengzhi's China News Agency (Zhonghua Tongxinshe 中華通信社). Zhou Taixuan's resolve to establish a Chinese news agency in Europe may well have been inspired by Hu Zhengzhi's ideas.<sup>73</sup> Like Zeng Qi in Japan, Zhou had become frustrated by dependency on foreign agencies.

Zhou arrived to France in March 1919 and, despite his limited French, co-founded the Paris News Agency with Li Huang. According to Li, Hu Zhengzhi was in turn inspired by the Paris News Service to establish his own Citizens' News Agency (Guomin tongxinshe 國民通信社).<sup>74</sup> In Paris, Zhou often met with Li Jieren and other classmates: they would cook Sichuan dishes, sing Peking opera, and discuss painting—largely replicating the life of young intellectuals in Chengdu. In March 1920, the Young China Association set up a Paris branch, of which Zhou became secretary.<sup>75</sup> He was joined by his fiancée Wang Yaoqun 王耀群 (1898-1935) and they married in France. Zhou obtained a master's degree in Montpellier in 1924 and a doctorate in biology in Paris in 1930; Wang Yaoqun

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<sup>72</sup> Li Huang, "Tongxue Shaonian," 18. On Hu Zhengzhi, see L. Sophia Wang, "The independent press and authoritarian regimes: the case of the Da Gong Bao in Republican China", *Pacific Affairs* vol. 67.2 (1994): 216-241. Hu Zhengzhi was also in Paris for the Peace conference as editor of the incipient *Dagongbao*, which had just been bought by the Anfu Clique. Thanks to their sponsorship, he hosted a lavish party for the press corps, with 130 guests from 15 countries, more than even the Chinese ambassador could afford. *Dagongbao*, May 3, 1919. See Wang, "The independent press," 222.

<sup>73</sup> "As a veteran Chinese journalist, [Hu] knew well that, without a good Chinese news agency, Chinese newspapers would have to learn about China from their foreign colleagues who, he suspected, manipulated the news to advance their national interests. Hu also believed that the success of a Chinese-owned news agency could enhance China's international status." Wang, "The independent press," 223. Hu had studied law in Japan, and took the *Mainichi* as his model. After the collapse of the Anfu clique in 1926, the *Dagongbao* became the reference for professional, impartial journalism in China. See Tang Xiaobing, *Xiandai Zhongguo de gonggong yulun: yi Dagongbao "Xingqi lunwen" he Shenbao "Ziyoutan" wei li*. (Public opinion in Modern China: the examples of *Dagongbao*'s "Weekly essay" and *Shenbao* "Free conversation" columns) (Beijing, Sheke, 2012).

<sup>74</sup> Li Huang, "Tongxue shaonian," 18. Li Huang also regrets that Zhou Taixuan's fascination with eugenics and refusal to use contraception led to his wife's early death in childbirth.

<sup>75</sup> "Bali fenhui chengli" (3 April [1920]), *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, I, 235-236.



obtained a doctorate in pharmacy. They then returned to Chengdu and both taught in several universities.<sup>76</sup>

Li Huang 李璜 (1895-1991) was born in Chengdu into a wealthy merchant family, and studied at the government foreign language school in Chengdu. He then enrolled in Aurora University in Shanghai, with Zeng Qi and Zuo Shunsheng. He took part in founding the Young China Association in June 1918, before sailing to France on one of the first boats after the armistice, on 5 February 1919, together with Li Shizeng, the founder of the work-study movement. In the fall of 1919 he enrolled in the Sorbonne to study European history, sociology, and comparative religions. His studies were sponsored by his family and he did not have to work for a living, but often gave French classes to Chinese students. In the first half of 1923 he toured Germany with Zeng Qi, advocated “statism” (*guojia zhuyi* 國家主義) against the internationalism of the KMT and the CCP, and founded the Young China Party with Zeng in December 1923. In 1924, Li returned to China, where he taught European history, French literature and education at Wuchang University (1924-25), PKU (1925-26), Sichuan University (1926-27).<sup>77</sup>

The biographical sketches presented in the section above provide an overview of how Sichuanese hometown networks overlapped with new culture associations like Young China, student-workers, and journalists at the time of the Paris Peace conference, but also provided space for a diversity of political positions and choices. It was at the intersection of these networks and different political persuasions that a new form of what may be termed “citizen journalism” appeared, with the establishment of the Paris News Service.

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<sup>76</sup> After the war, Zhou acted as an advisor to the *Dagongbao* in Shanghai and then in Hong Kong. According to Li Huang, when Sichuan University sponsored him to spend a year in France, he stopped in Shanghai and met one last time with Li before their paths parted. Li Huang, “Tongxue shaonian,” 18. According to Li Huang, like Wang Guangqi, Zhou disliked politics and disagreed with Zeng Qi, Zuo Shunsheng and Li Huang establishing an anti-communist party in Paris. Li Huang quotes Zhou as telling Li Shizeng: “Although communism has indeed harmed young people, and is indeed hateful, nationalism will certainly also harm people.” Li Huang defends his own political engagement by quoting Zuo Shunsheng: “Politics is inescapable. A gentleman cannot avoid it, a villain uses it to his profit.” After 1949, Zhou remained in China, and became president of Chongqing University. In 1953 he was invited to join the Academy of Sciences in Beijing, where he also joined the Democratic Workers’ and Peasants’ Party.

