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The Making of Modern Chinese Politics
Political Culture, Protest Repertoires, and Nationalism in the Sichuan Railway Protection
Movement

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

By

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2009

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2009

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ABBREVIATIONS

Baogao

Sichuan Baolu tongzhihui baogao [Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association]. Originally published from June-September, 1911.

Dang'an xuanbian

Sichuan sheng dang'an guan [Sichuan provincial archive], ed., *Sichuan baolu yundong dang'an xuanbian* [Selected archival documents of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement] (Chengdu: Sichuan dang'an chubanshe, 1981).

Dai Zhili 1994

Dai Zhili, ed., *Sichuan baolu yundong shiliao huizuan* [Collection of historical materials on the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement], 3 vols. (Taipei: Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1994).

Dai Zhili 1959

Dai Zhili, ed., *Sichuan baolu yundong shiliao* [Historical Materials on the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1959).

Jiao'an

Sichuan sheng dang'an guan [Sichuan provincial archive], ed., *Sichuan jiao'an yu yihequan dang'an* [Archival Records on Religious Cases and the Boxers in Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe 1985).

Sichuan jindaishi

Wei Yingtao et al., *Sichuan jindaishi* [Modern History of Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan shehui kexueyuan chubanshe, 1985).

Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing

Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing eds., *Sichuan Xinhai geming shiliao* [Collected Historical Materials on the 1911 Revolution in Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1982).

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hope that this dissertation will satisfy him and offer him some delights. The other veteran scholar on the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement is Wei Yingtao, who had produced a number of first-rate works on this subject. I thank him for his generous encouragement.

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The Making of Modern Chinese Politics
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by

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

University of California, San Diego, 2009

Professor Joseph W. Esherick, Co-Chair
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My dissertation studies the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement in 1911. What I see in this movement is the invention of the new rhetoric and the new political repertoires (such as mass media, demonstrations, public meetings, speeches, and numerous revolutionary pamphlets) that emerged in China during the first decade of the twentieth century. The rhetoric centered on the issue of “*quan*,” which included both political rights and economic rights. The discourse of tax became linked to notions of

mastership (*zhu*) of the polity.

Drawing upon archival sources, diaries, memoirs, correspondence, transcripts of meetings, bank reports, account books, and propaganda pamphlets and newspapers, I argue that the Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan entailed unprecedented grassroots participation. The movement experience was filtered through the media to create a new political community, which transformed the ways in which politics were conducted in China. To be more specific, the old, bureaucratic imperial political culture was abandoned in favor of a popular republicanism in which elected assemblymen, students, intellectuals, and other local elites collaborated and competed in creating a new polity and a new understanding of the Chinese nation. In a broader sense, my dissertation contributes to the understanding of how the world became a world of nation states and how Chinese people responded to that transformation.

Introduction

The 1911 Revolution overthrew the Qing ruling house and ended two thousand years of imperial dominance in China. In the field of modern Chinese history, the year 1911 has long been considered the beginning of the modern era. Scholars argue that during the 1911 Revolution, popular nationalist and republican sentiment effectively invigorated urban elites, including young intellectuals, students of new schools, New Army soldiers, national merchants, and some other urban residents. After the revolution, it is believed, the sentiment that had fed the enthusiasms in 1911 was frustrated. Leaders of the revolution degenerated into self-serving warlords, the old masters came back to power, and China entered a dark age.¹

Probably no one has portrayed this image of the 1911 Revolution more powerfully and poignantly than Lu Xun in his masterpiece, *The True Story of Ah Q*. Ah Q is a typical Chinese peasant. During the 1911 Revolution, in his hometown, Wei Village, Ah Q warmly embraces the revolution, enthusiastically cuts his queue, and for the first time in his life tastes the glory of being a master (*zhuren*). Ah Q is exhilarated: Even the forever-condescending landlord Master Zhao has to respectfully address Ah Q with a new title, “Old Q” (*Lao Q*). However, all this happiness for Ah Q is short-lived. The Revolution swiftly passes Ah Q’s life like a gust of wind; except for the cutting of

¹ I use the term “Sichuan Railway Protection Movement” consistently throughout my dissertation. I think this is the term that best describes the event happened in Sichuan in the year of 1911. At the same time, I do think Sichuan’s event is part of the general political change happened in China in 1911, which has been called “the 1911 Revolution.” In order to better engage with the historiography and to better situate Sichuan in China, both terms will be used in the dissertation. “Sichuan Railway Protection Movement” or “movement” refers to the specific event happened in Sichuan, and “1911 Revolution” refers to the general political story of China.

the queue, nothing has changed. Soon, the same old people take back power in Wei Village. Landlords still go after tenants for rent, and except for the fact that now people are shot rather than getting their heads chopped off, everything is the same. And Ah Q dies, in front of a firing squad, framed for stealing Master Zhao's property.

Lu Xun's piercing critique of the 1911 Revolution resonates with the general scholarly understanding of the event. The persisting and conventional wisdom is that the 1911 Revolution was a failure despite the fact that it overthrew the longest-lasting imperial system in human history, established a republic, and introduced to a wider group of Chinese people the vital conceptions of rights, republicanism, and democracy. It is believed that the revolution failed because it did not penetrate into China's countryside. It failed because it did not finish the difficult task of fighting against imperialism and authoritarianism and it did not change the social and the cultural structure of China. Nevertheless, my study of the events in Sichuan in 1911 challenges this rendering of the revolution.

I. The Events of 1911 in Sichuan

In the summer of 1911, an unprecedented mass movement took place in Chengdu, the capital city of the inland province of Sichuan. Once the Qing court announced its policy of nationalizing the privately-owned Chuan-Han Railway Company and its decision to incur foreign loans to pay for it, the entire city was agitated. For the first time, commoners joined the elite in one political organization, the Sichuan Railway Protection Association (*Sichuan baolu tongzhihui*). Branches of the Association according to neighborhood, occupation, gender, and social group mushroomed at an

astonishing speed. The Children's Street Branch, the Women's Branch, the Students' Branch, the Mechanical Workers' and Printers' Branch, the Silk Guild Branch, and even the Beggars' Branch were all set up in less than a month's time. Chengdu residents eagerly joined the branches, attended public meetings, listened to speeches, read newsletters, and contributed money. Painters, elementary school children, sedan-chair carriers, rickshaw pullers, policemen, artisans, blind performers, and prostitutes all donated their savings. Buddhist and Daoist monks, Christians, Muslims, tribal leaders of the Qiang minority, and also Manchus, all participated with great enthusiasm.²

The leadership of the Railway Protection Movement consisted of the "constitutionalists"; its backbone was a group of Sichuan provincial assemblymen (*ziyiju yiyuan*). They controlled the lucrative Chengdu branch of the railway company, and, to a large degree, they initiated the movement to protect their own interests from the central government. It was they who first organized the Railway Protection Association and masterminded the effective propaganda campaign under one slogan, "to recover the railway and to break the [foreign-loan] treaty" (*baolu poyue*). The official publication of the Railway Protection Association, *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association*, gained extensive distribution. Produced every day, it had a circulation of up to fifteen thousand copies per issue.³ Sold at the price of one cent and sometimes given for free, these newsletters secured a stable and wide-ranging audience, among whom ordinary Chengdu residents were a significant part. Importantly, the movement leaders

² In Dai Zhili 1994, 695-729, 1015-1079.

³ Wang Di, *Street Culture in Chengdu: Public Space, Urban Commoners, and Local Politics, 1870-1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 213.

made a great effort to send the newsletters to outlying counties: they did not haphazardly dispatch random people to do the job; rather, they meticulously selected those who were capable in public speaking and were well-connected in the locale. Moreover, these Chengdu leaders equipped their emissaries with sufficient travel fare; a number of the newsletters, whose contents they could use as talking points; and also personal connections that would help these delegates on the ground. As a result, branches of the Railway Protection Association were quickly established in various counties in Sichuan, conveying their messages and mobilizing people of the entire province.

The rhetoric of the railway movement was both fresh and powerful. The *Newsletter* conveyed the concept of popular sovereignty (*minquan*) and expressed a strong sentiment against authoritarianism. Ordinary people began participating in politics: a sedan-chair carrier donated his hard-earned money to the movement, proclaiming that “coolies are citizens too” [*suishu xiali, yi xi guomin fenzi*].⁴ Equally important, the rhetoric urged the Qing court to go through the rightful legal process in conducting political affairs. It argued that the court’s unilateral decision to incur foreign loans and nationalize the railway company without permission from the National Assembly (*guohui*) was wrong and unlawful. In essence, the rhetoric created common values for the people of Sichuan and mounted a severe challenge to the authority of the Qing government.

Sichuan people responded to the call of the movement leaders with action. More than 62 counties in Sichuan had Railway Protection Association branches, and when the

⁴ *Baogao*, no.33, August 14, 1911.

Qing government insisted on taking over the railway company without offering fair compensation, the movement became more contentious.⁵ In Chengdu, commoners contributed to the movement by taking part in a market strike. In the countryside and outlying counties, people followed with acts of tax resistance.⁶ The protests reached their climax on September 7, 1911, when the Qing acting governor-general arrested the major leaders of the movement. Upon hearing the news, Chengdu residents immediately gathered to demonstrate. Tens of thousands of memorial tablets for the late Guangxu emperor were hung outside houses and shops. The placards quoted the late emperor: “National policies should follow public opinion. Let the railway return to private management.”⁷ These Chengdu residents, who had rarely been a part of public politics before, were transformed into political actors. After the acting governor-general’s forces killed twenty-six demonstrators on September 7, the movement became a full-fledged insurgency all over Sichuan. Messages about the massacre were soon disseminated to the outside world via thousands of “river telegrams.”⁸ In a few days, the Railway Protection Army made up of tens of thousands of fighters gathered outside the city wall, ready to capture Chengdu. As to the total number of movement participants, one eyewitness

⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1433-1427.

⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 887-937.

⁷ This quotation is from Mary Rankin, “Nationalistic contestation and mobilization politics: practice and rhetoric of railway-rights recovery at the end of the Qing,” *Modern China*, 28.3 (2002): 337.

⁸ Shall explain in Chapter Six.

argued that at least one hundred thousand Sichuanese had joined.⁹ The battles lasted for more than three months. With numerous armies from neighboring provinces involved, Sichuan was crucial to the entire situation of China. By this point, the movement was out of the hands of the constitutional elite and became the prelude to the collapse of the Qing.

It is not at all clear why historians in most cases underestimate this important event, despite its obvious significance. The important *Tongmenghui* (Revolutionary Alliance) leader Song Jiaoren, who was not a Sichuanese, wrote on September 14, 1911, praising the fortitude and solidarity that Sichuan people had demonstrated: “Sichuan people, ever since it [the Railway Movement] started, have been enduringly persistent. They have been in opposition to the government for over two months. The strength of their will and the power of their determination are extraordinary. All this the people in Hunan, Hubei, and Guangdong cannot compare to.” Song Jiaoren thus encouraged revolutionaries of these provinces to take up arms and join the people of Sichuan, “to overturn the evils of despotism and build up a strong republic.”¹⁰ Revolutionary leaders recognized the chance that the Sichuan movement had created for other provinces to advance revolutionary agendas. In fact, Sichuan’s movement propelled revolutionary movements in many of China’s provinces and such impact was sufficiently noted by revolutionaries such as Song Jiaoren, Huang Xing, and Sun Yat-sen and well documented in sources on revolutionary movements in Yunnan, Shaanxi, Hubei, and Hunan

⁹ Huang Shou, unpublished memoir. Bought from the flea market in Chengdu, originally stored in Sichuan Wenshiguan [Sichuan Literature and History Bureau], 2000 pages. No clear page number.

¹⁰ *Minlibao*, September 14, 1911. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 593.

provinces. In 1911, Sichuan set in motion the 1911 Revolution nationwide.

Even less attention has been paid to the fundamental change that the 1911 Revolution brought to the local people in Sichuan. In Da county in east Sichuan, the Republican era ushered in a new society. Its gazetteer records that “ever since the establishment of the Republic, people of the traditional four classes (gentry, peasants, artisans and merchants) came to be equal to one another: the society was forever changed.”¹¹ In Luzhou prefecture in south Sichuan, traditional gentry wrote with great anxiety: “After the first year of Republican China, about six or seven out of ten people supported the old values. The rest of the people mistakenly believed in the notions of equality (*pingdeng*) and liberty (*ziyou*). Gradually, the old morals withered and died out because of [new values].”¹² The gazetteers demonstrate that a significant number of people in Sichuan were exposed to new ideologies and that many accepted the new ideas and the new political legitimacy. Furthermore, the relation between the ruler and the ruled was seriously altered. “Nowadays, as county chief executives try a case, the people stand rather than kneel. The county chief executives thus have no authority that keeps the ruled in awe (*wu wei kewe*).”¹³ In the private space of the lives of ordinary people, the 1911 Revolution ushered in a new way for them to relate to and to interact with each other. The hierarchical distinctions between elder and younger, male and female, became obscured: “The order was lost. There was no distinction between masters and servants or between the upper and lower groups (*zunbei shangxia wufen*). This situation was even

¹¹ *Xuxiu Daxianzhi*, vol.9 “Fengsu” [Customs]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 595.

¹² *Luxianzhi*, vol.3 “Fengsu” [Customs]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 595.

¹³ *Hechuan xianzhi*, vol.25 “Zhengfa” [Politics and laws]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 595.

more severe than in the late Qing.”¹⁴ In addition, people bowed and shook hands when addressing each other. No kneeling was allowed.¹⁵ To say the least, in rituals, cultural habits, and discourses, greater equality prevailed.

Even today, Sichuan people remember the movement. The monument memorializing the martyrs of the Railway Protection Movement still stands upright at the heart of Chengdu and serves as a major landmark for the city. To many Sichuan people, the event was crucial to their identity and their local pride: it made ordinary people heroes and put Sichuan on the map of China. Even today, Sichuan residents, when showing outsiders around, often bring them to the monument. And still, local students pay tribute to this monument regularly.¹⁶

Contemporary observers have continued to remark on Sichuan’s movement, but have generally agreed that the movement was unfinished, and in effect, failed. In the 1980s, S.A.M. Adshhead’s book on the administration of Sichuan governors-general illustrated the movement’s general story line, yet it shed little light on why the movement could bring all sorts of people from all walks of life together and last as long as it did.¹⁷ When it comes to Sichuan, some scholars, focusing on the deep involvement of the secret society, the Sworn Brothers (*paoge*) considered it an old-style rebellion by local

¹⁴ *Anxianzhi*, vol.55: “Lisu” [Rituals and customs]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 595.

¹⁵ *Hechuan xianzhi*, vol.25: “Zhengfa” [Legal issues]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 596.

¹⁶ Author interviews with Chengdu citizens in People’s Park of Chengdu, where the monument is located, September 25, 2006.

¹⁷ S.A.M. Adshhead, *Province and Politics in Late Imperial China* (London and Malmö: Curzon Press Ltd, 1984).

peasants.¹⁸ Sichuan regional historians, Dai Zhili and Wei Yingtao, to name but two, have done great work in discovering sources and made a substantial contribution in illuminating this crucial event.¹⁹ They notice the role of the constitutional elite and give the movement a more positive evaluation. Yet, because of the still sensitive political atmosphere and restrictive ideological conditions in China, these scholars cannot voice their statements as freely as they wish. Points that had first been made by political leaders such as Mao Zedong and Wu Yuzhang—for example, the leading role of the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*)—have to be emphasized and certain conclusions—for example, the “incomplete and unsuccessful” nature of the 1911 Revolution—have to be reached.²⁰ Recently, two Sichuan-born scholars researching in the United States have returned to this topic and shed new light on the political culture

¹⁸ Mary Wright, ed., *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 47.

¹⁹ For example, Dai Zhili 1994 and Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing.