<sup>77</sup> In 1929 Li Huang moved to the French concession in Shanghai for his safety (since he was an outspoken critic of Chiang Kai-shek), and taught at Fudan University. In 1932, he moved to Beiping, where Zhang Xueliang 張學良 gave more freedom to his party than Chiang. In 1933, he returned to Chengdu, where he headed a committee to prevent the communist Long March from entering central Sichuan. In 1936, the Young China Party joined the United Front, and Li Huang joined the Democratic League. In 1945 Li Huang was a member of the Chinese delegation at the San Francisco conference. He turned down several offers to enter Chiang’s government; in 1949 he and Zuo Shunsheng moved to Hong Kong where they continued to write critically about both the communist and nationalist parties. Li taught European history and wrote for the Hong Kong press; he eventually moved to Taiwan in the 1960s.

## The Paris News Service

News agencies played a major role in shaping the narratives that politicians performed for a worldwide audience in the Paris Peace conference. A majority of newspapers worked with a very small number of in-house journalists and were therefore reliant for both foreign and often even domestic news on information collected and disseminated by news agencies. As noted by Heidi Tworek, the “big three” agencies (Reuters, Wolff and Havas) that had appeared in the aftermath of the 1848 revolutions in Europe formed a cartel in 1870, in which each reported on an assigned geographical sphere and exchanged news with the others. This allowed them to dominate the global news business until World War II. The entry barrier to the sector was particularly high, not only because of the cost of stationing correspondents and the high price of telegrams, but also because governments generally controlled telecommunications infrastructure as well as channels of official information, which they could choose to exclusively disseminate by partnering with certain agencies.<sup>78</sup>

Wireless telegraphy became broadly available at the turn of the twentieth century, allowing the transmission of messages from one to many points (unlike cable telegram, which was point-to-point), as well as reducing the dependence on undersea cables controlled by sovereign states. However, wireless cables still transmitted messages through Morse code, hence transmission remained time-consuming and costly, requiring expertise, especially for encoding Chinese characters.<sup>79</sup> The political control of telecommunications infrastructure was a topic of concern in the lead-up to World War I, after Britain censored content sent through its telegraphic cables during the Boer War, and severed Germany’s underseas cables as soon as war was declared in 1914. Beyond infrastructure, there was also concern that the monopolistic structure of global reporting could produce biased information, especially in the field of economics and

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<sup>78</sup> Heidi Tworek, “Magic Connections: German News Agencies and Global News Networks, 1905–1945,” *Enterprise & Society*, 15.4 (2014): 675. See also Daniel Headrick, Pascal Griset, “Submarine Telegraph Cables: Business and Politics, 1838–1939,” *Business History Review*, 75:3 (2001): 543–578.

<sup>79</sup> The first codebook for Chinese language telegraphy was published by the French customs official Septime Auguste Viguier in 1871, followed by a more comprehensive version by the constitutionalist scholar-official Cheng Kuan-ying 鄭觀應 (1842–1922, author of the famous *Words of Warning for an Age of Prosperity* 盛世危言), published after he was appointed head of the Shanghai Telecommunications Office under the title *A new compilation of four-digit telegram code* 四碼電報新編 in 1881. Both versions used 4-digit combinations to encode the 6800 most common Chinese characters, which were often charged at a higher rate than alphabetical languages because they were considered a form of secret code. See Thomas Mullaney, “Semiotic Sovereignty. The 1871 Chinese Telegraph Code in Historical Perspective,” in Jing Tsu and Benjamin A. Elman, eds. *Science and Technology in Modern China, 1880s–1940s*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014): 153–183.

business, resulting in a global “battle over the information flows that undergirded imperial and global exchanges flow.”<sup>80</sup> The Allied domination of both communications infrastructure and news agencies was an important factor in the battle for public opinion during World War I.<sup>81</sup>

At the end of the war, the United States government engaged in a vast public relations effort to disseminate its views in preparation for the peace conference. In China, where US ambassador Paul Reinsch<sup>82</sup> had complained about the monopoly of the British agency Reuters and its Japanese counterpart Kokusai (who did not necessarily share the views of their American ally on Shandong for example), the Committee for Public Information established a branch known as the US-China Press agency (Zhong-Mei tongxinshe) in the Summer of 1918, headed by the Shanghai-based journalist Carl Crow (1884-1945), to translate American news dispatches and offer them to the Chinese press. Crow was also tasked with arranging translations of Wilson’s wartime speeches, which he entrusted to the well-known scholar (and future president of PKU) Chiang Monlin (Jiang Menglin 蔣夢麟, 1886-1964). Two volumes were published by Commercial Press and widely distributed to influential elites (the northern warlord Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 bought 500 copies and had them distributed to his officers). Recipients were invited to write to Wilson, and Crow received 5000 letters in return, which greatly contributed to the “Wilson fever” and high expectations in China for the peace conference.<sup>83</sup>