²⁰ Author interview with Professor Wei Yingtao on September 10, 2004. Mao Zedong argued in his famous article “Xin minzhu zhuyi lun” [On the new democratic revolution]: “The 1911 Revolution was a great revolution, and ... its failure lies in the weakness of the nationalist bourgeois class.” Quoted in Wu Yuzhang, *Xinhai geming* [The 1911 Revolution] (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1960). Wu Yuzhang’s book was first written in 1960 and was among the first historical works that defended the Maoist interpretation of the 1911 Revolution. In this book, Wu argues that the social context of the 1911 Revolution is the result of the development of capitalism in China: “Though the bourgeoisie appeared around the 1880s, at the beginning of the twentieth century, it became a class.... In the year 1906, there were 136 enterprises owed by nationalist bourgeoisie.” This sets the tone for the study of the 1911 Revolution in mainland China. The very comprehensive and high-quality standard historical works, such as Jin Chongji and Hu Shengwu’s *Xinhai geming shigao* [The draft history of the 1911 Revolution] and Li Xin’s *Zhonghua mingquoshi* [History of republican China] all make great efforts to examine the situation of the cities and the newly-born bourgeoisie of China at that time.

that this movement entailed.²¹ Still, systematic study of this crucial event has not yet been done.

Differing from treatments that marvel at the involvement of the secret society and accounts that make certain political claims, my study tries to understand the process of the movement and how power arose in the movement. I examine how change was brought to Sichuan and investigate the nature of that change. To do so, I examine the orientations and the processes of this movement. My study argues that the 1911 Revolution in Sichuan, i.e., the Railway Protection Movement, established a new political legitimacy—a new norm in conducting politics. Starting as a movement centered in Chengdu and focusing on protecting the railways, it expanded to the entire province of Sichuan and widened its concerns to include issues of popular sovereignty and constitutionalism.²² It involved unprecedented grassroots participation. The revolutionary experience was filtered through the media to create a new political community, transforming the ways in which politics was conducted in the early twentieth century. In a broad sense, this study contributes to the understanding of how the world became a world of nation-states and how Chinese people responded to that transformation, abandoning a bureaucratic imperial political culture in favor of a popular republicanism in which elected assemblymen, students, intellectuals, local bosses, and others cooperated and competed to produce a new understanding of politics and the

²¹ Wang Di, *Street Culture in Chengdu*. Li Danke, “Popular Culture in the Making of Anti-Imperialist and Nationalist Sentiments in Sichuan,” *Modern China* 30.4 (2004): 470-505.

²² Huang Shou, unpublished memoir.

nation.

I begin here by addressing some of the major historiographical and theoretical issues that this study engages. First, I examine the debate over the 1911 Revolution in the field of modern Chinese history. Second, I engage with studies of the complex notion of *quan* or *quanli* (rights) that have been focused primarily on theoretical writings of the late-Qing and Republican intellectuals. While *quan* and *quanli* were crucial for important thinkers like Liang Qichao in advocating political and social changes, my study reveals that these concepts did not exist only on paper. The discourse of rights had important organizational and economic consequences. Finally, as an in-depth examination of an important political movement invigorated by notions of anti-imperialism and anti-despotism, this study extends our understanding of the emergence of modern Chinese politics and the modern Chinese nation-state.

II. The 1911 Revolution: Past Scholarship

During the first nearly one hundred years since the 1911 Revolution, scholars, both in China and in the western world, have tended to measure the impact of the 1911 Revolution in terms of the “success” or “failure” of the revolutionaries. These scholars argue that the 1911 Revolution was an aborted revolution. Particularly, the 1911 Revolution failed as Sun Yat-sen failed and Yuan Shikai and other warlord-like reactionaries “stole the fruit” of the revolution and took power. In fact, all three major scholarly interpretations in the China field share this view.

The first interpretation appeared right after the republic was founded and attributed the revolution to the revolutionaries, specifically to Sun Yat-sen. Initiated by

supporters of Sun, this explanation later developed into the orthodox school.²³ In later years, scholars began to challenge this Sun-centered argument,²⁴ and works on revolutionary groups other than the Revolutionary Alliance also appeared.²⁵ However, with this focus on the beliefs and behavior of the revolutionary leaders, the wider experience of the 1911 Revolution was ignored.

Second, and also dominant, is the sociological interpretation, including both Marxian and “revisionist” analyses. In the Marxian account, the 1911 Revolution was bourgeois in nature because its origins were bourgeois. The revolution is typically

²³ Zou Lu’s *Zhongguo Guomindang shigao* [Draft history of the Chinese National Party], published in 1929, is a typical example of this interpretation. Even in collecting historical sources, the Revolutionary Alliance activities were these historians’ only consideration. For example, the source collections compiled by the KMT on the Sichuan 1911 Revolution, such as *Zhongguo Guomindang Sichuan dangshi cailiao* [The KMT History in Sichuan] and the most comprehensive collection *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu* [The Record of the campaigns of Sichuan martyrs], traced the activities only of Revolutionary Alliance members. Also, see Winston Hsieh, *Chinese Historiography on the Revolution of 1911: A Critical Survey and a Selected Bibliography* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1975), 5. As Hsieh argues in his critical review of 1911 Revolution studies in China, this Sun-centered interpretation emerged when Sun needed urgently to build up his reputation: “The challenge to his leadership from his own ranks ... spurred Sun’s group to claim his undisputed leadership and seniority in the whole revolutionary movement” (18). After Chiang Kai-shek, a follower in Sun’s clique, came into power in 1928, this theory became even more dominant in the KMT history books.

²⁴ K.S. Liew, *Struggle for democracy: Sung Chiao-jen and the 1911 Chinese Revolution*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971). Winston Hsieh, *Chinese Historiography on the Revolution of 1911*. Joseph Esherick, “1911: A review,” *Modern China*, 2.2 (1976): 141-184.

²⁵ Zhang Pengyuan, *Lixianpai yu Xinhai geming* [Constitutionalists and the 1911 Revolution] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1969). Michael Gasster, *Chinese Intellectuals and the Revolution of 1911: The Birth of Modern Chinese Radicalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1969). Mary Rankin, *Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chekiang, 1902-1911* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). Zhang Yufa, *Qingji de geming tuanti* [Revolutionaries of the late Ch’ing period: an analysis of groups in the revolutionary movement 1894-1911] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1982).

described as one in which the bourgeoisie led the masses to topple the Qing ruling house; either the Revolutionary Alliance or the constitutional elite is regarded as the political representative of the growing bourgeoisie.²⁶ The revisionist sociological interpretation comes mainly from western scholars, who argue that the revolution itself was fundamentally rooted in the long-term political changes in local society, especially the new and expanded functions of the local elite. Chuzo Ichiko argues that the 1911 Revolution was a movement of gentry fighting for their self-preservation; on the other hand, Mary Wright notices the new social origins of the movement, the newly elected assemblymen and new army officers.²⁷ Also focusing on the local elite, Joseph Esherick attributes the revolution to new urban elite reformists, while Edward Rhoads finds its origin in the treaty port mercantile elite.²⁸ Overall, the revisionist position challenges the Marxian account that valorizes the bourgeois class, but it still implicitly accepts the focus on the elite class and the preoccupation with the sociological origins of the 1911 Revolution. Thus, by focusing on the prior economic and social origins, the social interpretation overlooks the realm of ideas whereby new political consciousness and new political communities took shape.

²⁶ Wu Yuzhang, *Xinhai Geming* [The 1911 Revolution]. Wei Yingtao, *Sichuan baolu yundong shi* [History of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1981). Li Xin, *Zhonghua minguo shi* [History of Republican China] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981).

²⁷ Chuzo Ichiko, "The role of the gentry: a hypothesis," in Mary Wright, ed., *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968). And Mary Wright, "Introduction," in Mary Wright, ed., *China in Revolution*.

²⁸ Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution: the 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976). Edward Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: the Case of Kwantung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).

The last interpretation is the modernization framework. In this account, the focus is no longer on a specific social group that led the revolution, but rather on state-building. In her comparative study of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions, Theda Skocpol highlights the theme of the state creating a modern edifice when facing military humiliation and international competition.²⁹ In interpreting China's Railway Movement, Lee En-han and Kristen Stapleton treat the movement as a conflict of the different modernization agendas of central officials and provincial elite.³⁰ For these scholars, the 1911 Revolution is a brief interruption of the longer and more fundamental modernization process. The experience of the movement itself remains unexamined.

In sum, little has been written on the broader political and cultural experience of the revolutionary process itself. The common purpose, the overlapping interests, and the values that movement leaders created in mobilizing the masses are unexamined. The involvement of the commoners, the building of the solidarity between the elite and the masses, and the reasons why such collective action endured in the 1911 Revolution remain a mystery.

This study aims to investigate these territories. Methodologically, my study resonates with the new cultural history school, which emphasizes new forms of political repertoires and their long-lasting effects in history. In particular, in the field of the

²⁹ Theda Skocpol, *States and Social revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

³⁰ Li Enhan, "Wanqing shouhui liquan yundong yu lixian yundong" [The sovereignty recovering movement and the constitutional movement in the late Qing], *Jindai Zhongguo shishi yanjiu lunji* [Articles on modern Chinese history] (Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yinshuguan, 1982), vol.2, 84-100. Kristin Stapleton, *Civilizing Chengdu: Chinese Urban Reform, 1895-1937* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

French Revolution, historians like Lynn Hunt have looked at political culture to go beyond the old social class history.³¹ Drawing upon Hunt's formulation of "political culture," namely, "the values, expectations, and implicit rules that expressed and shaped collective intentions and actions," I place attention not only on the professed intentions of movement leaders, but also on the actual reactions to the propaganda of the masses. Like Lynn Hunt, I also aim at rehabilitating the political process. In this process of the 1911 Revolution, how were new political identities forged? How was political authority redefined and the social contract renegotiated? How did the ways in which individuals interact with the state change?

III. Rethinking Revolution: What is Revolution?

If this study adds to our knowledge of the 1911 Revolution in modern Chinese history, it should also allow us to rethink how we should study revolution. In fact, Mao Zedong himself changed radically in his understanding of the 1911 Revolution. In the 1946 version of the *Collected Works of Mao Zedong*, we see Mao Zedong highly praising the impact of the 1911 Revolution, crediting it with having first introduced ideas of democracy and having enlightened people with the concept of republicanism; yet in his 1952 version, he downplays the revolution's influence and emphasizes that only with the formation of the Communist Party could a "true revolution" occur. What is revolution?

³¹ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class in the French Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984). Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New cultural history* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

Is, as it would be under Mao's definition, a class struggle that eliminates a social class and overhauls the social structure a "true revolution?"³²

In the twentieth century great revolutions tragically degenerated into dictatorship and despotism. What, then, is the effect of revolution? How should we understand and evaluate a revolution? On this account, I am indebted to Michel Foucault's revived thinking on revolution, at a time when "revolutionary study has gone astray." In his Enlightenment lectures, Foucault took up this question after the revolutionary era and asked: How might we continue critically thinking about and reinventing the political, after the hopes of a revolution that had gone astray?

Foucault turned to Kant's 1789 text "What is Revolution?" for inspiration. As Foucault points out, Kant was reflecting on the dramatic actuality of the French Revolution. Kant believed that it is not revolutionary upheaval that constitutes the proof of progress: "It matters little if it [the revolutionary upheaval] succeeds or fails, it matters little if it accumulates misery and atrocity."³³ Foucault, inspired by Kant, then writes: "It is not the revolutionary process which is important...The failure or success of the revolution are not signs of progress or a sign that there is no progress."³⁴ Rather, "what is significant is the manner in which the Revolution turns into a spectacle" and "the way in which it is received all around by spectators who do not participate in it but who watch it, who attend the show and who, for better or worse, let themselves be dragged along by

³² Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong xuanji* [Collected Works of Mao Zedong] (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1952), vol.1, 17.

³³ Immanuel Kant "What is Revolution?" In Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth* (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 2007), 90.

³⁴ Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 90.

it.”³⁵ The revolution exists as a spectacle and as a repository for the enthusiasm of those who watch it.

Both Kant and Foucault link revolution to the longer process of Enlightenment. For example, Foucault writes, “We also know very well that a political constitution willingly chosen by the people and a political constitution that avoids war are the two elements that constitute the very process of the Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*).” “The revolution is what effectively completes and continues the process of the Enlightenment, and the revolution consists of events that can no longer be forgotten.”³⁶ Even though the revolution in any case “will always risk falling back into the old rut,” still, the process and means by which the revolution is “conducted attests to a permanent virtuality” and cannot be forgotten.³⁷ Therefore, to study revolution is not to determine which part of the revolution would be most fitting to preserve as a model, or to determine what is the standard for a successful revolution. Rather, the question is: how are people influenced by revolution and what have they learned from it? Foucault also materializes the abstract notion of Enlightenment and gives it a realistic touch.³⁸ He stresses the act, the practice, and the technique of Enlightenment. In addition, he argues that Enlightenment belongs to

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 92.

³⁷ Immanuel Kant “What is Revolution?” Quoted from Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 92.

³⁸ And Lynn Hunt too.

no “prior group”; rather, what is essential for Enlightenment is “a critical attitude,” which is something that exists only when people actually engage in it.³⁹

These insights have helped me a great deal in understanding the story in Sichuan. Following Foucault and Lynn Hunt, I also investigate the act, the practice, and the technique that were used in the 1911 Revolution. Foucault’s critical thinking on revolution and French historians’ (Lynn Hunt in particular) emphasis on the revolutionary process have inspired me to move away from concerns with the fixed social parameters of a revolutionary class that have dominated the debates on the 1911 Revolution in the field of modern Chinese history. Also, rather than being confined by the short-term outcomes of the revolution, which also dominated the earlier debates on the 1911 Revolution, I believe that we historians need to look more closely into the long-term legacies of revolution.⁴⁰

In addition, the Foucauldian conception of “eventalization” has also helped me understand a revolutionary event without reducing it to certain preset models. It is not that historians should not think of the issue of “origins”; rather, it is that we should not be reductive. Foucault himself, in his later years, attempted to theorize what he called “eventalization,” that is, the phenomenon in history whereby various dispersed practices end up coalescing to the point where they form an “event” or a rupture in the historical

³⁹ Michel Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, 14-15.

⁴⁰ Wang Di’s work on Sichuan has shown that some ideas that were disseminated during the revolution did persist in republican China. The story in Sichuan has shown that if we look at a longer range of history and look at people’s real activities on the ground, we see that beyond the warlord battles, a rather vibrant civic life did exist in Sichuan after the 1911 Revolution. Using a local author’s words written in May 1928, “Workers of Chengdu obviously have their own consciousness.” In Wang Di, *Street Culture*, 243.

continuum that introduces a whole new way of thinking or of doing things. Given an “event,” the job of the historian is to make sense of its appearance by revealing all of the different and contradictory factors that made it possible.⁴¹

In the event that happened in Sichuan in 1911, movement leaders used new ideas, techniques, strategies, and organizations to fight for their oppositional political cause. This dissertation analyzes the development of the new ideas, the new “protest repertoires,” that is, the political-cultural inventions (rituals, languages, and symbols), and the new organizations. I argue that the revolutionary experience was filtered through the media of protest repertoires to create a new political community, which transformed the way in which politics was conducted in the early twentieth century in China and afterward.⁴² In the process that occurred in 1911, Sichuan people were liberating themselves: members of the secret society went public, elites were demanding their share of power in the decision-making process, and even women decided to become part of an open fight. Overall, the spirit was: We can no longer be ruled like passive subjects of an

⁴¹ “Eventalization means making visible a singularity at places where there is a temptation to invoke a historical constant, an immediate anthropological trait or an obviousness that imposes itself uniformly on all. To show that things weren’t necessary as all that; it wasn’t as a matter of course that mad people came to be regarded as mentally ill; it wasn’t self-evident that the only thing to be done with a criminal was to lock them up; it wasn’t self-evident that the causes of illness were to be sought through individual examination of bodies; and so on. A breach of self-evidence, of those self-evidences on which our knowledges, acquiescences and practices rest: this is the first theoretico-political function of eventalization. It means uncovering the procedure of causal multiplication: analyzing an event according to the multiple processes that constitute it.” Michel Foucault, “Impossible Prison,” in Michel Foucault, *Foucault Live: Interviews, 1966-84* (Los Angeles: Semiotext (e), 1996), 277.

⁴² Lynn Hunt’s approach is also inspired by Foucault. The field of history has gone beyond the sociological mode, which is well argued in Lynn Hunt, ed., *The New Cultural History*, introduction.

emperor. By the end of the revolution, Sichuan people learned new values and ideologies, which helped them form a feisty opposition against the state authority. After the 1911 Revolution, the emperor, whose legitimacy used to come from Heaven and had existed for more than two thousand years, was forever gone. Rather than being confined by the short-term outcomes of the 1911 Revolution, I treat the 1911 Revolution as a lens through which to assess significant political transformation that happened in Sichuan. And in doing so, I urge readers to think: What is the event that is called “revolution?”

IV. The Ideas, the Discourse of *Quan*, and the Relation between Ideology and Practice

Even though the 1911 Revolution as a topic has fallen out of favor for decades, studies of the intellectual and cultural trends of the late Qing and early Republic have been plentiful. Starting with Joseph Levenson’s *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* in 1965, scholars have explored changes that happened between the late Qing and the Republican period and argued that there was a fundamental change in Chinese intellectualism. Over the years, the focus has been on the more prolific writers, influential thinkers, and visionary activists. Starting from Benjamin Schwartz on Yan Fu, there are Jung-pang Lo and Hsiao Kung-chuan on Kang Youwei. Of course, Liang Qichao received even greater attention. The most comprehensive and balanced monograph on Liang’s early thought is by Chang Hao. A more recent study focusing on Liang’s nationalism and his views of the past is by Tang Xiaobing.⁴³ The Japanese

⁴³ Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1964). Lo Jung-pang, ed., *K’ang Yu-Wei: A Biography and a Symposium* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1967). Hsiao Kung-chuan, *A*

influences on Liang are discussed in Joshua Fogel.⁴⁴ In addition, there are studies on Zhang Binglin.⁴⁵ Recently, a new generation of scholars went beyond the confined sphere of “great thinkers” and extended intellectual history to the broader cultural history. The role of journalism and mass culture in the late Qing is well discussed by Li Xiaoti and Joan Judge.⁴⁶ In addition, essays in Peter Zarrow and Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua Goldstein examine the relationships between ideologies and practice.⁴⁷ These studies provide important background for understanding the intellectual and cultural ambiance of the 1911 Revolution that was to come.

In particular, some scholars have explicitly applied approaches learned from the new cultural history school and contributed to our understanding of how ideas, especially key concepts such as *quan* (rights), were spread and publicized. Joan Judge and

Modern China and a New World: K'ang Yu-wei, Reformer and Utopian, 1858-1927 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1975). Chang Hao, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1971). Tang Xiaobing, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

⁴⁴ Joshua Fogel, *Late Qing China and Meiji Japan: Political and Cultural Aspects* (Norwalk: EastBridge, 2004).

⁴⁵ Wong Young-tsu, *Search for Modern Nationalism: Zhang Binglin and Revolutionary China, 1869-1936* (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1989). Charlotte Furth, “The Sage as Rebel: The Inner World of Chang Ping-lin” in Charlotte Furth, ed., *The Limits of Change: Essays on Conservative Alternatives in Republican China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), 22-53.

⁴⁶ Li Xiaoti, *Qingmo xiacen shehui qimeng yundong 1901-1911* [The late Qing popular enlightenment movement, 1901-1911] (Taibei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan, 1992). Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: Shibao and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

⁴⁷ Peter Zarrow, ed., *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006). Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua Goldstine, *Everyday Modernity in China* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

Henrietta Harrison are two wonderful examples and have made fresh discoveries concerning a new political culture that emerged in China from the late Qing period. Joan Judge notes that from the end of the Qing Dynasty, reformers such as Liang Qichao avidly promoted the notion of public opinion, a concept that was adapted from western political discourses and transferred to China. Liang and other publicists theorized that public opinion was to be the basis of imperial reform and modernization. Henrietta Harrison, applying Lynn Hunt's method, challenges the view that the 1911 Revolution was an elite affair and argues that the notion of citizenship was demonstrated through republican rituals after the 1911 Revolution.⁴⁸ The studies of reform culture have enhanced our understanding of the discourse of *quan*. They also have begun to challenge the artificial divide between the 1911 revolutionaries and reformers.

Nevertheless, there is still a disconnect between the specific political dynamics and the culture of reform of the late Qing. How Liang Qichao's ideas were introduced and how they operated on the ground remains poorly understood, and the study of the notion of *quan* has been limited to the level of rhetoric. While *quan* had been crucial for scholars like Liang Qichao in advocating political and social changes, my study reveals that the concept of *quan* was not confined just to writings. "Political rights," "people's rights," and the discourse of "rights" in general had important organizational and economic consequences. I explore how ideas and practice interacted with and influenced one another.

⁴⁸ Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

V. Chinese Nationalism

Even in 2009, Chinese nationalism is still a catchword and a sentiment central to China's domestic and international politics. In a flurry of events that happened in 2008—the Tibetan riots and the following upsurge of Han ultranationalism, the devastating Sichuan earthquake, and the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games—nationalism was a crucial force vital to China's political configuration. It was also a driving force for Chinese history in the twentieth century. Nationalism energized movement politics, and they together led to the success of the Communist Revolution. Even today, when a reforming China is saying farewell to revolution, movement politics and nationalism remain.⁴⁹

Over the past three decades, there has been a continuing interest in nationalism among scholars around the world. Pathbreaking theoretical and historical works produced by scholars such as Benedict Anderson, Ernest Gellner, and Eric Hobsbawm keep forcing historians to think critically about concepts like the nation, the modern nation-state, and nationalism. Scholars seem to have reached an agreement that nationalism is a recent cultural artifact, whose construction started in eighteenth-century Europe and Americas and which gradually spread to the rest of the world. However,

⁴⁹ Recent scholarship such as Jonathan Unger (1996), Zheng Yongnian (2004), and Peter Hays Gries (2004) all discuss the importance of nationalism in today's China. Mass nationalism was seen most recently in May 1999, after U.S. planes inadvertently bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade. According to Peter Hays Gries: "The protests were actually an overwhelmingly bottom-up phenomenon; the Party had its hands full simply responding to the demands of popular nationalists." "In over 100 Chinese cities, Chinese citizens of all ages and backgrounds protested the bombing, while the authorities struggled to contain the unrest." Jonathan Unger, ed., *Chinese Nationalism* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1996). Zheng Yongnian, *Globalization and State Transformation in China* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Peter Hays Gries, *China's New Nationalism: Pride, Politics, and Diplomacy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

China seems to fit poorly into this general perception. As a political and cultural entity, China can be considered to stretch back two millennia, comprising a civilization and an empire. Moreover, as historian Jonathan Unger puts it, “unlike much of Europe, China was not carved out of a welter of remnant feudal suzerainties and city-states.... So, too, unlike the great bulk of the present-day nations of the Third World, China was not originally cobbled together by a western colonial power out of a congeries of disparate peoples.”⁵⁰ Theorists seem to have a hard time making sense of the China experience, and China is usually treated in “cursory and sometimes ill-informed ways.”⁵¹

Scholars in the China field have responded to the new theories on nationalism. They reexamined China’s nation-building process, and some controverted the conventional wisdom, namely, the prevailing “culturalism-to-nationalism” explanation. Influenced by Joseph Levenson, a definition emerged of China as “a center of civilization,” and as Henrietta Harrison puts it, “loyalty to this cultural China was not an attachment to any particular state, but a commitment to humane and civilized values.”⁵² The other general belief derived from this “culturalism-to-nationalism” explanation was that during the Republican period, China had somehow become a modern nation and a part of the modern world made up of other nations. A transition happened, and Chinese identity was transformed from “cultural” to “national.” Under this logic, the new Chinese nation had a

⁵⁰ Jonathan Unger, *Chinese Nationalism*, xii.

⁵¹ Peter Harris, “Chinese Nationalism: the State of the Nation,” *The China Journal* no.38 (1997), 123.

⁵² Henrietta Harrison, *Inventing the Nation: China* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 3.

strong and natural link with its cultural past, and Chinese nationalism had originated in Chinese culturalism.

No matter how plausible and comfortable the culturalist logic is, it faces unsympathetic scrutiny under the critical lens of the new theories on nationalism. Among these critical theorists, Benedict Anderson is arguably the most influential. Anderson does not see “nation” to be “a soul, a spiritual principle,” or “a large-scale solidarity, constituted by the feelings of the sacrifices that one has made in the past and of those that one is prepared to make the future.”⁵³ Rather, he views the nation as imaginary, and he argues that “nationalities, as well as nationalism, are cultural artifacts of a particular kind,” and that “the creation of these artifacts towards the end of the eighteenth century was spontaneous distillation of a complex crossing of discrete historical forces; but that, once created, they became modular, capable of being transplanted, with varying degrees of self-consciousness, to a great variety of social terrains, to merge and be merged with a correspondingly wide variety of political and ideological constellations.”⁵⁴ Not viewing it as an ideology, Anderson understands nationalism from an anthropological approach, and proposes the definition of “nation” as “an imagined political community” that is both “inherently limited and sovereign.”⁵⁵

⁵³ Ernest Renan, “Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?” [What is a nation?], translated and annotated by Martin Thom, in *Nation and Narration* (London: Routledge, 1990), ed. Homi K. Bhabha, 8-22. I read this article from Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Becoming National: A Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 42-55. This quote is from page 53.

⁵⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1991), 4.

⁵⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

The new definition puts forward a refined definition of “nation,” thus leading China scholars to reassess the origin of the modern Chinese nation and nationalism. Following Anderson’s lead, empirical research done by a new generation of scholars has powerfully debunked the notion of an automatic and natural emergence of a Chinese nation and nationalism (Hung 1994; Fitzgerald 1996; Karl 2002). In particular, John Fitzgerald is among the historians who explicitly follow Anderson in studying empirically the formation of Chinese nationalism. Published in 1996, his book *Awakening China* makes a great contribution to the China field. Fitzgerald clearly shows how the nation-state as a cultural artifact was constructed in China. He shows us the detailed account of the creation of mass organization by the Nationalist Party in building a nation, which left a legacy for Chinese Communists. Fitzgerald makes clear that it was only after the establishment of such a powerful propaganda machine that Chinese nationalism in its modern sense—a broad, popular identification with “China” as a sovereignty, a community, and a political entity with limited borders—finally arrived. After Fitzgerald, no one would treat the nation China as a given any more.

As the previous understanding of nationalism is debunked, a new synthesis seems to emerge, represented in Henrietta Harrison’s textbook *China*, which incorporates these research results and establishes a new paradigm in understanding China’s modern history (Harrison 2001). In this book, Harrison argues that although China seems at first sight to be a notable exception to the notion that nation-states were invented as a result of the rise of nationalism as an ideology in the nineteenth century, in fact, its nationhood was invented in a way similar to those that were invented elsewhere. During the course of the nineteenth century, a series of military defeats created a widespread awareness of the

world of nation-states. Responses to this threat led to a division between popular nationalism and the modern nationalism of the elite. At the center of this modern nationalism lay the political parties that arose in the early twentieth century, and by the 1920s, these parties had succeeded in dominating the processes through which the nation was being imagined and invented. In a way, Harrison synthesizes the two generations' understandings by saying: Yes, it is true that there were some popular sentiments like proto-nationalism or popular culturalistic nationalism existing before the twentieth century; however, those sentiments were not the same as the modern nationalism in the twentieth century, which started with the elite, was built by political parties, and finally made China a modern nation-state. To use William Kirby's aphorism, "China is an ancient civilization, but it is a new country."⁵⁶

These recent studies on Chinese history have greatly enhanced our understanding of the emergence of modern Chinese nationalism. Nevertheless, there is the tendency in the China field to treat "state" and "nation" as conflated concepts. For instance, Henrietta Harrison writes that in the nineteenth century Chinese people gradually developed a strong sense of identity focusing around the state. But, what is this "state" that she refers to? With only a few exceptions (such as John Fitzgerald, who clearly differentiates the meaning of "state" from that of "nation"), the relation between modern state-building and modern nation-building and the transition from the old imperial state to a new nation-

⁵⁶ William Kirby, forward to C.X. George Wei and Xiaoyuan Liu, eds., *Exploring Nationalisms of China: Themes and Conflicts* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), vii.

state have not been articulated.⁵⁷ My study ventures to tackle these difficult issues and to provide concrete ways to understand these issues.

One of my goals in this research is to explore the origins of China's mass nationalism and its relation to movement politics. Focusing on the beginning stage of the formation of Chinese nationalism, I aim to explain the nature and characteristics of the primitive elements of mass nationalism and the construction of the nationalist repertoires, which ushered in the rudiments of the later national politics. While scholars have studied mass nationalism only in its full-fledged form in the 1920s and 1930s, this study aims to explore its origins and investigate its initial formation and embodiment in the political culture of the years from 1900 to 1915.

Additionally, when scholars look at the creation of nationalism, regionalism is viewed as an obstacle in forming the national identity, as Donald Sutton shows in the case of the Yunnan army and John Fitzgerald shows in the case of Guangdong. However, scholars seem to forget that beside the "Awakening Inc.," Sun Yat-sen and many others had an alternative vision for the future of China, that is, take the federalist model of the United States, develop each province's power and strength, and then unify China.⁵⁸ In the 1911 Revolution, regionalism was used as a force to mobilize people their home provinces. In the 1920s, regionalism was still seriously considered as a way to rebuild

⁵⁷ Joseph Esherick pointed out in our seminar in October 2004: "If it is only the state that created the nation, what do we do with the May Fourth Movement? What do we do with the Constitutional Reform? For both were anti-state."

⁵⁸ Hu Chunhui, *Minchu de difang zhuyi yu liansheng zizhi yundong* [The regionalism and federalist movement in early Republican China] (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2001).

China. The very complex dynamics between regionalism and nationalism should definitely be taken into consideration and examined more closely. I aim to examine the complex dynamics between regionalism and nationalism in the 1911 Revolution. The case of Sichuan's mass mobilization suggests a reinforcing relationship between the regional and the national identities. In the rhetoric of the movement, protecting the region of Sichuan is simultaneously a form of protecting China as a whole. Moreover, the overseas student magazines in the decade of the 1900s, despite their radical nationalist tone, always took a provincial representation (for example, *Sichuan Magazine*, *Yunnan Magazine*, *Tides of Zhejiang*) and organized according to provincial ties and connections. All these hint toward a buttressing relationship between provincialism and nationalism during this initial formation of the Chinese nation-state.

This issue of regionalism also relates to an epistemological problem, that is, should we always take "China" as a unit of analysis?⁵⁹ In the year 1911, Sichuan was estimated to have 45 million people and comprised more than 140 counties. Sichuan province was the size of France and had roughly the same population as today's France. As we shall see in details from Chapter One, Sichuan was incredibly self-sufficient as a province. In the Qing Dynasty, for example, the governor-general of Sichuan was called "the overseas son of Heaven" (*haiwai tianzi*). Rather than taking all of China as an analytical unit, there are enough reasons for a historian to take just Sichuan itself seriously. We need to focus on the real people on the ground and understand how they got involved in the 1911 Revolution and how their life was changed afterwards.

⁵⁹ Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

VI. This Study

My dissertation studies the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement. At the same time, it is research on the making of modern Chinese politics. My questions are these: What were the new political identities and how did they negotiate with each other? What kinds of networks, communication, and rituals helped in cutting through boundaries of village, clan, and social class? Finally, in the heat of this political conflict, how did mass participation and popular mobilization change the structure of the polity and transform the way politics was conducted?

What I see in this revolution is the invention of the new rhetoric and the new political repertoires (demonstrations, speeches, and holding meetings) that emerged in China during the first decade of the twentieth century. The rhetoric centered on the issue of “*quan*,” which included both political rights and economic rights.⁶⁰ In addition, the discourse of tax became linked to notions of ownership or mastership (*zhu*) of the polity. In the heat of the revolution, the revolutionary experience was filtered through the media to create a new political community, transforming the ways in which politics was conducted in the early twentieth century in China.

My approach is both local and global. The period I study (1900–1915) is a time when great empires fell apart and new nation-states were in formation. My dissertation deepens our understanding of how the world became a world of nation-states and how

⁶⁰ But *quan* in Chinese always carries the meaning of “power” as well, so that understanding this purely within the Western discourse of “rights” is problematic, and it is thus important for us to understand the meaning of the character in each case.

Chinese people responded to that transformation. On the one hand, my dissertation uses the 1911 Revolution as a lens through which to assess a changing political culture among the people of Sichuan. I investigate in detail the political-cultural inventions (rituals, languages, and symbols) through which revolutionary experience was filtered to create a new sense of political community. On the other hand, constantly interacting with theories on collective action, political culture, and nationalism, and actively drawing upon comparisons to the rest of the world, this dissertation contributes to the literature on revolution, political culture, and nationalism.