Reporting from the Paris peace conference was dominated by Western agencies, who often outpaced the diplomats themselves. While the Japanese plenipotentiaries relied on official telegrams often sent with a lapse of up to a week, and the semi-official Kokusai agency was understaffed and deprived of information by the delegation, Japanese broadsheets relying on foreign sources reported the developments in Paris within 24 hours. This created a chasm between official channels and the “immediacy of private-sector reporting from Paris,” eager to inform the Japanese public about the country’s

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<sup>80</sup> Tworek, “Magic Connections,” 680. Tworek suggests that German—just like Chinese—elites were increasingly concerned about Germany’s “second-class” status as an information producer and standard-setter and both the state and private sectors invested heavily to catch up in the first half of the twentieth century.

<sup>81</sup> E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Manela describes Reinsch as a respected professor, political scientist and cofounder of the American Political Science association with Woodrow Wilson, as well as a devout Christian, and a critic of European imperialism (*The Wilsonian Moment*, 110). Others underlined his German ancestry and possible sympathies for Germany (see Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 160).

<sup>83</sup> E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 99 sq.

exclusion from the “big four” negotiators, and rejection of the racial equality clause, in a public relations disaster for the Japanese government.<sup>84</sup>

Reports on the peace conference in Chinese newspapers reflected these tensions. For example, on 1 May, when news about the outcome of the negotiations began to look worrying, the *Shenbao*'s main news pages (3 and 6) printed in the following order:

- an editorial titled “Do not fear” (Wu qie 勿怯)
- a presidential order
- main dispatches (zhuan dian), large print (26, all from Beijing)
- cables from Chinese news agencies (all domestic news): Pinghe (2), Zhonghua (8),

Zhongfu (12)

Followed on page 6 by:

- official cables (2).
- translated cables from western press (from Reuters, 2)
- cables from Japanese agencies: Tôhō (5) and Kyôdô (6)
- cables from American Wireless Agency (6)
- cables from Reuters (6)

While the dispatches in this and other instances were short and factual, free of obvious mistakes or distortions, readers were still left with the feeling that they did not have access to the full account of events.

Finding channels for independent news reporting to better inform Chinese and international public opinion was a topic dear to the Young China Association. According to Zhou Taixuan, in the fall of 1918, Young China affiliates in Beijing and Shanghai decided to convene a meeting in order to create independent Chinese press agencies in Japan, the US and France. Lei Baojing, a founding member at the June meeting, had already played a role in establishing the Huaying News Agency in Japan with Zeng Qi to report on China's secret agreements with Japan.<sup>85</sup> At the fall meeting, it was decided that the need for independent reporting was greatest in Paris and two members – Li Huang and Zhou Taixuan – set off to Paris to establish it that winter, joined in the fall of 1919 by Zeng Qi: “Since the reporting on international affairs in Chinese newspapers relied on

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<sup>84</sup> Naoko Shimazu, “A Cultural History of Diplomacy,” 115. While the official negotiators Makino and Chinda were actively pushing for the racial equality clause, they did not dare make it into a public campaign; by contrast with observers like the young journalist Nakano Seigô, who left Paris in February, totally disillusioned.

<sup>85</sup> Having returned to China as part of the Protest Corps, Lei Baojing set out back to Tokyo but was taken ill on the boat and died shortly after arriving to Tokyo on 14 December 1918, aged only 19. See Wang Guangqi, “Ku Juansheng” (Mourning for Juansheng), *Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui zhounian jiniance*, unpaginated front pages.

the news dispatches that were entirely monopolized by English, Japanese and American agencies, we all enthusiastically hoped to have our own agency offering reports.”<sup>86</sup> As recorded in the reports of Young China, before Zhou and Li set sail for France, Wang Guangqi travelled to Shanghai for a meeting which took place on 23 January 1919, during which they collectively decided to divide their work among different geographical areas.<sup>87</sup>

Li Huang sailed first, arriving to France on 5 February, while Zhou Taixuan followed in March.<sup>88</sup> According to Zhou Taixuan, before reaching Paris, he secured support from Wu Yuzhang in Hong Kong, Li Shizeng (already in Paris) as well as Tcheng Yu-hsiu,<sup>89</sup> and the chief envoy of the Canton government Dr C.C. Wu (Wu Chaoshu 伍朝樞, the son of Wu Ting-fang 伍廷芳). He provides an upbeat account of Chinese newspapers’ eagerness to break free of the monopoly of western news agencies, noting that by late March, the newly arrived activists were sending dispatches to the large papers in Peking and Shanghai. The Paris News Service paid reliable fees for articles, so that many work-study students were eager to write, and they quickly expanded from two to four or five people, all of them Young China members.<sup>90</sup> For Zhou Taixuan, the highlight of the Paris News Service activity was without doubt the news of late April that the US would not support China’s demands in the Peace conference: he recalls working all night to confirm the information, before sending the cable back to China before any foreign agency.<sup>91</sup>

Li Huang’s account is more skeptical of the demand in China for independent news reports and instead emphasizes Li’s own contribution to supporting the group. According to Li (who was independently wealthy), Zhou Taixuan experienced considerable financial difficulties and had to borrow travel money to go to France. Zeng Qi in Shanghai had told him that *Shenbao* and *Shishi xinbao* both needed a correspondent, and Wang Guangqi had communicated that Peking and Tianjin newspapers craved news from Versailles, so Zhou Taixuan believed he could pay for his studies by relying on his Sichuanese network. But when he reached Paris, his French was insufficient to read the press or conduct interviews so he sought Li Huang’s help. According to Li, they sent

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<sup>86</sup> Zhou Taixuan, “Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi,” 546.

<sup>87</sup> “Huiwu baogao” (Report on Association matters), *Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui zhounian jiniance*, 2.

<sup>88</sup> Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu*, 41.

<sup>89</sup> According to her own memoir, Tcheng travelled to Europe via Japan and the US rather than around the Cape of Good Hope, because she swapped tickets with an unofficial Korean delegate to the Peace Conference who had bought a ticket through Japan but was afraid of being arrested there. *My Revolutionary Years*, 115.

<sup>90</sup> Zhou Taixuan, “Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi,” 546.

<sup>91</sup> Zhou Taixuan, “Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi,” 546.

reports to newspapers in China but no fees were wired back. Consequently, Li Shizeng helped by putting up Zhou in the workers' dormitory of his tofu company.<sup>92</sup> Later, Zhou Taixuan was able to move out of the factory and rent rooms in a student hostel in the Latin Quarter. He and Li each occupied one room where they did translating, writing, printing and sending.<sup>93</sup> Zhou was also studying biology at the Sorbonne at the same time. After Zeng Qi came to Paris in the autumn of 1919, Zhou Taixuan's writing and French are said to have improved, and Zeng Qi was also able to read the French press.<sup>94</sup> As a contractual correspondent, Zeng Qi was paid 12.5 yuan for a dispatch of 2 to 3000 characters, which allowed him to barely scrape by with around 100 yuan a month.<sup>95</sup>

When Li arrived to Paris in early February he was impressed by the three daily editions of *Le Petit Parisien* updating readers on the peace conference. Because of Zhou's limited French, they would split the translating work, with Li providing an oral translation, which Zhou would take down in writing and edit. They would print copies using offset lithography in Zhou's script and send them to the important newspapers in Peking and Shanghai by mail, once a week.<sup>96</sup> Because of their connection with Zeng Qi, the *Shanghai News* was the only paper that, once negotiations heated up in mid-April, sent them advance telegram fees to speed up dispatches:

this obliged me to go to Versailles (sic) to conduct interviews myself! Luckily, C.T. Wang in the Chinese delegation...helped me to obtain press credentials, and with my badge I was able to enter Versailles at any time and mingle with journalists from all over the world....If I obtained some special news I would rush back to discuss with Taixuan, and we would use ten-digit code to cable it to the *Shanghai News*, which greatly increased its circulation in the second half of April. Around April 20<sup>th</sup>, the Chinese delegation realized that France and England were about to accept the Japanese demands on the German rights in our Shandong, C.T. Wang told me so in confidence, and I prepared a cable. At the same time I asked two Chinese journalists to request interviews with the British and French Prime

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<sup>92</sup> Li Shizeng established the Paris tofu company (La Caséo-sojaïne) in 1909. Situated at 48 rue Denis-Poisson, La Vallée (Colombes), it employed up to 100 workers, and spawned a trading company for Chinese goods, as well as a publishing house. M. Levine, 102. See Nora Wang, *Emigration et politique*, 91-92. See also Angela Ki-Che Leung, "To Build or to Transform Vegetarian China: Two Republican Projects," in Angela Leung and Melissa Caldwell, eds., *Moral Foods. The Construction of Nutrition and Health in Modern Asia*, Honolulu, Hawai'i UP, 2019, p. 221-240.

<sup>93</sup> In the first annual report of the Young China Association, Zhou's address is given as "Mr Chow Woo, Care of Mr Looheyi, 62 rue Gay Lussac, Paris, France" and Li Huang's mail is to be forwarded to the same address. *Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui zhounian jiniance*, p. 67.

<sup>94</sup> Li Huang, "Tongxue shaonian" 18.

<sup>95</sup> Shen Yunlong, "Wo suo renshi de 'Shao Zhong' shiyou," 25-26. Only Zeng Qi was able to secure a regular income as a journalist thanks to his personal connection with the editor of *Xinwenbao*.

<sup>96</sup> "We would mimeograph [*youyin*] a number of copies (using a form of offset lithography [*yizhong jiaoban tayin*], Taixuan's regular script [*xiaokai*] was very meticulous, and beautiful once printed out, only the color was not lasting), and send them out to every paper in Peking and Shanghai." Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu*, 42.