To gauge the extent and effects of the 1911 Revolution, I draw on archival research and memoirs to bring to light the experiences of this movement. Historical sources on the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement are both colorful and rich. In Sichuan Provincial Archives, Chengdu Municipal Archives, Sichuan Provincial Library, Sichuan University Library, and numerous county archives (such as Ba and Xinjin counties), government documents, systematic sets of newspapers, reports, memoirs, and pictorials are well preserved. My sources include twenty thousand pages of Qing- and Republican-period archival documents found in nine archives and libraries; many of them have not before been used in historical accounts. I also use diaries, correspondence, transcripts of meetings, bank reports, account books, and revolutionary pamphlets and newspapers that I collected during my field work in China.

Chapter One examines Sichuan province and articulates the Old Regime in Sichuan. A rich and self-sufficient region, Sichuan was beset with potential but was only fully incorporated into the Qing Empire in the 1850s. Soon after that, however, population growth, gradually menacing foreign presence, and new tasks that a strained

and pressured Qing central state had to fulfill all generated great tension in the local society, eroding the old local power configurations and destabilizing the Old Regime.

Chapters Two, Three, and Four identify the leaders of the Railway Protection Movement and examine their intellectual, economic, and political orientations. The key issue with which I am dealing with in these three chapters is: How did their power arise? The moderate and progressive reformers took the lead of the Railway Movement and these reformers spread new concepts such as “the rights of the people” and “national sovereignty,” and mobilized a social force supporting them. It is these moderate and progressive reformers who actually controlled the Chuan-Han Railway Company and commanded a great amount of economic capital. It is also these reformers who held a political reputation that was unmatched by any other groups in Sichuan after their actions were legitimized in the late Qing Constitutional Reform.

There are three puzzles regarding the process of the Railway Protection Movement. First, how did the elite movement leaders in Chengdu draw ordinary people into collective action? Although ordinary people possessed the resources for collective action during many periods of Chinese history, they mainly either accepted their fate or they rose up only when their survival was threatened, often to be repressed. What was new this time? How did the movement leaders combine innovative forms of ideologies to create a common purpose for the movement and bring people together and mobilize them against more powerful opponents (Chapter Five)?

A second question relates to the large scale and long duration of the Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan. Unlike the 1911 Revolutions in most other provinces, which took place in the cities and happened in a matter of days, the movement in Sichuan

involved thousands of people throughout the province and lasted for more than seven months. How did the power and solidarity of this movement arise? What were the social networks and cultural symbols of this movement? And, after the most important movement leaders were all captured on September 7, 1911, how and why did the movement sustain itself? In essence, how did the movement hold its common purpose, maintain its solidarity, and sustain its challenging action (Chapter Six)?

The third question relates to movement legacies. In the Railway Movement, popular power arose quickly, reached a peak, and soon evaporated or gave way to repression and routine. In Sichuan, protests of the commoners created opportunities for other non-revolutionaries. If the impact of the movement was so mediated, was the power in the movement real? Did this movement have an impact beyond its short-lived mobilizations (Conclusion)? In my conclusion, I also sum up the legacies of the movement. Maybe in the short-term view, the revolutionaries failed to maintain power. However, the 1911 Revolution has long-term legacies: ideas created during the movement stayed in the hearts of Sichuan people and were internalized in their everyday activities. Sichuan people learned about their rights and powers, learned to make contentious arguments, and learned to obtain protest repertoires. They experienced the possibility of having an official who might be “their man.” A revolution attracts people’s enthusiasm in an extremely exciting way. It shakes people’s beliefs and destabilizes their old lifestyles, it creates good stories to watch, it puts on a good show on open streets, and by doing so it touches people’s hearts and makes an impact on people. It is through movements like this that modern Chinese politics was taking its shape.

Chapter One. Sichuan and the Old Regime

In historian S.A.M. Adshead's eyes, before the twentieth century, Sichuan was "the best province of a traditional empire."¹ A territory the size of France, Sichuan was rich and resourceful. Sichuan had a superb premodern agriculture, an excellent communications network, a high level of urbanization, and abundant energy sources. Long a part of China, Sichuan had been depopulated during the late Ming rebellions but was quickly resettled with a vigorous people. At the end of the Qing Dynasty, Sichuan had a population of 45 million people.²

Geographically, Sichuan was isolated and was thus protected. It was far enough away from western powers on the east coast to allow officials to draft long-range plans to modernize the region. These apparent advantages, if mobilized and channeled into the empire, would create a significant potential for political action. After the 1850s, a process of mobilization took place in Sichuan and the province was fully integrated into the empire. The Old Regime survived. However, rebellions forced the regime to defend itself in ways that disturbed the power balance between the local elites and the state. Soon, under the high tide of imperialism, religious riots (*jiao'an*) added another dimension of tension to the Old Regime. The Qing central state was losing control over its discontented people and local officials.

¹ S.A.M. Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 2.

² Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie: Changjiang shangyou quyu shehui yanjiu, 1644-1911* [Striding out of a closed world: A study of society in the upper Yangzi region, 1644-1911] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 81. Wang Di believes that Sichuan's population in 1910 should be 45 million.

I. Sichuan: The Place

In the late nineteenth century, during the Old Regime of the Qing Dynasty, everyone agreed in praising Sichuan. The official geography described it as “a land rich and fair, with abundance of rivers and streams, fertile lands, forest and bamboo groves, vegetables and fruit.”³ Xiliang, the Sichuan governor-general from 1903 to 1907, when starting his tenure, stated that “its products are abundantly rich,” “the land is spacious and the people numerous.”⁴ Europeans were equally enthusiastic. German geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen observed “a degree of ease and well-being as regards the sustenance of life, not common in other provinces of China.”⁵ The Blackburn mission of 1896-1897 not only described this prosperity, but also recommended what its chamber of commerce should do about it: “Rich in everything which goes to support trade, agriculture, mineral wealth, products of skilled labor and the comparative wealth of its people, this province is *par excellence* the market, of all others, it should be our endeavor to gain.”⁶

Located at the southwestern corner of the empire, Sichuan was an isolated place that had poor links with the other provinces of the empire (Map 1). A Chinese proverb says, “It is more difficult to ascend to Sichuan than to ascend to heaven.” In the same

³ *Daqing yitongzhi* [Geography of the Qing Dynasty] 1812, 236: 8. In Adshead, 2.

⁴ Xiliang, *Xiliang yigao zougao* [Posthumous papers and memorials of Xiliang] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959), vol.1, 323 and 326.

⁵ Ferdinand von Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen's Letters 1870-1872*, 2nd edition (Shanghai, 1903), 177. In Adshead, 2.

⁶ *Report of the Mission to China of the Blackburn Chamber of Commerce 1896-1897* (Blackburn, 1898). In Adshead, 2-3.

vein, Richthofen marveled that “this population is connected with the rest of the civilized world by one inconvenient mountain-road . . . and one large river.”⁷

Luckily, Sichuan was self-sufficient despite being isolated. Traditional agriculture was at its best in Sichuan: Sichuan not only produced more grain than any other province in China, but it was also among the highest in terms of yield per cultivated acre and per capita.⁸ It combined a typical South Chinese climate and crop pattern with a high utilization of space.

There were no extremes of climate in Sichuan; frost was exceedingly rare. Heavy monsoon rain fell in May, June, and July; light Mediterranean-type rain fell in January and February. Protected by the northern rampart of the Daba Mountains from the dry cold winds of Central Asia yet open to the warm wet winds of the South China Sea, Sichuan enjoyed an unusual environment, generally humid in both summer and winter, which supported many kinds of grain and allowed double-cropping. Sichuan grew the winter crop of wheat and the basic summer crop of rice, maize, and sweet potatoes. In particular, the introduction of maize opened new land and supported more population. Maize gives huge yields per quantity sown and requires little labor, so it is an excellent pioneer’s crop and Sichuan was one of the largest producers of maize in China.

In addition, in Sichuan, where the population increased fifty-fold (to 45 million) over the course of the Qing dynasty, the extra labor it maintained was invested in terracing, so that the original maize gardens were eventually converted into rice paddies

⁷ Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen’s Letters*, 206. In Adshead, 5.

⁸ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 3.

and wheat fields. As a result, Sichuan had a higher percentage of cultivated land than other provinces of the south. Hillsides were used: “Where the angle of a slope is 30 degrees, the whole hillside is usually covered with fields from the bottom to the top. ...The contrast between this mode of production peculiar to Sz’-chwan and that in use in the eastern provinces is very conspicuous.”⁹ All this helped make Sichuan’s agriculture one of the best in the empire and supported Sichuan’s population increase.

Observers also noticed that in Sichuan, the wealth from agriculture was more evenly distributed than in other places. Richthofen noticed: “The inhabitants are evidently in a state of general prosperity. In the cities and in the country there is a certain luxury in dress and habitations in Sz’-chwan as compared with other provinces.” Wealth appeared to be “more evenly distributed and therefore, more conspicuous.”¹⁰ The reason for this social structure that was more egalitarian than that in other parts of China was migration. The British consul at Chengdu, Sir Alexander Hosie, wrote: “This province has gathered her workers from all parts of the Empire; they brought with them the knowledge and skill acquired in their respective provinces and they found scope for their varied attainments in the natural richness as well as in the potentialities of their new home.”¹¹ Sichuan, settled later than the rest of China at a time when the extended family was already eroded, was colonized not by clans as in south China, but by nuclear families

⁹ Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen’s Letters*, 176. In Adshead, 4.

¹⁰ Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen’s Letters*, 164-5. In Adshead, 4.

¹¹ Alexander Hosie, *Report by Consul-General Hosie on the Province of Ssuch’uan*, in *British Parliamentary Papers On China*, no.5 (1904), 4. In Adshead, 4.

and individuals, producing a pattern of private farms. It was this infrastructure of independent family enterprise that underlay the achievements of Sichuanese agriculture.

Besides its well-developed agriculture, Sichuan enjoyed better communications, both by water and land, than most other regions of China. To a large degree, Sichuan's affluence drew upon its intraprovincial communications system, making commerce an essential part of daily life for Sichuanese. It is true that Sichuan was disprivileged regarding its communications with other provinces of the empire. However, in a time when interregional exchanges amounted to only a low percentage of gross national product, this external isolation was less significant than the excellent internal communications.

First, Sichuan had a superb network of navigable water routes. According to historian Wang Di, there were 540 rivers in total in the province, more than 90 navigable.¹² Sichuan's major axis was the Yangzi River, to which all of Sichuan's secondary axes were linked, forming a complete network of navigable water routes for the province (Map 2). There were 29 navigable river lines directly linked to the Yangzi, constituting 2,234 kilometers of total navigable length. Before modern communications such as railways opened to traffic, the Yangzi River was *the* most crucial way for Sichuanese and Sichuan products to travel to other provinces in the empire.

Beyond the Yangzi River, there were six secondary river axes running in the province of Sichuan: the Min, Tuo, Jialing, Fu, Qu, and Qian Rivers. The Min carried rice, salt, coal, medicines, timber, silver, bronze, candles, and merchandise such as

¹² Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 35.

clothes or thread throughout western and southern Sichuan, and brought external goods including luxurious clothes from other provinces to Chengdu, for which it was the key route. The Tuo River ran side by side with the Min. It had less hustle and bustle, but was longer, and ran through the salt producing region of Sichuan, carrying Sichuan salt to the Yangzi River and thus on to Hunan, Hubei, Shaanxi, and Guizhou. The Min River also carried sugar, coal, wine, paper, and other agricultural products from the nearby counties.

The most crucial secondary axis in northern and eastern Sichuan was the Jialing river, which joined the Fu and Qu Rivers at Chongqing and connected Shaanxi and Gansu provinces to the Yangzi and the rest of the empire. This system stretched more than 1,000 kilometers and, according to a survey written in the Republican period, “the route was wide enough to allow boats of 40,000 kilograms to travel through.”¹³ A great deal of the goods carried on the Jialing River was to support consumption in Chongqing. Coal, rice, cotton, and other raw materials went downward and the more luxurious merchandise such as tea moved upward. Lastly, the Qian River linked Sichuan province to neighboring Guizhou province, transferring rice, coal, medicine, and other goods to Fuzhou in exchange for more delicate merchandise from Fuzhou.

Therefore, although inferior to the optimal water communications of Liangjiang, the Sichuan system was still very impressive. Sichuan’s salt administration, for example, could arrange to distribute three quarters of its salt by water. One scholar wrote that at the end of the nineteenth century, no fewer than 20,000 boats arrived in Chongqing per

¹³ Zhang Xiaomei, ed., *Sichuan jingji cankao ziliao* [Economic materials on Sichuan] (Shanghai: Zhongguo guomin jingji yanjiusuo, 1939), 4. In Wang Di 1993, 36.

year, which annually carried goods of more than 250 million kilograms.¹⁴ There were about two million Sichuan men working as boat trackers during the Xuanton reign. These boats, traveling up and down in rivers of Sichuan, connected residents and goods within this vast province.

Compared to the water transportation system, land communication in Sichuan was much less friendly. High mountains and rugged terrains in the upper Yangzi River region made land traveling difficult. Still, in Sichuan, there was a comprehensive overland transportation system, “slipping round the general hills of the province from river valley to river valley, unimpeded by the loess of the north or the real mountains of the south.”¹⁵

There were two kinds of roads in Sichuan: provincial highroads (*shengdao*) and local footpaths. The provincial highroads, officially built and maintained with state revenue, were 21 feet in width. They were “well paved with flagstones, wide enough for the pack-trains to pass each other, and kept in excellent repair.”¹⁶ Highroads were built on the foundation of ancient post stations (*yizhan*). The main purpose of provincial highroads was military and political use. In late Qing, there were 64 post stations in Sichuan, with 772 staff men and 763 horses. The highest speed service, 300 kilometers per day, was reserved for extremely urgent matters such as deaths of governors-general or loss of key military battles. The 200 kilometers per day service was for impeachment of officials or reports on sentences of death every fall. Then, the 100 kilometers service was for transferring regular memorials and reports by provincial officials; at the beginning of

¹⁴ Deng Shaoqing, *Jindai chaunjiang hangyun jianshi*, 122. In Wang Di 1993, 41.

¹⁵ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 8.

¹⁶ Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen's Letters*, 163. In Adshead, 6.

every month, provincial documents were collected and dispatched to the court in Beijing. Because Chengdu was 2,850 kilometers away from Beijing, it thus took 9, 14, and 29 days respectively for Sichuan documents to reach the capital. Along these post stations, therefore, four major highroads were formed: the east route linking Chengdu to Chongqing, the central route linking Chengdu to Wanxian by way of Nanchong, the west route, which was the only way to arrive at Tibet and linked Chengdu, Xinjin, to Yazhou and then to the crucial military station Dajianlu, and the north route linking Chengdu to Guangyuan and then to Shaanxi.¹⁷ Of course, they all centered on the political hub, the city of Chengdu.

Besides the official provincial highroads, each county, town, and village paved its roads to help residents to communicate better. The county roads were about 3 meters wide, and country footpaths varied from 2 meters to less than half a meter in width. Most of these were built with flagstones. According to Richthofen, Sichuan had “an infinite number of footpaths [, which] permeate the country; and there is probably no hilly region in China so well provided with them... [They] were paved and constructed with care.”¹⁸ Robert J. Davidson and Isaac Mason, the Quaker missionaries, gave a similar impression: “the whole of the province is supplied with main roads between the chief centers, and smaller ones to all the towns, villages, and markets. These are paved with stone, of which there is plenty in the province.” Admittedly, these routes were narrow and circuitous, “nevertheless they are roads, exceedingly useful, and well worn by the

¹⁷ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 45-48.