Ministers Lloyd George and Clemenceau, and inform them that, after the Chinese government had participated in the war, the Chinese nation would never accept to abandon Jiaozhou Bay again. In their democratic tradition, the British and French leaders did not turn down any journalist requests, but Clemenceau, abandoning the “tiger’s” composure, simply glared without responding, while the “lion” Prime minister smilingly thought it over and gave a most comic reply: “China is very big! Such a small piece of land as Jiaozhou Bay, is it worth such anguished questions?”<sup>97</sup>

Having understood the probable outcome, Li Huang rushed back to prepare both a cable to the *News* and a detailed report to be sent by mail. While this dispatch was only one among many, as a civic act by “citizen journalists” it obviously held symbolic meaning for Li and Zhou.

### **From Paris to Beijing to Chengdu**

As the Chengdu literary historian Zhang Yiqi has pointed out, on 4 May, history fortuitously re-connected three high school classmates active in journalism, Zhou Taixuan reporting for the Paris News Service, Wang Guangqi in Peking as a journalist and leader of the still informal Young China group among the new culture activists, and Li Jieren in Chengdu as the editor of *Chuanbao*.<sup>98</sup> Since Wang Guangqi was auditing classes at PKU, he naturally joined the demonstrations on May 4.<sup>99</sup> At the end of the day, Wang went to the telegraph office to cable news of the events to Chengdu. By acting so quickly he may have avoided the strict censorship on the event decided by the Peking government.<sup>100</sup> At the time, wireless cable was not widespread in China; press cables were slower than official or business cables, as well as expensive, so the report was short and took three days to reach its addressees in Chengdu. Li Jieren immediately understood that a momentous event was underway and published Zhou Taixuan’s report from Paris on students opposing signature of the treaty. Then he received the emotional report by Wang Guangqi from Peking, which he printed prominently and in the largest headline typeset in the *Chuanbao* on May 7. On May 16, he received Wang’s

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<sup>97</sup> Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu*, 42. Since most of the negotiations took place at the Quai d’Orsay, not in Versailles, Li Huang’s memory may be at fault. Also, it seems that 4-digit code was standard for cabling Chinese characters, I have found no reference to ten-digit code.

<sup>98</sup> Zhang Yiqi, “Wusi zhi huo zenyang shaodao Bashan Shushui—Zhou Taixuan, Wang Guangqi, Li Jieren zai 1919 nian” (How the flames of May Fourth burned all the way to the mountains and rivers of Sichuan – Zhou Taixuan, Wang Guangqi and Li Jieren in 1919), *Li Jieren yanjiu*, 2011, no. 12.

<sup>99</sup> For events in Peking, see Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement*, 84-116; for a more recent version, Chen Pingyuan, *Touches of History: An Entry into May Fourth China* (Leiden: Brill, 2011): 11-66.

<sup>100</sup> News of the incident was censored, cable communications between Peking and foreign countries cut off, and only a few correspondents were able to report by wireless. Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement*, 120.

longer report and added rousing subtitles in the text, to great resonance in Chengdu. Wang Guangqi continued writing almost daily reports, which were published prominently by the *Chuanbao*. Li Jieren recalled these events in a 1960 reminiscence:

Previously, because cables were expensive, having a 20- or 30-character cable from Peking or Shanghai was already remarkable. Because I was very interested in news from outside Sichuan and abroad, I set aside some money so that, in addition to sending their usual clippings and increasing the length of cables to about 50 characters (including using ways of signifying one sentence with one character), I could get them to send one or two dispatches (*tongxin*) each week. Wang Guangqi became very good at writing these dispatches. So at the time of May 4 he was easily able to write 2 or 3 a day, which played a great role in making the movement known in Chengdu. We the editors also paid great attention to it at the time. We came to trust him even more.<sup>101</sup>

Zhang Xiushu 張秀熟, at the time a student at Chengdu Higher Normal College, later wrote about his memory of student activist Yuan Shirao 遠詩堯 reading the article out loud while standing on a refectory table during breakfast on May 8. The refectory became a meeting hall as the students acclaimed the patriotic protesters, booed the Beiyang government and called to dismiss the three traitors, and to refuse signing the treaty. On the same day the students organized a protest march with street lectures (*youxing jiangyan* 遊行講演) to the *dujun* 督軍 and provincial government, sent cables to every province and county, and approved a boycott of “evil” produce. Despite Sichuan’s remote location, Chengdu students were mobilized. On May 19<sup>th</sup>, the Law College organized a fund-raiser, each student donated 2 coppers for cable fees; on May 22, Chengdu Normal College cabled the Beijing government demanding to release the students and punish the traitors.<sup>102</sup> On May 25, over 6,000 students joined 10,000 other citizens in a rally in Shaocheng Park. On May 28, a preparatory group for a Citizen Assembly was set up. On May 31, governor Xiong Kewu 熊克武 was forced to cable Beijing demanding to refuse to sign the treaty. Chongqing students set up a “Chuan Dong xuesheng jiuguo tuan” (Eastern Sichuan National Salvation Corps); patriotic support groups were set up in more than 90 counties throughout Sichuan by people from all

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<sup>101</sup> Li Jieren, “Huiyi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui Chengdu Fenhui zhi suoyou chengli,” 551. Zhang Xiushu puts the number of dispatches by Wang Guangqi at 50 between May 4 and 16. Zhang Xiushu, “Wusi yundong zai Sichuan de huiyi” (Memories of May Fourth in Sichuan), February 1959, in *Wusi yundong huiyilu*, 1, 872.

<sup>102</sup> Zhang Xiushu, “Wusi yundong zai Sichuan de huiyi,” 872-873. Zhang Yiqi, “Wusi zhi huo zenyang shaodao Bashan Shushui.” The cable was reprinted in *Guomin Gongbao*, 24 May 1919. See *Sichuan Daxue shigao*, (Chengdu: Sichuan Daxue, 2006): 73.



walks of life.<sup>103</sup> After the Beiyang government backed down in early June, the Chengdu chapter of the Young China Association was set up with Li Jieren as secretary,<sup>104</sup> as well as its journal *Sunday Review* 星期日 with Li as editor.<sup>105</sup>

### **The impeded signature**

Meanwhile, as the date of June 30 approached, there was some hesitation in Peking about completely boycotting the signature of the Treaty. Although none of the last-minute compromises proposed by the Chinese delegation in Paris was accepted by the Allies, such as entering a formal reservation on the articles dealing with Shandong (an option refused by France and the UK), the Peking government was still hesitant at the risk of being excluded from the League of Nations. The delegates' resolve, which made China the only participant in the conference not to sign the treaty, was a direct result of the pressure of public opinion, relayed by activists in Paris, including the Sichuanese "citizen-journalists" of the Paris News Service.

Li Huang recalls in his memoirs how, just before the final signature in June, on June 27, they went to meet with the leaders of the Chinese delegation, including Wellington Koo and others, except the minister, Lu Zhengxiang, who refused to receive them, hiding out in a residence near the Bois de Boulogne. Although all other delegates had given them their word that they would not sign, Li Huang joined a group of four journalists and six students who set watch around Lu's residence to ensure that he did not secretly come out to sign the treaty. "The anxiety and indignation of our group was in no way inferior to the feelings of the student and merchants striking back home! However, how could those short-sighted western so-called politicians and diplomats of the time understand or foresee that the weighty reasons for the anger of the new generation would be exploited by Soviet conspirators and plant the seeds for the current chaos in the East?"<sup>106</sup>

The signature episode is also narrated in great detail in the memoirs of Tcheng Yu-hsiu, although she does not mention Li Huang's presence. She recalls how, the day before

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<sup>103</sup> Zhang Xiushu, "Wusi yundong zai Sichuan de huiyi," 874.

<sup>104</sup> "Chengdu fenhui chengli," *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, 231.

<sup>105</sup> *Xingqiri*, established on 13 July 1919, was a weekly affiliated with, though not subordinated to Young China (similar to Peking's *Meizhou Pinglun* or Shanghai's *Xingqi Pinglun*); it became one of the most widely printed new culture journals, with a print-run of 5000 copies and subscribers all over Sichuan and beyond. Li Jieren, "Huiyi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui Chengdu Fenhui zhi suoyou chengli," 550-553.

<sup>106</sup> Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu*, 43.

the signature, when Lu was nowhere to be found, she was able, through the indiscrete wife of a general in the Chinese delegation, to find out that he had hidden in a house in the Western suburb of Saint-Cloud, from where he would presumably be able to reach Versailles unimpeded the next day. Dashing off to Saint-Cloud in a taxi, Tcheng was joined by group of students who set siege to the house overnight, ambushed Lu's secretary who appeared carrying a thick briefcase, and finally gained an audience with the minister the next morning at 10:

we reiterated our point that Mr. Lou [Lu] had no instructions from his Government to sign away China's rights. We reminded him that the other two delegates, persons of considerable influence in China [Wellington Koo and C.T. Wang], refused to sign, thus leaving him with the full responsibility for his act. The treaty was to be signed that day in the Hall of Mirrors in the Palace of Versailles. As the hour drew near, Mr. Lou still sat—a crumpled and sulky figure in a chair, with us firing verbal ammunition at him from all sides. Finally, he gave in just as the moment approached for him to leave the house. The hour came and went. Mr. Lou did not go to Versailles and China was saved from countenancing the handing over of a portion of her most valuable land to an alien power. Japan did get Shantung temporarily, but the injustice was later rectified at the Washington conference in 1921.<sup>107</sup>

Lu Zhengxiang's memoirs, on the other hand, make no mention of this pressure group, claiming for himself the credit of not signing:

Impressed by these strong representations [made by the Allies], my government found the isolation of abstaining from signing imprudent and gave me a formal instruction to sign the treaty. For the first time in my career, I believed it was my duty to disobey. ... I did not want to, once again, put my name below unfair clauses, and I took it upon myself alone to refuse to sign. On that day, late in the evening, several hours after the signing ceremony had been concluded, an improbable telegram from my government gave me the counter-order that I had had the cool-headedness to carry out on my own initiative.<sup>108</sup>

While the two accounts do not directly contradict each other, it does seem that the pressure of public opinion, as materialized in the student activists that set siege to the temporary residence of the Foreign minister, played a rather greater role than Lou cared to remember.

After the treaty was concluded, the Chinese Federation in France (*Huaqiao xieshe* 華僑協社), was established on 31 August 1919, and among the groups registered under its

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<sup>107</sup> Tcheng Yu-hsiu, *My Revolutionary Years*, 124-125.