¹⁸ Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen's Letters*, 163. In Adshead, 6.

thousands who travel long distances, and the tens of thousands who ply hither and thither in pursuit of a living.”¹⁹

The highroads and the narrow footpaths linked Sichuan people together. In fact, the demand for overland transportation was so high that by mid-Qing, a number of sedan shops had developed services in transporting passengers and goods. Among them, the longest-lasting and most famous was Maxianguye. Established in 1852 by Chen Yixin, Maxianguye started business transporting passengers long-distance (*changtu*). The business was going so well that near the end of the Xianfeng period (1860), the sedan shop opened several branches in Sichuan, expanding business to important major cities like Chengdu, Chongqing, Yibin, and Kunming in Yunnan province. Quickly, more branches were opened, especially on the east route that linked Chengdu to Chongqing: at almost all county towns along the east route, there was a branch of Maxianguye providing overland transportation. Besides transferring human beings via sedan chairs, Maxianguye also transported merchandise and goods. The cargo business also flourished, greatly enhancing overland communication among Sichuan, Yunnan, and Guizhou provinces. By 1866, Maxianguye had established branches in Kunming in Yunnan, Guiyang in Guizhou, in addition to Luzhou, Yibin, and Liangshan, and numerous branches in Sichuan. From the Qing to the Republican period, overland transportation using sedan chairs or horses was the only way to travel, and this difficult travel remained a key part of Sichuan people’s daily life.²⁰

¹⁹ Robert J. Davidson and Isaac Mason, *Life in West China* (London, 1905), 34-5. In Adshead, 6.

²⁰ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 49-59.

The active intraprovincial communications guaranteed connectedness of residents inside Sichuan. With both water and land networks of communications, Sichuan had an impressive urban superstructure. Consul Hosie estimated that 30 percent of the province's population was urban. Contemporary economist Dwight Perkins confirms a superior level of urbanization in Sichuan. In fact, his map of Chinese cities shows in all 46 cities with a population of 10,000 and over in 1900, of which 7 were in Sichuan, a score not exceeded by any other province. In addition to the four main centers in Sichuan, Chengdu, Chongqing, and Ziliujing, there were numerous lesser cities, usually at the nodal points of the communications grid: Fulin, Luzhou, and Xuzhou at the intersection of tributaries with the Yangzi River; Jiading at the juncture of the Tong and Min Rivers; Hezhou at the confluence of the three components of the Jialing River; Wanxian in the gullet of the Yangzi gorge; or else at or near the head of navigation. Salt production, the province's special contribution to the economy of west China, also gave rise to urbanization: not only the major center of Ziliujing, but also secondary producers such as Qianwei, Leshan, and Yunyang. Sichuan's cities, large and small, expressed and exploited the achievements of the rural base.

If outside observers were impressed by Sichuan's wealth—from its rural base, communications network and urban superstructure—the ultimate explanation of the province's prosperity may lie in its relative abundance of energy resources, which powered both country and town. Sichuan had sufficient sources of energy in animals, water, human muscle, wind and wood. According to S.A.M. Adshead, there were

estimated to be 10,000 water buffaloes in Ziliujing alone.²¹ On the Chengdu plain, it was noted as early as Yuan times that “water wheels for hulling and grinding rice, and for operating spinning and weaving machinery, to the number of tens of thousands, were established along the canals and operated throughout the four seasons.”²² Human power was certainly abundant in Sichuan, increasingly so as the population rose from 20 million in 1800 to 45 million in 1900.²³ With regard to the last major traditional source of energy, wood, Sichuan was a provider as well. In addition to its relative affluence in traditional sources of energy, Sichuan also showed considerable precocity in the use of coal. Richthofen believed that “all kinds of coal, not excluding the worst, are used for domestic purposes; the fuel is within reach of the majority of the people at low prices.”²⁴

Everyone admitted that Sichuan was a “heavenly land” (*tianfu zhiguo*), rich in resources; however, unfortunately, all this wealth was confined within the province itself. For Sichuanese to travel outside of the province, the danger of traveling on the rapidly flowing Yangzi River and the pains of traveling via horses and sedan chairs made it incredibly hard for them to get in touch with the rest of the empire. This seriously confined the province’s economy, which remained mainly agricultural and traditional. Importantly, the desire and demand for modern waterway transportation—steamships—and modern overland transportation—railways—were extraordinarily strong. Both

²¹ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 7.

²² Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1954), vol.4, part 3, 296. In Adshead, 7.

²³ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 7. In Wang Di 1993, 80, the number is 41 million.

²⁴ Richthofen, *Baron Richthofen’s Letters*, 173. In Adshead, 9.

officials and the Sichuan elite championed the idea of building modern vehicles that would help its people reach out to the outside world.²⁵

These factors—magnificent premodern agriculture, an excellent communications network, a high level of urbanization, and abundant sources of energy—lay behind Sichuan’s justified reputation for affluence in the nineteenth century. They also created a considerable potential for political action if Sichuan’s resources were mobilized and channeled into the activities of the empire. It was during the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s that Sichuan, being a support province (*xieji sheng*—that is, the province provided resources for suppressing the Taipings), got fully incorporated into the Qing Empire. The richness of the province was exploited by political rulers in Beijing to suppress the rebellion, which gave Sichuan an unprecedented crucial role in the Qing Empire. Before that, Sichuan was ruled peacefully under the Old Regime.

II. The Old Regime

Landscape, modes of production, and commercial activities were all crucial elements that influenced Sichuan people’s lives. Equally important was politics. The ways in which public affairs were managed had great impact on the livelihood of common people. An effective and just political order would enormously advance people’s welfare, inducing economic and commercial growth. What, then, was the kind

²⁵ In 1903, Governor-general Xiliang was behind the proposal to build a railway company and in 1908, Governor-general Zhao Erxun proposed to buy steamships to strengthen Sichuan’s link in the Yangzi River, both with the intention of developing the economy of this province.

of politics practiced in Sichuan? What was the nature of the rule in Sichuan? In other words, what was the Old Regime?

In 1646, Manchu rulers established control in Sichuan, following General Haoge, who had led Qing banner troops coming from the north and subjugated the province. The conquerors soon established a provincial seat in Langzhong.²⁶ To conquer a province is one thing, to rule is another. After conquering, how did the Qing state exercise its sovereignty over Sichuan? What was the relation between Sichuan and the Qing court, which had to rule from more than 2,850 kilometers away in Beijing? When crises happened, how did the regime manage to navigate through all sorts of problems and stay in charge?

In order to maintain any kind of rule or to establish basic order for a territory, all rulers have to ensure their possession of two key resources: money and might. To be more specific, effective rule includes the maintaining of the physical control of territory, a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, the claiming of legitimate authority to make decisions, the ability to provide reasonable public services, and later on, the facility to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.²⁷

²⁶ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 349. The provincial seat later was moved to Chengdu permanently, yet the Manchu rulers continued its conquering. The annexing of the Sichuan-Tibetan Border Region (*Chuanbian*) expanded the land of Sichuan province, making it one of the biggest provinces in the Qing Empire.

²⁷ A state is a political association with effective sovereignty over a geographic area and representing a population. A state usually includes the set of institutions that claim the authority to make the rules that govern the exercise of coercive violence for the people of the society in that territory. In Max Weber's influential definition, state is the organization "that successfully claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory," which may include the armed forces, civil service, state bureaucracy, courts and police.

In Qing China, Manchu rulers depended on both formal government and informal government to fulfill the daunting tasks of ruling. The formal government, or the “state,” is defined as the set of institutions that claim the authority to govern the exercise of violence for the people of the society in that territory. (Or, in Max Weber’s influential definition, the organization “that successfully claims a monopoly on the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory,” which may include armed forces, state bureaucracy, courts, civil service, and police.) The informal government, on the other hand, was the institution of management by various local elites, who ran local public affairs at places where state was not able to reach. Inspired by historian Ch’u Tung-tsu, I use the term “government” dynamically, treating it as the governing process that encompasses both formal and informal institutions.²⁸

The Formal Government

1. The Central Government

The political system of late imperial China is easy to schematize at its higher levels. At the top ruled the emperor, surrounded by relatives and trusted councilors who were sometimes granted hereditary titles of nobility. The Qing state was an imperial system of government. As the “Son of Heaven,” the emperor enjoyed incomparable authority and legitimacy. In the classical Chinese political system, the *shi* were the ruling class and operated within a political culture that valorized the monarchy. “All lands under Heaven belong to the emperor and all people under Heaven are submissive

²⁸ I was inspired by Foucault’s term “governmentality” to understand “government” in a mobile sense. It seems that Ch’u Tung-tsu has also got a similar idea, many years ago.

servants to the emperor” (*putian zhixia mofei wangtu, shuaitu zhibin, mofei wangchen*) was the most widespread and deeply rooted political notion among the Chinese educated class.²⁹ According to these political values, people should all live humbly and feel grateful to the monarch for having a plot of land to live on.

Even though monarchy was the key to this political system, the discourse of the people (*min*) was by no means unimportant. In fact, there have always been scholars (even in present day China) suggesting that western democratic theory was anticipated in ancient China. They mostly use Mencius’s *minben* (the people as the base) idea as evidence because it demanded people’s happiness as a test of the fulfillment of the will of Heaven by the son of Heaven.³⁰ The essence of the “people as the base” argument is: *tianzi* (the son of Heaven) held *tianming* (the Mandate of Heaven) as long as he expressed the *tianyi* (will of Heaven). However, such an arrangement, as historian Joseph Levenson pointed out, did not leave the people (*min*) any real mechanism to be effective power players because “Heaven’s hands could not be forced.” In Levenson’s elegant words: “Heaven’s son, mandate, and will were unequivocally the classical founts of supremacy, and the people’s will, when it was worked at all by Confucian thinkers into political theory, was purely symbolic, not effective, in establishing legitimacy.”³¹

²⁹ Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian* [Before the big storm] in *Li Jieren xuanji* [Collected works of Li Jieren] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1980), vol.1, 469.

³⁰ A recent example is the rediscovery of the work of the Ming Dynasty thinker Huang Zongxi. Promoted by Prime Minister Wen Jiabao of China, some Chinese historians have argued that Huang demonstrated “the Chinese version of the idea ‘democracy’.”

³¹ Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), vol.2, 12.

In traditional imperial theory, therefore, popular discontent did not by itself invalidate an emperor's claims—nor, by the same token, did popular approbation legitimize him. As Joseph Levenson wrote: “Popular discontent was a portent, as a flood might be a portent, of the loss of the mandate; it was a sign, perhaps, of the loss of imperial virtue. But a flood was not to be greeted with fatalistic acceptance. While an emperor should read the signs aright, he still should try to check the flood. And just so, the outbreak of a popular rebellion was no guarantee of its success or of its Confucian acceptability.”³² Thus, in Confucian classical theory, popular satisfaction operated only in the classical political ideal: a sign of some higher ratification of the emperor's legitimacy. In actuality, the people were not stakeholders in a polity; they simply had symbolic status.

The imperial system had existed for a very long time in China, which the single unifying writing system had helped transform from feudal states to imperial bureaucracy, and, on one hand, there was a great deal of continuity in governmental structure from the Ming Dynasty to the Qing. The Qing rulers did little to change the Ming legal code except for a few wordings. The Qing state also adopted the Chinese civil service examination system, consistently recruiting the service of smart and aspiring young men to be bureaucrats (whom westerners called “mandarins”) occupying offices down to the level of county magistrates. The Qing rulers also adopted the Chinese-style administrative system that the Ming used. The central government had six boards: Civil Appointments, Revenue, Rites, War, Justice, and Public Works. Organs of local

³² Ibid.

administration mostly did not even change in name or structure. The Qing inherited the Ming's method of dividing its territory into the hierarchy of provinces, prefectures, and counties, and retained the provincial, prefectural, and county seats.

On the other hand, there was an alien side of the Qing rule. In the central government, at the head of each departmental post, there had to be a Han and a Manchu—a system known as “dyarchy.” In the provincial governments, bannerman overwhelmingly outnumbered the Han Chinese as heads of provinces. In addition, Manchu garrisons at various viceregal seats were evidence of the Manchu rule. In each viceregal seat, the city was divided into the inner city, which was the Manchu city, and the outer city, which was the Han city. Manchus stayed at Manchu garrisons: they enjoyed special allowances from the Qing state, took only Manchu wives, and lived separately from the Han Chinese residents. All these regulations created a sense of difference and threat among the large number of the Han population, making the Han Chinese understand who the rulers of the empire were.³³

As the dynasty progressed, the ethnic aspect of Manchu rule was diminishing. The Qing rulers began to lose their military ability; they also lost their cultural and language skills. In 1771, owing to the fact that too many Manchu officials could not read or write Manchu, the Qianlong emperor abandoned the Manchu memorial system. By the nineteenth century, Manchu as a language was not commonly used among Manchus. By the twentieth century, the Manchu population in Beijing was surpassed by the Han Chinese, and Beijing dialect became what Manchus used for daily communications.

³³ On the Qing garrisons, please read Mark Elliot, *The Manchu Way: The Eight Banners and Ethnic Identity in Late Imperial China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).

Even though the Qing rulers were successful in making the imperial title pass on and Manchus were getting stipends for just being Manchus, Manchus turned out to have no useful function and simply became the privileged elite. Especially in south China, ethnic tension, which had always been present, increased.

2. *The Provincial Government*

As for our province, Sichuan, the Manchu rulers started building civil and military bureaucracies soon after the Qing established its power in Sichuan in 1646. These hierarchies, with a monopoly on legal authority, were staffed by men from outside the province, appointed directly or indirectly by Beijing. The highest civil official of Sichuan province was the governor-general. Under him were the civil officials—*daotais*, prefects, and local magistrates. Also under him were the military commanders. In the Jiaqing reign, there were 5 *daos*, 24 prefectural-level administrations (including *fu* and *zhilizhou*), and 135 county-level administrations (including *zhou*, *ting*, and *xian*). In the Xuantong reign, there were 7 *daos*, 28 *fu* and *zhilizhou*, and 144 *zhou*, *ting*, and *xian*. Among these officials, I shall put more emphasis on the provincial and county level (including *zhou*, *ting*, and *xian*). As for *dao* and the prefectural-level government, because of their lesser importance, I will simply mention them.³⁴

The highest official in Sichuan was the governor-general. Other top provincial officials included the provincial treasurer (*buzhengshi*), the provincial judge (*an'chashi*), and the provincial academic official (*xuezheng*). The highest ranking military officer in

³⁴ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 351 and 359.

Sichuan was the Chengdu General (*Chengdu jiangjun*), who was at the same rank as the Sichuan governor-general. In addition, there was the Green Standard Chief Officer (*tidu*) and the Vice General of the Chengdu Garrison (*zhufang fu dutong*) for the Manchu armies.

The governor-general was the premier commander in both civil and military matters in Sichuan. Unlike most other provinces in the Qing Empire, Sichuan did not have the position of governor (*xunfu*). In civil affairs, the routine was that even though the Sichuan governor-general could not directly control his provincial-level colleagues, he had an absolute leading role in provincial politics. Most of the memorials written by provincial officials were forwarded to the court by the Sichuan governor-general, as a gesture for provincial officials to show “respect and harmony.” In military affairs, in normal times, all military officials below the garrison (*zhen*) level were under the governor-general’s command. In chaotic times, the Green Standard Chief Officer was also under the governor-general’s command.³⁵

The provincial treasurer was the official in charge of personnel and taxation matters. The treasurer was the most important provincial civil official other than the governor-general and he had three crucial subordinates: the first in charge of Sichuan officials’ promotion, transferals, and demotions; the second in charge of collecting tax and funds for the provincial treasury, the “Guangji Treasury,” which had a storage of about 3,000,000 taels of silver; and the third subordinate in charge of drafting documents.

³⁵ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan* [Collected talk about Sichuan] (Chongqing: Chongqing Dagongbao bu, 1948), vol.1, 53a-54b. Original document from Professor Dai Zhili. In 1748, the Sichuan governor-general took over the work of the governor, which led to the elimination the post.

Besides the treasurer's salary of 8,000 taels of silver a year, he also gained extra revenue from all the transportation fees levied from various local governments related to the various taxes. These extra charges of the transportation fee yielded revenue of 300,000 taels and the provincial treasurer and his yamen would get 100,000 taels in total in late Qing Sichuan.³⁶

The provincial judge administered legal matters for Sichuan province. The provincial judge accepted trials and lawsuits submitted from local offices, and retried and judged them in the Eighth Month of each year. The governor-general would then report the verdicts to the Department of Punishment (*xingbu*) in Beijing. The provincial judge had three subordinates, one in charge of eastern Sichuan's legal cases, one western Sichuan's, and the last one in charge of matters that needed to be reported to Beijing.³⁷

The position of Sichuan Academic Official (*xuezheng*) was not a stable or steady post in the first place but a part-time post (*jian*). The academic official took care of matters related to the civil service examination. In his tenure of three years, the academic official needed to go to various Sichuan prefectures twice, in order to inspect, investigate, and evaluate matters relating to the examination. Beyond the 3,000 taels of salary that this official enjoyed, the inspected region had to provide *pengfei*, the money levied for building the examination halls (which was obtained from the various academic lands [*xuetian*] in the different locales), which helped the official to travel and lodge in

³⁶ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtao*, vol.1, 58a-59b.

³⁷ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtao*, vol.1, 59b-60b.

different prefectures.³⁸ After the disestablishment of the civil service examination, the title of the post was changed from *xuezheng* to *tixueshi*; it was now responsible for new schools and new textbooks, and for selecting local educational officials. It was the *tixueshi* who developed a close relation with the local elites and intellectuals in the 1911 Revolution period.

Besides civil officials, the Qing state also had military officers who claimed a monopoly over the legitimate use of physical force in Sichuan. The post of Chengdu General, equal in rank to the governor-general, was established in 1776, after the Qianlong emperor led troops to pacify the Sichuan-Tibetan border. Afterwards, Manchu banner troops were stationed in Chengdu and put under command of the Chengdu General. All civic provincial officials below the governor-general, and all military officials below the *zhen*, had to show their respect for the Chengdu General. In particular, the Chengdu General had a close relation with Songpan and Jianchang *zhens*, as legacies inherited from the conquering of the Sichuan-Tibetan border. Gradually, the bannermen lost their utility as armies and most of the military matters in the province were managed by the governor-general, leaving the Chengdu General mainly as the leader of the 10,000 Manchu bannermen inside the Manchu city within Chengdu. Coexisting with the Chengdu General was the Chengdu Garrison Chief. After the establishment of the post of the Chengdu General in 1776, the Chengdu Garrison Chief lost his importance. Yet, despite the dispensability of the position, the appointment continued to exist.³⁹

³⁸ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtao*, vol.1, 56a-57b.

³⁹ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtao*, vol.1, 54b-55b.

The chief military force in Sichuan was the Green Standard, led and managed by the Sichuan *tidu*. The Green Standard was also called the “governing battalions” (*zhiying*) and there were altogether 80 battalions in Sichuan, divided into 4 garrisons (*zhen*). There were altogether 34,000 Green Standard soldiers in Sichuan, and, on average, each battalion had about 400 soldiers. Every spring and autumn the governor-general would inspect the Green Standard troops in Chengdu and at each *zhen* headquarters.⁴⁰

The capacity of fighting of the Sichuan Green Standard was low. Zhou Xun, a clerk at the Qing Sichuan provincial government and also an acute observer of the late Qing administration, wrote: “After the opening of China and the constant foreign threats, the Green Standard did not actually do anything to improve itself. Every year, the same old patterns and skills were practiced in Chengdu and no change actually took place.... All the performances were routinely practiced and they were nothing more than poor-quality dramas shown on the countryside stages (*xiangba*) of Sichuan.”⁴¹ By the time of the Taiping Rebellion, the Green Standard in Sichuan had become so incapable that Qing statesmen could not rely upon them. Sichuan’s Green Standard was sent to the lower Yangzi regions to help suppress the Taiping rebels; however, it was recorded as acting “sloppily and slowly.”⁴² Because the salary of a Green Standard soldier was too low to support his family, soldiers had to think of other means to make a living and thus could not focus on training and fighting. Zhou Xun wrote that even before the Sichuan Green

⁴⁰ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.1, 34a-36b; 55b-56a. The garrisons were the Chuandongzhen located in Chongqing, Chuanbeizhen located in Baoning, Jianchangzhen located in Ningyuan, and Songpanzhen located in Songpan (Also see Map 1).

⁴¹ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.1, 36b-37a.

⁴² Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.1, 37b.

Standard soldiers were dispatched to the outer provinces, they already showed “a feeling of decay” (*muqi*).⁴³ As a consequence, in the 1850s, Qing official Luo Bingzhang established the Border Army (*fangjun*) in Sichuan to help suppress the Taiping Rebellion leader Shi Dakai and the rebellion led by Li Yonghe and Lan Chaoding.⁴⁴ The Border Army was commanded by the Sichuan governor-general and co-led by the *tidu*. Even though it was useful when it first appeared, the Border Army soon suffered the same fate that the Green Standard had. Zhou Xun noted: “The dispersion and the miscommunication of its officers and soldiers all made [the Border Army] lack solidarity.”⁴⁵ Despite the fact that in 1907 the number of the battalions of the Border Army was increased to 63 and each battalion had about 301 soldiers, still, the Border Army was not dependable when an emergency occurred.

In sum, before the late nineteenth century, the viceregal government was a small administration. Though small, it was just enough for handling the limited matters arising in the Old Regime.

3. *The Local Government*

After clarifying the structure of the provincial government, we can now look at the local governments in Sichuan. A level below the province was that of the *dao*.⁴⁶ Below that was the prefectural echelon, including prefectures (*fu*), independent

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.1, 39a-40a.

⁴⁵ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.1, 40b.

⁴⁶ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.1, 65a-66b.

subprefectures (*zhilizhou*) and independent departments (*zhiliting*). *Fu* served as an intermediary between the local government and the provincial government: it delivered reports from local governments to the provincial government and forwarded orders the other way around. *Zhilizhou* and *zhiliting* usually occupied strategic positions in a province, thus gaining direct attention from the provincial officials, bypassing the *dao*.⁴⁷

But it was the county-level governments that the Qing state relied upon for the daily work of management that can tell us the most about the Old Regime. These units, subordinate to prefectures and the smallest in the hierarchy, included subprefectures (*zhou*) and departments (*ting*) as well as counties (*xian*). Here, drawing upon historian Ch'u Tung-tsu's important work *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing* and Sichuan's primary sources, I shall reveal the structure and function of the lowest level of government in Sichuan.

There were 144 county-level governments at the end of Qing in Sichuan. They were divided into four categories, *chong*, *fan*, *pi*, and *nan*, depending on the ease or difficulty of ruling. All local governments consisted of a district seat, which was a walled city surrounded by towns and villages. In each *zhou*, *ting*, and *xian*, the control from Beijing was enforced: all magistrates were agents of the central government and were under direct supervision of prefects. They all had to abide by the code of administrative regulations issued by the Beijing government. Lastly, all death penalties had to be reported to the Board of Justice in Beijing by way of prefectual and provincial

⁴⁷ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congfan*, vol.1, 67a-76b. Also see Wang Di 1993, 352-353, Chart 6.2.

authorities, and no magistrate had the final say over a person's life. There was no autonomy for a magistrate to rule his people.⁴⁸

The most important person in a local yamen was the magistrate. He was responsible for maintaining local order, collecting taxes, and trying cases. In Qing China, there was no separation among the “three branches” of a state. Before the Constitutional Reform in 1906, no legislative branch existed, and the administrative branch and the judicial branch were combined in the magistrate's yamen. The magistrate was both the chief administrator and the chief judge. In fact, the tasks of a magistrate were so encompassing that he was called “parental official” (*fumu guan*) by people in his locale. Generally speaking, a *zhou* magistrate carried a sub-fifth rank and a *xian* magistrate carried a seventh rank in the civil service system. There were three other subordinate officials in a formal county office—assistant magistrates, chief officers, and miscellaneous officials; however, because the Qing law did not allow subordinate

⁴⁸ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 310. Take Ba county of Sichuan as an example: the county yamen was divided into four sections—the nine departments (*jiufang*), document communication (*chengshu*), edicts teaching (*jiaoyu*), and water defense (*fangxun*). *Jiufang* was the most important among the four; it, in turn, had nine departments. Interestingly, in Sichuan and all other provinces in the empire, the structure of the county yamen was an imitation of the six departments at the central level. The first department of the nine was personnel (*lifang*), in charge of regulation, promotion, and demotion of officials. The second was financial (*hufang*), in charge of financial matters, local taxation, arable lands, land tax, property tax and various other taxes. The third was ritual (*lifang*), in charge of academic matters, rituals, and sacrifices. The fourth was military (*bingfang*), in charge of courier service, catching thieves and robbers, the postal services, and the transferring of prisoners. The fifth was punishment (*xingfang*), in charge of matters of legal trials, prison matters, and so forth. The sixth was construction (*gongfang*), in charge of river routes, river bank construction, irrigation, construction of the county seat and bridges. The seventh was granary (*cangfang*), in charge of the storage of grain. The eighth was salt and tea (*yanchafang*), in charge of matters such as the salt and tea permits and their taxation. The ninth was the department of clerks (*chengfalifang*), in charge of dispatching government documents, court subpoenas, verdicts, and confiscated goods.

officials to take a complaint or directly engage in local business, they had little function in the local government.

The formal salary for a magistrate was low. In Ba county of Sichuan, for example, the magistrate received 500 taels of silver a year. During the Yongzheng period, a surcharge called “meltage charges” (*huohao*) was added to land taxation to support the local magistrate’s treasury, which was also called *yanglianyin*. There were numerous ways for a magistrate to gain extra revenue, some acceptable and some not, and the line was a delicate one to walk. The customary fees (*lougui*), for example, were within the toleration of the law. Customary fees were a kind of service fee, levied by government officials, clerks, and runners from the local people as they carried out governmental business. In addition, in some counties (Dongxiang county in Sichuan, for example), the magistrate would determine the conversion rate of copper to silver higher than that of the market price. Because all taxes directly coming from the peasants were in the form of copper, the county government would profit by doing so. Historian Ch’u Tung-tsu estimated that of the entire profit, 60 percent would go to the magistrate himself, 10 percent to his servants and 30 percent to his clerks.⁴⁹ To rule the county, the overburdened magistrate relied heavily upon his clerks, the yamen runners, the personal servants, and the private secretaries to finish his tasks.

Clerks were those who prepared and processed documents for the local government. Specifically, clerks made drafts, prepared routine reports, wrote memoranda, issued warrants, prepared tax records, and filed documents. The quota of clerks for each

⁴⁹ Ch’u Tung-tsu, *Local Government in China under the Ch’ing* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), section on magistrates.

department in a county yamen was only thirty, but the enormous amount of paperwork always required more clerks. In a big county such as Ba county, as many as seven to eight hundred clerks were hired. Unlike officials, all clerks were recruited from their home province. Although their term was five years, many remained at their posts longer, while sojourning magistrates came and went. Facing these native, entrenched clerks, the outsider county magistrate was in a predicament. On one hand, he relied heavily upon clerks; on the other hand, he could not totally trust them. The clerks' access to documents and knowledge of administrative routine enabled them to manipulate government business. Even though clerks were only given only ten to twelve taels of silver a year as their salary, they depended heavily on customary fees and other forms of corruption to make a living. When faced with this problem, the magistrate remained ineffective and the clerks' customary corruption would become an element contributing to unrest over taxation and religious disputes in the final decades of Qing rule.⁵⁰

Besides clerks, there were also runners, known as *yayi*. *Yayi* served the local government as messengers, guards, policemen, and in menial capacities. They enabled officials to exchange documents and publicized magistrates' orders to the local people; *yayi* acting as police served summonses, made arrests, and performed regular police duties. Runners, often having privileged information, could amass power and create trouble in collusion with powerful local people. Employing extra *yayi*, as well as clerks, was a common practice. Also like clerks, runners were natives of the province and held

⁵⁰ Ch'u Tung-tsu, section on clerks. Also see Bradley Reed, *Talons and Teeth: County Clerks and Runners in the Qing Dynasty* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), section on clerks.

their positions as long as possible, often after their official terms had expired. There were numerous means of corruption for the runners to augment their salary of six taels per year. Even though efforts were made to reduce the number of runners and to curtail their corrupt behavior, regulations and penalties were rarely enforced.⁵¹

Unlike his relation to the clerks and the runners, the magistrate had a personal relation with servants and secretaries. Magistrates often trusted their nonnative servants more than the local clerks and runners. They were not employed by the government, but they were involved in the flow of documents, court dealings, and taxation. Usually, servants brought messages from officials to clerks and to post stations; they speeded up the collection, supervised the runners, delivered tax funds, and many times, were appointed as granary supervisors. Besides all this, servants dealt with a lot of personal matters for the magistrate, such as receiving him and serving for him as gate porters or court attendants. They were paid by magistrates personally and thus had a special loyalty to the magistrate.

Secretaries constituted a brain trust that helped magistrates operate the government. Because the magistrates gained their positions by passing the civil service examinations, which were mainly concerned with the style of poems, they were in great need of administrative experts who knew how to keep the bureaucratic machinery in operation. Personal secretaries gave technical advice to the magistrates on legal, financial, or other administrative matters and also assumed responsibility for certain aspects of high-level administrative routine. All secretaries were intellectuals: usually,

⁵¹ Ch'u Tung-tsu, section on runners. Also see Bradley Reed, *Talons and Teeth*, section on clerks.

they held the secondary degree, *juven*, and were qualified for official appointments. Secretaries were personally hired by the magistrates with a relatively high salary of forty to one hundred taels of silver per year. They were also nonnative. In this sense, compared to clerks and runners, they did not have many opportunities for extortion and because of their personal interests would help the magistrate run his business as well as possible. Secretaries were organized into categories that corresponded to the functions they served: secretary of law, of taxation, of registration, of correspondence, the bookkeeper, and the secretary in charge of legal documents. Among these, the secretaries of law and taxation were the most important two. The secretary of law read complaints and summarized the case, gave the magistrate important advice, and reported the trial to upper-level officials. Equally crucial, the secretary of taxation examined the past records of taxation, estimated the revenue for the local government, and very importantly, consulted with the tax clerks and reread their suggestions to finally decide the amount of a county's taxation. In the Qing Dynasty, the magistrate would always bring a legal secretary and a taxation secretary as he was transferred to a new post.⁵²

With the help from clerks, runners, servants, and secretaries, the magistrates could now assume a wide range of administrative duties. Three tasks were particularly important. The first was to manage justice. County governments were the lowest tribunals in the Qing state. Ordinary people could appeal to a higher yamen only on the grounds that a magistrate had failed to accept the complaint or judged it unfairly. A magistrate's duties combined those of judge, prosecutor, police chief, and coroner. Every

⁵² Ch'u Tung-tsu, section on secretaries.

month, about six to nine days were reserved for acceptance of civil complaints. All decisions were announced by magistrates after hearing the civil and criminal cases. However, very few magistrates were able to go over the legal documents of a case before presiding over its trial in court, and few actually knew the law beyond a general and elementary level. In fact, all reports were prepared by the secretaries, making the secretary of law and the clerks play a key role in the local administration. Again, the legal power of a magistrate was limited: he was authorized to pronounce sentences only in civil and minor criminal cases where punishment was no more severe than beating. Serious cases calling for penal servitude had to be reported to the superior officials and his recommended sentences were subject to their approval. All cases involving death sentences had to be retried by the governor-general. The final approval of a sentence more serious than beating came from Board of Justice in Beijing, making sure that the Qing state at the central level maintained its nominal control over its local government.

The second major task for the local government was to supervise taxation. Land tax (*zhengliang*) was the basic tax responsibility that a landowner fulfilled. In the 1720s, in order to improve tax collection, an important reform, “merge the head tax with the land tax” (*tanding rumu*), took place. The reform made sure land tax was paid in money and levied according to the fertility of the soil. After the reform was carried out, the head tax (*dingyin*), which was in theory levied on all males from sixteen to sixty years old, ceased to be collected as an independent item, but was combined with land tax and the two were now called *didingyin*. Importantly, people who had no land were exempted from the head tax. In most of Sichuan, the *tanding rumu* reform was carried out much earlier than

in other provinces, and had been applied throughout Sichuan by 1763.⁵³ After the reform, the job of the magistrates was to prepare the land tax records, and then send a tax notice to the taxpayers, giving the rate of tax imposed on various kinds and grades of land, and also display the information on a stone tablet in front of a yamen.