<sup>108</sup> Pierre-Célestin Lou Tseng-tsiang, *Souvenirs et Pensées* (Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1945): 81-82. See also Stephen G. Craft, *VK Wellington Koo and the Emergence of Modern China* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2004): 59.

auspices was the Paris News Service.<sup>109</sup> However, it suffered from a lack of interest in news from Europe and a lack of volunteers with good French, and it stopped working in 1920.<sup>110</sup> Li Huang also recalls that interest in news from Europe declined in China after Versailles. By this time Li Huang himself had tired of journalism (which prevented him from eating warm meals regularly and triggered severe digestive problems which he attributed to eating “crispy bread” with cheese or chocolate during the conference) and decided to withdraw. Zeng Qi’s arrival reinforced the news service, also because the *Shanghai News* gave him a fixed salary in addition to paying for articles.<sup>111</sup> Li Jieren set off for France from Chengdu in September 1919: after briefly working for the Paris News Service, he continued to Montpellier, where he was reunited with Zhou Taixuan. Chinese journalism in France became increasingly geared toward members of the Work-Study movement, as shown by the development of the two worker journals *Huagong Xunkan* 華工旬刊, edited by Li Jieren and Zhou Taixuan and *Huagong zazhi* 華工雜誌, edited by He Luzhi 何魯之. Zhou Taixuan devoted most of his time to editing *European Sojourner Weekly* (Lü Ou zhoukan 旅歐週刊), while Li Huang enrolled in the Sorbonne to study European history, sociology, and comparative religions.<sup>112</sup> Finally, Wang Guangqi left for Europe in March 1920 and was briefly reunited with Zhou and Li in Paris before continuing to Frankfurt.

In a text that can be dated roughly to January 1920 (it states that the Paris News Service has been established for a year), the Young China Association drafted a manifesto for an “International News Agency” (Guoji tongxinshe) that appears as an appendix in the Association’s yearly report:

1. The failure of our country’s diplomacy in the Paris peace conference was due to many reasons, but an important one among them is that our citizens have so far been inactive in international news. In comparison the activities of Japanese citizens truly leave us staring at the back of the runner.

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<sup>109</sup> M. Levine, *The Found Generation*, 100 (it is named the Paris Correspondence Service, presumably a translation from French). The association, domiciled at 39 rue de la Pointe, La Garenne-Colombes, served as a meeting point and mailing address, offering printing services and allowing students to sleep on the floor if necessary. It had a library, sponsored enterprises and set up a cooperative to help members with living expenses.

<sup>110</sup> Zhou Taixuan, “Guanyu canjia faqi Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui de huiyi,” 547.

<sup>111</sup> Li Huang, *Xuedunshi huiyilu*, 43

<sup>112</sup> Li Huang, “Tongxue shaonian,” 18

2. The Assembly of the League of Nations is about to open,<sup>113</sup> it is the best time for our nation to become active on the international scene. We must ensure the circulation of information in order to remedy our previous failure.
3. In order to remove the estrangement between Europeans, Americans and citizens of our nation we must ensure mutual understanding through the circulation of correct information.
4. The circulation of international academic news is extremely slow, causing great loss to our education sector. We should urgently find a way to speed it up.
5. Overseas Chinese and students overseas cannot easily obtain news from the motherland. Nor do people in China pay much attention to overseas compatriots. We should urgently find a way to improve circulation of news.
6. China has not so far operated its own news agency on an international level. All circulation of news depends on foreigners (like for example Reuters' Far East Cable News agency). This is truly exceptionally dangerous, we should urgently find a way to set up a remedy.
7. The world trend is already toward citizen diplomacy. Our citizens should urgently disseminate true public opinion to the world, we can absolutely not rely on the government.
8. There are already news agency institutions abroad, which can be used to liaise with all sorts of foreign organizations and take steps to reform the world.<sup>114</sup>

The blueprint captures the core of the thinking behind the establishment of the Paris News Service, in particular its commitment to establishing an independent news service not out of nationalism, but in the name of cosmopolitanism and better communication among nations. It also affirms that this news service will be staffed entirely by young volunteers (*chunjie er rexin fuwu zhi qingnian* 純潔而熱心服務之青年) and be without any partisan color (*bu dai hezhong dangpai secai* 不帶何種黨派色彩). It is also echoed in the Association's correspondence of 1920. Wang Guangqi's "Letter from the Indian Ocean" (April 1920) argues that such an agency could help exchange information in political studies between China and abroad, inform Chinese readers about new books published abroad, and carry out research on foreign education systems on behalf of individuals or institutions in China.<sup>115</sup> Zuo Shunsheng praises the work of the Paris News Service: "I find the content of submissions very good. Each dispatch provides detailed information about Chinese workers in Europe and Frugal Studies participants, which is truly beneficial to our nation developing its projects abroad." He concludes with the

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<sup>113</sup> This probably refers to the League's first council meeting, held in Paris on 16 January 1920, six days after the Versailles Treaty and the Covenant of the League of Nations came into force. The first General Assembly was held in Geneva on 15 November 1920.