The third task of a Qing local government was to maintain order. It was the magistrate's duty to organize households in his district into units of *pai*, *jia*, and *bao* as security units. In the *baojia* system, a *pai* comprised 10 households, a *jia*, 100, and a *bao*, 1,000; the individuals who headed these units were called *paizhang* (or *paitou*), *jiazhang*, and *baozhang* (or *baozheng*), respectively. *Baojia* was set up as a police network to detect lawbreakers: the government used this to control the local people because one's activity can hardly escape the neighbors' eyes. It was *baojia* heads' responsibility to see that the government was provided with villagers required to render labor service and the associated equipment. In theory, the magistrate appointed the heads of *bao* and *jia*, using them as their agents; the magistrates also assigned *dibao* or *difang*, known as land wardens or local constables. *Baojia* enabled the government to extend its control beyond the lowest administrative unit and fill the personnel gap. In reality, however, *baojia* was managed directly by the local notables, which I shall discuss later.

Local government in the Qing was comprehensive in its functions, owing to the Chinese philosophy of government that considered every organized activity concerning the general welfare of the populace to be the concern of the government. In China, all

⁵³ *Daqing huidian shili* [Examples from the Qing Code] vol.157, *Hubu hukou* [Board of revenue; Households]. *Qingchao wenxian tongkao* [The comprehensive study of the Qing institutions] vol.19, "Hukoukao yi" [Households 1], 5026. In Wang Di 1993, 420.

community activities carried out by local elites and local notables, which in other societies might be the responsibility of civic associations, were either governmentalized or under government supervision. With this principle, other aspects of administration such as population registration, security, courier service, public works, public welfare, education, and cultural, religious and ceremonial works were all handled in a fashion similar to *baojia*. It is true that in China there were also counterparts of these state agents; from the local society there were the heads in each rural area, town, and village (such as *xiangzhang*, *zhenzhang*, and *cunzhang*), who were elected by the local residents to take charge of local affairs. But these heads were not agents of self-government because they had no independent legal status recognized by the political authority.

The Informal Government

Overall, the Qing formal government was effective, and from the level of the central government to the level of the county government, the Qing strove to centralize its rule. However, still, compared with the great population in the empire, the Qing formal bureaucracy was tiny. No officials were appointed below the county level. Thus, for the Qing state to control its people and maintain its rule, it had to mobilize local elites in implementing order. For fulfilling their two key responsibilities, keeping order and levying taxes, for example, magistrates heavily relied upon the local elites. By commanding certain resources (political, economic, social, or cultural), local elites constituted the local power structure and influenced the ways in which people interacted with each other.

Particularly for our purpose, we have to understand how the Qing rulers influenced the local power structure to manage the society. Concretely, how were orders from the rulers carried out in the local society? Who were the people in control? How was power constituted in the local society in the Old Regime? What was the source of these powers?

On this matter, an 1890 Sichuan local gazetteer stated rather directly: “Ranked number one was *shen* [roughly, officials and degreeholders; see discussion below]; number two was *liang* [landlords]; and number three was *paoge* [secret societies].”⁵⁴ Concurring with this view, Sichuan’s Qing sources repeatedly use the term “*shenliang*,” meaning, *shenshi* (*shishen* or *shenjin*) and *lianghu* when describing the local power dynamics. Because *paoge* became powerful only after the late nineteenth century, it was *shen* and *liang* that had control over the local society, and with whom Qing rulers collaborated in order to guarantee their rule at the local level, before the twentieth century in Sichuan.⁵⁵

Shenshi were the most important leaders in the Qing society. The term *jinshen*, as Ch’u Tung-tsu noted, could be traced back to the Qin and Han dynasties, meaning those who held official titles.⁵⁶ *Jinshen* retained the same meaning in the Ming and the Qing dynasties. Generally speaking, *shen* were the officials who had left their posts but used

⁵⁴ Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi* [Study on *paoge*] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1993), 96.

⁵⁵ The term *shenliang* was widely used in Sichuan. It appears repeatedly in novels of Li Jieren and Sichuan local sources.

⁵⁶ Ch’u Tung-tsu, section on gentry and local administration.

to be *guan* (serving officials), while *shi* referred to the holders of degrees and academic titles; or in general, people who read books.⁵⁷

From the Ming Dynasty, *shenshi*, *shishen*, *xiangshen*, or *shenjin* started to indicate a status group, that is, those degreeholders who were qualified to become officials. In the Qing, *shenshi* referred to people who held a degree or an official appointment. They included officials, active and retired, holders of degrees, civil and military, including *jinshi*, *juren*, *gongsheng*, *jiansheng*, and *shengyuan*. Importantly, the status of Chinese *shenshi* was not determined on an economic basis; rather, anyone holding a degree or receiving an official appointment immediately became a member of *shenshi*—even non-literati who had purchased a title or official rank.⁵⁸

Among *shenshi*, the majority gained their status through examinations, in preparation for which they learned and recited classical Confucian texts and accepted the moral principles in those texts. *Shenshi*—as Confucian teachings said gentrymen should—played an important role in establishing the authority of the emperor and in educating the people to respect that authority. Their moral exemplary function was recorded vividly in the local gazetteers of Sichuan:

During the Qing Dynasty, as the civil service examination was functioning successfully, those with integrity were deeply valued. Therefore, those who had passed the examinations were all serving with moral principles and got promoted into officialdom. Even those who were not so lucky in

⁵⁷ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 376.

⁵⁸ Ch'u Tung-tsu, section on gentry and local administration. Also see Yang Guoqiang, “Yang Guoqiang tan wangqing de shenshi yu shenquan” [Yang Guoqiang on shenshi and the power of shenshi in late Qing China]. Viewed from <http://book.sohu.com/20090327/n263043062.shtml> (July 2009).

obtaining official posts were writing essays and teaching students. They obeyed important principles.... These people, if they were fathers, taught their children to behave properly, as brothers, and they encouraged their brothers to behave well. They were also good teachers and good friends.⁵⁹

Historian Chang Chung-li in his classic work *Chinese Gentry* describes in great detail the privileges that *shenshi* in the Qing enjoyed that were not enjoyed by commoners. First, *shenshi* were generally regarded as the social equals of officials. In contrast to the commoners, the *shenshi* had free access to the officials and was exempt from the submissive etiquette that commoners had to observe.

Shenshi's privileged position was also expressed in a formal way. Special forms of address, decorations, hat buttons, and garments distinguished the *shenshi* from the commoners.⁶⁰ Also, special etiquette was designed to underline the dignity of their position. To express honor and respect, the common subjects had to address all officials as *da laoye* (Great Excellency), while all *shenshi* without official rank or title were to be addressed as *laoye* (Excellency).⁶¹ Among other formal privileges of the *shenshi* was the exclusive right to participate in certain ceremonies. For instance, only *shenshi* could attend official ceremonies held in the Confucian temples. When clans observed ancestral rituals, *shenshi* in a clan were honored as leaders. The honors that the regular degreeholders gained through their success in the examinations brought prestige and glory to their provinces and home communities. The successful candidates in the

⁵⁹ *Minguo Daxianzhi* [Da county gazetteer in the republican era] vol.4, "Lisu 8" [Customs 8] "*fengsu: shixi*" [local ethos: gentry]. In Wang Di 1993, 383.

⁶⁰ Chang Chung-li, *The Chinese gentry: Studies on their role in nineteenth century Chinese society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1967), 33-34.

⁶¹ Chen Kangqi, *Langqian jiwen* [Memories and records] (1884), 10/19 b-20a. In Chang Chung-li, 33.

metropolitan examinations were honored at a feast by the emperor himself. They were also given a formal banquet by the governor or governor-general of their home province. After that, their return home was an occasion of great festivity; their deeds were made known in family records and tablets and by the erection of honorary arches.

The prestige that *shenshi* enjoyed also found expression in Qing legal codes, edicts, and practice. For example, *shenshi* were protected by law against insults from commoners. If a member of the *shenshi* was insulted or injured, the offender was punished more severely than if he had insulted a common subject. A *yayi* or soldier who insulted a *juren* would receive seventy lashes, compared with ten for insulting a commoner.⁶² Moreover, commoners were not allowed to involve members of the *shenshi* as witnesses in lawsuits. When *shenshi* themselves were involved in lawsuits directly, they were not required to attend the trials personally but could send their servants to the *yamen*.⁶³

On the other side of the law, Chang Chung-li notes that a western account pointed out that “one inducement to acquire even the lowest degree of literary rank is that it exempts the graduates from the bamboo.”⁶⁴ If a member of the *shenshi* committed a crime, he could not be humiliated. As the social equals of magistrates, *shenshi* could be punished for offenses only through special procedures involving the education officials (who controlled the *shenshi* via their authority over the examination system). If a

⁶² *Daqing lüli huiji bianlan* [Collected regulations and statutes of the Qing dynasty] (1876), 29/2b and 29/1a. In Chang Chung-li, 35.

⁶³ *Daqing lüli huiji bianlan* (1876), 3/42. In Chang Chung-li, 36.

⁶⁴ *The Chinese Repository*, IV, no.3, July, 1835, p. 120. In Chang Chung-li, 36.

magistrate punished the *shenshi* on his own authority, he could be impeached. This regulation was well understood and practiced by local officials. For example, a handbook for personal assistants of magistrates stated that it was necessary for the county magistrates to report to their superiors on *shengyuan* and other *shenshi* who committed offenses: “*Shengyuan* who had committed light offenses subject to lashes and deprivation of rank should be reported to the provincial *xuezheng* and the superior prefects. If it is a serious offense, they should be reported to all authorities. *Shengyuan* on stipend who have committed crimes should also be reported to the financial commissioner, who should cancel their stipend. *Gongsheng* and *jiansheng* who are subject to deprivation of rank should be reported to all authorities as well as to the provincial *xuezheng*.”⁶⁵

Besides legal privileges, *shenshi* also had important economic exemptions and stipends. *Shenshi* were exempted from official labor service (*yi*) because their dignity, their cultural refinement, and their life of study did not permit them to engage in manual labor. This exemption also relieved them from the corresponding converted corvée tax, which was a substantial part of the tax burden. On the other hand, they were not exempt from property tax (*fu*), although *shenshi* often used their influence to reduce their payments. *Shenshi* were, however, exempted from payment of all personal taxes, including, at the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, the head tax.⁶⁶⁷ After the *tanding rumu*

⁶⁵ Wang Yintang, “Important Notes on Treatment of Law Suits,” in Zhang Hanbo, ed., *Rumu xuzhi wuzhong* [Five matters you have to know to be a secretary] (1887), 46a. In Chang Chung-li, 37.

⁶⁶ *Qinding xuezheng quanshu* [The imperial book for academic officials] (1812), 32/2 a-b. In Chang Chung-li, 38.

reform in 1720s, when head tax was amalgamated with land tax, this exemption remained a *shenshi* privilege and became one of the pretexts of *shenshi* members for paying less of the revised land tax. In practice their advantage was even greater, since their privileged positions enabled them frequently to escape extra charges and to pay less or none of the land tax for which they were supposed to be responsible.⁶⁸

Because of these social, legal, and economic privileges, the position of *shenshi* was both longed for and respected. As Gu Yanwu's essay on the *shengyuan* stated, "Once one became a *shengyuan* one was exempted from official labor, free from the oppression of the underclerks, dressed in the scholars' gowns, received by officials courteously, and not subject to the humiliations of being lashed. Thus the reason for persons wishing to become *shengyuan* was not necessarily for the honor of the title but for the protection of their persons and their families."⁶⁹ But *shenshi* status also gave its possessors vital influence over public opinion.

Shenshi exerted great influence on their local people. A governor's proclamation stated: "The *shenshi* are at the head of the common people; and to them the villagers look

⁶⁷ An edict of 1648 stated: For officials in the capital, those of the first grade are exempted from 30 piculs of grain and 30 shares of head tax... and those of the ninth grade from 6 piculs of grain and 6 shares of head tax. Officials outside of the capital are entitled to an exemption of half this amount. For *juren*, *gongsheng*, *jiansheng*, and *shengyuan*, 2 piculs of grain and 2 shares of head tax are exempted... For officials who are retired with honor the exemption is seven-tenths of their original exemption; for those who are merely living at home in retirement, the exemption is half of their original." In *Daqing lichao shilu* [The veritable records of the Qing dynasty] Shizu [Shunzhi emperor] (1937), 37/21 a-b. In Chang Chung-li, 39.

⁶⁸ Chang Chung-li, 39-41.

⁶⁹ Gu Yanwu, "Tinglin wenji," in *Tinglin yishu shizhong* [Ten posthumous papers of Gu Yanwu], 1/27b-18a. In Chang Chung-li, 43.

up.”⁷⁰ In a handbook for magistrates, a passage on the appropriate treatment of *shenshi* by magistrates reads as follows:

In administering the affairs of a district, the high families (*shen*) are not to be disturbed. They should be met in a virtuous manner and received courteously and are not to be repressed with power and prestige. Also the scholars (*shi*) are at the head of the people, and since the laws and discipline of the court cannot be exhaustively explained to the people, and since the scholars are close to the people and can easily gain their confidence, the learned and virtuous scholars are exactly the ones to rely upon in persuading the people to follow the instructions of the officials. Therefore, they should be loved and treated with importance. When they happen to come because of public affairs, if they are sincere and self-respecting, they should be consulted on the problems of whether bandits exist in their villages, what the jobs of the villagers are, whether the customs of their places are praiseworthy.⁷¹

All this indicates the importance of the *shenshi* in the eyes of the administrators and shows that they formed the leading social group, to be treated differently from the commoners.

The channels for the *shenshi* to exert their influence came from the sphere of their influence not only over the commoners but also over the local officials. *Shenshi*'s connection with formal power must be examined within the institutional framework, for the connection was not based on random personal relations, but on the examination system, such as relations among teachers, students, and fellow degreeholders. As for *shenshi*'s connection with the commoners, *shenshi* many times shared local interests with

⁷⁰ “Proclamation of the Governor of Guangdong,” in *The Chinese Repository*, I, no.11, March 1833, 461 ff. In Chang Chung-li, 33.

⁷¹ Wang Fengsheng, “Shenshi” [On Gentry], in Xu Zhichu, ed., *Mulingshu* [Handbooks for administration] (1848), 16/26 b. This book is a collection of essays on various aspects of local administration written by magistrates and scholars and compiled to serve as a handbook for magistrates. In Chang Chung-li, 32.

the people. They voiced local protests to officials through recognized channels. In Sichuan, just as in other places in the Qing Empire, *shenshi* amassed great authority and were enormously powerful.

Powerful as *shenshi* were, there were also other power holders who commanded influence in supervising public affairs and in dealing with the Qing state. The second most powerful group in Sichuan was *lianghu*, the rich landlords. *Lianghu* were important payers of land tax, giving them important economic power in local society. Compared to the *shenshi*, who had gained enormous amounts of prestige, *lianghu* were not as prettily portrayed and were often mocked. Many times, they were called the “earthy *lianghu*” (*tu lianghu*) or “the earthy landlord” (*tu dizhu*), terms derogatorily portraying them as ignorant and illiterate. Besides these terms, they sometimes were called “the local tempered strongmen,” (*difang chongkezi*), Chengdu slang which meant people who had no strategies or wisdom but were hot-tempered and lacked manners.

Despite not being particularly respected by the local people, *lianghu* nevertheless were members of the local elite class in Sichuan and they vigorously carried out daily management for the local society. *Shenshi* and *lianghu* together carried out local government’s tasks of keeping order and levying taxes. In general, *shenshi* set the rules and provided advice, yet the execution of these tasks was the work of the much more down-to-earth *lianghu*. It is noteworthy that in Sichuan historical sources the term *shen* and the term *liang* often appeared together as *shenliang*, and sometimes the term *xiangshen* was used interchangeably with the term *shenliang*.