<sup>114</sup> "Appendix [to the annual report/ Huiwu baogao]: International News Agency," *Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui zhoujian jianiance*, 72-74.

<sup>115</sup> Wang Guangqi, "Zi Yinduyang zhong shangshu," 61.

need to simplify payment procedures for contributors and formulates high hopes for the New York and Singapore News Service.<sup>116</sup>

## Conclusion

The outcomes for China of the Paris peace conference have received very different appraisals. Unquestionably, the split between the Peking and Canton governments undermined the remit of the Chinese delegation and shifted the initiative to students and other groups who sought to plead China's case for the benefit of both domestic and global public opinion. Erez Manela has argued that in China and other countries, the collapse of Wilsonian ideals fueled anti-colonial nationalism, leading to the decline of liberal ideals and pushing young nationalists like Mao to embrace Bolshevism as the strongest alternative to liberalism.<sup>117</sup> On the other hand, Xu Guoqi has argued that Chinese diplomacy in Paris was in fact quite successful: it was able to secure China's presence in Versailles and symbolic acceptance into the world community, preserve China's imperial borders even as other Empires were dismantled, cancel the Boxer payments to the defeated powers, and shortly afterwards to sign equal treaties with Germany and Austria, join the League of Nations and even take back Japanese interests in Shandong in 1922.<sup>118</sup> By contrast, Japan came back disappointed from Versailles, its domestic public opinion incensed by the defeat of the racial equality clause (which Chinese diplomats had the elegance to support despite the Shandong dispute), and diplomatically isolated by the moral defeats of March 1 in Korea and May 4 in China.<sup>119</sup>

The network of Chengdu classmates and the role they played in connecting the events of Versailles with national and local publics in China and Chengdu serves to replace the event of May Fourth into a broader continuity of space and time. The Young China Group, which since its inception had been skeptical of both Wilsonian democracy and Bolshevism, remained committed to its pluralistic, utopian, and cosmopolitan agenda after May Fourth, even as individual members took different paths.<sup>120</sup> Until its dissolution in 1925, Young China continued to embrace the ideals of mutual aid, self-

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<sup>116</sup> Zuo Shusheng, "Letter, 22 June [1920]," *Shaonian Zhongguo xuehui zhounian jiniance*, 64.

<sup>117</sup> E. Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment*, 195.

<sup>118</sup> Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War*, 280.

<sup>119</sup> Xu Guoqi, *Asia and the Great War. A Shared History* (Oxford: OUP, 2017): 176.

<sup>120</sup> Gotelind Müller similarly argues that, despite the nationalist aspects of the May Fourth movement, internationalism remained strong if not downright dominant among Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s. "Versailles and the Fate of Chinese Internationalism," 204-205.

cultivation and personal reformation, as well as connecting intellectuals and workers through detailed study and debate of issues. Members believed in the possibility of a global network of grassroots associations untainted by politics or commercial profits. The preoccupation with establishing autonomous channels for the production and distribution of news, independent from the western powers and their monopolistic news agencies, remained constant among Chinese intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s. The disappointment of Versailles did not push the Young China Association toward the Bolshevik model, but reinforced their commitment to cosmopolitan pluralism, as illustrated in the manifesto for an international news agency. Nor were they unique in seeking alternative intellectual paths. For example, Du Yaquan and other intellectuals labeled as “conservative” sought to reconcile the present with the past and turning away from the productivism and Darwinian competition.<sup>121</sup> Dai Jitao, Zhang Ji and He Tianjiong’s May 1919 “Open Letter to the People of Japan” denounced the hypocrisy of the Japanese government while issuing a call for freedom and democracy as ideals to be shared among citizens of the two nations.<sup>122</sup>

The role played by the Sichuanese network in contributing to the crystallization of a modern form of nation-wide public opinion in China around May 4 can be understood against the background of the political culture formed in Sichuan during the Railroad Protection Movement in 1911, sustained by the vitality of the press and publication industry. The press was not simply a tool in the May Fourth mobilizations, but a central component of the mobilizations themselves. The slow build-up of modern newspapers, networks of reporters, special funds for cable dispatches, and ultimately the establishment of the first Chinese news agency in Europe were all crucial in providing the infrastructure and long-term preparation for the sudden surge in public opinion of 1919. At the same time, it is remarkable that the technology and institution of a modern press relied closely on a premodern type of home-town network. Without connections like the ones between Zhou Taixuan, Wang Guangqi and Li Jieren, it is doubtful that the May Fourth movement could have spread with such effect in Sichuan. In this sense, this most global event also relied on the most local connections.

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<sup>121</sup> Van den Stock, Ady (2021). “Beyond the Warring States: The First World War and the Redemptive Critique of Modernity in the Work of Du Yaquan (1873–1933).” *Asian Studies*, 9(2), 49–77.

<sup>122</sup> Torsten Weber. “A Lost Chance for Peace. The China Crisis of 1919 and the Debate on Japanese-Chinese Friendship in Japan,” in Tosh Minohara, and Evan Dawley, eds. *Beyond Versailles*, p. 185-206.