The first and foremost task for *shenshi* and *lianghu* was to help the local yamen levy tax. In Sichuan, land tax was not levied directly by the yamen. Rather, *shenliang*

were the guarantee that the tax quota would be fulfilled. In Yunyang county in Sichuan, for example, “every autumn, the county magistrate would send invitations to invite urban and rural *shenliang*—those who wore special hats and sashes were the *shenshi* and those who gained rents by renting out their land were the *lianghu*, and they two together were called *shenliang*—to his official residence, discussing the tax rate and the conversion rate between copper and silver. This is called ‘discussing the tax rate’ (*yiliang*).”⁷²

After setting the amount of taxes and the conversion rate from copper to silver, many *shenliang* became lenders for land tax. In Sichuan, a normal practice was that the local land tax was usually advanced by the *shenliang* first, who would then be reimbursed by the local farmers. Historian Wang Di notes that in Sichuan, the *xiangshen* were willing to fulfill this job. On one hand, it showed the Qing rulers that they were “loyal” (*zhongxin*) to the regime, in return for which they were “awarded or appointed to government positions.”⁷³ On the other hand, the *shenshi* and *lianghu* could also gain practical benefits from lending money to ordinary tax payers. For example, in Nanchuan county, the practice was that “the levying of land tax, in our county, was that every year, the county magistrate invited the powerful gentry (*da shen*) over to discuss the amount. At that time, the market price for silver was one tael of silver to around one thousand copper coins. However, when the *shen* was consulted, the conversion rate became one

⁷² *Minguo Yunyang xianzhi* [Yunyang gazetteer in the Republican time] vol.9, “Lisu: fengsu” [Customs: ethos]. In Wang Di 1993, 379.

⁷³ *Minguo Nanxi xianzhi* [Nanxi gazetteer in the Republican time] vol.2, “Caifu san” [Revenue and taxation 3]: “tianfu” [land tax]. In Wang Di 1993, 379.

tael of silver to seven thousand coins! In doing this, both the magistrates and the *shen* gained a big profit.”⁷⁴

Of course, this process gave enough opportunities for powerful gentry or big landlords (*dahu*) for economic domination over small farmers (*xiaohu*). Such exploitation became increasingly severe as the Qing state imposed more taxes on its subjects and as the price of silver become increasingly high. In some localities, *shenshi* went so far as to monopolize the actual collection of taxes (*baolan*).⁷⁵ In Sichuan, such practices were prevalent especially after the nineteenth century, owing to the fact that the silver price was climbing in the nineteenth century. From 1821 to 1840, according to economic historian Yan Zhongping, the price of silver kept rising. Up to the 1830s, the price rose 30 percent, and by the end of the 1840s, the price of silver had risen 70 to 80 percent.⁷⁶ Even though big tax increases happened mainly after the 1860s, the rise in the silver price in actuality worsened the land owners’ and farmers’ everyday life. From this time on, *shenliang* became more and more uncontrollable in taking advantage of their less-powerful fellows. From 1800 onward, in Sichuan, many outrageous incidents took place involving *dahu* monopolizing tax collection and setting extreme conversion rates. For example, in November 1860, Guang’an county experienced a riot resisting the *shenshi*’s monopolization of tax collection. In 1876 in Guan county, Li Sanshao led a

⁷⁴ *Minguo chongxiu Nanchuan xianzhi* [The revised Nanchuan gazetteer in the Republican time] vol.4 no.1, “Shihuo: tianfu (jia): diding” [Economy: land tax (1): taxes on land and on *ding*]. In Wang Di 1993, 379.

⁷⁵ Chang Chung-li, 49.

⁷⁶ Yan Zhongping, *Zhongguo jindai jingjishi tongji ziliao xuanji* [Selected statistic materials of modern Chinese economic history] (Beijing: Kexue chubanshe, 1955), 37.

resistance movement against tax-collecting *shenshi* who were charging excessive interest on their tax-related loans to farmers. The most serious incident happened in 1875 in Dongxiang county, where Yuan Tingjiao led three thousand followers to rise up against *shenshi* who had cheated and imposed more taxes on local farmers. Again, in 1884 in Dayi county, *paoge* leader Yang Hongzhong took up arms to rebel against the overt extortion by the county magistrate and yamen clerks. *Shenshi* and *lianghu* were well aware of the local power structure, and by collaborating with yamen clerks or magistrates they took all the opportunities they could to benefit themselves.⁷⁷

The second major task for *shenliang* was to help magistrates maintain local order. Below the county level, Qing rule was assured by the local police network, the *baojia* system. In Ba county of Sichuan, for example, the magistrate in 1810 ordered *baojia* leaders to exterminate the thieves thriving in their locales. All leaders of *bao*, *jia*, and *pai* “should constantly check the wellbeing of the local residents. Whoever looked unfamiliar should be driven out. Those who had moved outside their *jia* should be recorded, and those who just recently moved in also should be recorded carefully, so that no chaos would occur.”⁷⁸ In 1813, the Ba county magistrate required that “when bandits entered the locale, the *paitou* would strike the gong and deputize all the commoners in a

⁷⁷ *Minguo Dayi xianzhi* [Dayi gazetteer in the Republican time] vol.14, 3. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 163.

⁷⁸ “Bianlian *baojia* hukou tiaogui gaoshi” [Announcement of the regulations to group people into *baojia*], in *Baxian dang’an* [Ba county archival records] (1810). In Wang Di 1993, 377.

pai to hold wooden sticks and help capture the bandits.”⁷⁹ Again, in 1850, a new regulation in Ba county stated that each *paitou* had to get the register of the ten households in his jurisdiction, to record their property, and write down the population of *ding* (taxable men) and other people in a household.⁸⁰

Baojia leaders were people who held some social status. In Ba county, *paitou* had to be those who were “clear in their record,” “capable,” and “respected by the local residents.” In Da county, “*baozheng* had to be degree holders or elders; either invited by the county magistrates or recommended by the local gentrymen. They were all confirmed by the yamen for their posts with a certificate, but they were also not given any salaries.”⁸¹ In fact, the job of *baozheng* was not an easy one. Being stuck in the middle between the state on one hand and the village on the other, *baozheng* needed extensive skills to fulfill the jobs that the state assigned them. When the state imposed more tax or when there was a famine so that not enough grain was grown for taxation, *baozheng* would be put in a particularly difficult position and would have great trouble fulfilling their jobs. Nevertheless, because by assuming public responsibilities a *baozheng* had a certain amount of authority, he and his family would be protected and he

⁷⁹ “Baxian tuanshou *paishou* tiaoli” [Regulation for the leaders of *pai* and *tuan*], in *Baxian dang’an* [Ba county archival records] (1813). In Wang Di 1993, 377.

⁸⁰ “Biancha *baojia* tiaogui” [Regulations to group people into *baojia*], in *Baxian dang’an* [Ba county archival records] (1850). In Wang Di 1993, 378.

⁸¹ *Daxianzhi* vol.7, “Guanzheng men: minzhi” [Category of the officials: civil officials]. In Wang Di 1993, 378.

would gain a certain status in his locality. As a result, still, many local *lianghu* liked to take the job for that certain “status” as a public man.⁸²

Besides *paitou*, *jiazhang*, and *baozheng*, there were also other local posts such as *chengyue*, *changyue*, and *xiangyue*; they were also filled by members of the *shenliang* and given certificates by officials. In addition, in the end of the nineteenth century, local militias (*tuanlian*), also led by *shenliang*, were set up to help pacify disturbances, which I shall discuss in the next section. All these people helped maintain order for the rulers at the local level.

Of course, beyond taxation and policing, there were a number of other tasks that were carried out by *shenliang*: the promotion of welfare, protection of the interests of their home areas, and so on. They undertook tasks such as welfare activities, arbitration, public works, and the organization of local militias. In general, the functions of *shenliang* were related to administrative areas. All *shenshi* functioned in areas of their native districts, but some functioned within a larger administrative unit—their home prefecture or even their home province. A lower *shenshi* member, belonging to the district government school and having close contacts with district educational officials and the district magistrate, could function effectively within his district but seldom beyond it. It was mostly the upper *shenshi* whose influence and activities extended over a broader area. The connections they established as well as the higher prestige they obtained from passing the advanced examinations gave them close contacts with high provincial officials and with other upper *shenshi* of their provinces.

⁸² Wang Di 1993, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 378.

Shenliang could have been forces competing with the Qing state; however, *shenliang* were not members of self-government because they had no independent legal status. Rather, the prestige and status *shenliang* maintained was conferred by the state. For *shenshi*, it was state that gave them either an official title or a degree. For *lianghu*, assuming public jobs gave them their status in their locale, which also came from helping with the state administration. In other words, the key qualifications for one to be a member of China's local elites were to be found in the current political order: the membership was based upon the attainment of bureaucratic status *or* the qualification for that status.

Using Sichuan author Li Jieren's words, those who were powerful in the Qing were those who had some sort of connection with the officials (*zhanle guanqi*). Only when wealth was combined with political power could people secure protection for themselves and their families. For example, Japanese scholar Masao Nishikawa traced the history of several powerful lineages in Yunyang county of Sichuan and revealed the reason for their prominence. The Guo family migrated from Hubei Province and grew larger and richer from the Qianlong reign to the Guangxu reign. Among the Guo family's six generations, there were numerous officials, degreeholders, and those who became provincial assemblymen and leaders in the Chuanhan Railway Company. All these official and semi-official titles and degrees guaranteed the influence of the Guo family. Similar things happened to the Peng family: after five generations in Sichuan, there had been members who became prefects, academic officials, and instruction officials (*xundao*). According to Nishikawa, it was exactly by passing the civil service examinations and by making their children officials that these families maintained their

power. In sum, by becoming officials and local *shenshi*, by combining social and political capital, Qing families made sure their wealth and prestige remained stable and growing.⁸³

In the Old Regime, thus, for anyone who wanted to gain respect and protection, it was crucial to gain access to official titles and positions. The influence of officials (*guanshi*) was enormous. Even the style of *guan* became something that common Sichuan people wanted to imitate. For example, Chengdu people at the end of the nineteenth century were mocked by social critic Fu Chongju as “shamelessly ingratiating themselves in front of the officials” and “being proud in imitating the official manners, that is, the ways of talking and the apparel of the officials.” All these showed that *guan* wielded enormous power and carried huge prestige in the local society of Sichuan. In addition, *shenshi* were legally protected by officials and *lianghu* maintained their local status via helping officials. *Guan*, *shenshi*, and *lianghu* constituted the local power holders in Sichuan’s local society. They all depended on the authority of the state to give them the prestige they enjoyed and in exchange offered their loyalty and service to the state. This is the Old Regime.

III. The Political Reality of the Old Regime

We have seen the structure and the nature of the Old Regime; what was the political reality in Sichuan under the Old Regime? Was Sichuan taxed heavily? Was

⁸³ Masao, Nishikawa. “Shisen-shō Unyō-ken zakki” [Notes on Yunyang District Sichuan Province], in *Kanazawa Daigaku Bungakubu ronshū shigaku-ka hen*, no.7 (1987): 169-224. Learned from Wang Di 1993, 529.

justice carried out in Sichuan? What was the relation between Sichuan and the central government? Ultimately, was the Old Regime working and did it go through any changes in order to survive? In this section, I shall evaluate the political reality of the Old Regime in Sichuan province and assess the changes that took place in the regime.⁸⁴

The Political Reality of the Old Regime: Money

In S.A.M. Adshead's view, down to the Taiping Rebellion, Sichuan remained "an interior off-shore island in relation to the main body of the Chinese empire ... a continental Taiwan or Hainan." Adshead writes: "Although the formal government in Sichuan was rationally and effectively organized, as well or better one may think than government in the outer provinces of Spain under the Habsburgs or the Ottoman Empire, the prevailing impression it conveys is one of lightness and limitation."⁸⁵ Perhaps the most striking indication of the lightness of the rule in Sichuan was the comparatively small sums it raised in taxation. According to Adshead, in 1850, the revenue of Sichuan had been only 1.3 million taels of silver, raised under five items of taxation, which was approximately 0.5 percent of an estimated gross provincial product of 252 million taels,

⁸⁴ Scholars such as Philip Kuhn and Mary Rankin have argued that the Taiping Rebellion was a shifting moment for the Qing Dynasty. Before the Taiping, the state was able to control its subjects and commanded political authority but after the Taiping, the reaction to the rebellion set in motion important changes in the power dynamics of the Old Regime. This is a true depiction of the general situation in China, but each province is different and we have to be careful to the peculiar situation of each province. For Sichuan, Taiping Rebellion is not the moment that dismantled the Old Regime.

⁸⁵ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 10.

assuming a population of 35 million (or 27.5 million) and a per capita income of 7.5 taels or (9.2 taels).⁸⁶

Land tax, also called “standard tax” (*zhengliang*), was the most important tax in the traditional economy. Sichuan’s incredibly low rate of land tax was inherited from the Ming and was also a matter of early Qing economic policy. Ever since the Ming Dynasty, Sichuan’s land tax was light, owing to the small population and small amount of land registered in the official tax records. In 1578, the sixth year of the Wanli reign, there were only 1 million *dan* of grain levied as land tax in Sichuan. On this, the official Sichuan Provincial Gazetteer [Kangxi reign] noted, “The amount of land tax of all Sichuan was that of a prefecture or county in the Jiangsu or Zhejiang region!”⁸⁷

The lightness of the land tax of Sichuan was also a special policy issued by the early Qing rulers. At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, owing to the devastating Zhang Xianzhong Rebellion, the government basically stopped levying land tax seriously in Sichuan. For example, in 1661, the eighteenth year of the Shunzhi reign, Sichuan was taxed 27,000 taels of silver and 928 *dan* of grain, which together roughly equaled 68,000 *dan* of grain and constituted only 6.6 percent of the land tax levied in 1578.⁸⁸

The lightness of the taxation in Sichuan was not changed in the Kangxi reign. The policy “to have more population yet to add no taxation” (*zisheng rending, yongbu jiafu*) greatly helped the growth of the Sichuan provincial economy. The Kangxi

⁸⁶ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 12. Wang Di 1993, 81. Wang Di corrected the 1850 population to be 27.5 million.

⁸⁷ *Kangxi Sichuan tongzhi* [Provincial gazetteer of Sichuan in the Kangxi reign] vol.5, “Tianfu” [Land tax]. In Wang Di 1993, 421.

⁸⁸ *Qingchao wenxian tongkao* vol.1, “Tianfukao yi” [Land tax 1]. In Wang Di 1993, 421.

Emperor wrote: “The wastelands in Sichuan have now been much developed. If we can start levying land taxes according to the amount of truly arable lands, every year we would raise almost 300,000 taels of silver from Sichuan. However, I think that our state treasury now is sufficient, and there should be no need to add an extra land-tax burden on the Sichuan people.”⁸⁹ Also, Kangxi warned Sichuan Governor-general Nian Gengyao: “To be a governor, if you start your tenure by measuring the land and adding to taxation, you will lose the hearts of the people immediately.”⁹⁰ All these greatly helped Sichuan’s agriculture to grow.

If “low taxation and light corvée” (*qingyao bofu*) was the state policy of the early Qing period, the following reign of the Yongzheng emperor was marked by large-scale state building activities. The motivated Yongzheng emperor took on ambitious reforms of the political economy of the empire. The first reform was the *tanding rumu* reform, in which the head tax (*ding*), which was in theory levied on all males from sixteen to sixty years old, was to be combined with land tax into a new standard tax (called “*didingyin*”). *Didingyin* was paid in money and levied according to the fertility of the soil. However, even in the Yongzheng period, no extra tax was added to the land tax. The land production had increased, yet the taxation of that production was still light.⁹¹ In the seventh year of the Yongzheng reign, the land tax was only 40 percent that of the Wanli

⁸⁹ *Qingchao wenxian tongkao* vol.2, “*Tianfukao er*” [Land tax 2], 6848. In Wang Di 1993, 422.

⁹⁰ *Shengzu ren huangdi shengxun* [Edicts of the benevolent Kangxi emperor] vol.46, “*Chi chengong*” [Remonstrations to the ministers]. In Wang Di 1993, 422.

⁹¹ Anonymous, *Sichuan caizheng kao* [Study of the financial history of Sichuan], 1. In Wang Di 1993, 422.

period, despite the fact that the total amount of taxable land in Sichuan was 3.4 times that of the Wanli period.

Benefited by these lenient tax policies, Sichuan's population grew quickly. In 1661, the population was still only half a million; by the end of the Kangxi period in 1722, the population was 2.9 million. This population growth trend continued: in 1736, the first year of the Qianlong reign, the population was 3.3 million and in 1812, the population rose to 20 million. Soon, in 1850, the population of Sichuan was 27.5 million.⁹² Sichuan had been transformed from a depopulated and deserted place into the most populated province in the Qing Empire.

Importantly, the Yongzheng emperor did not only want to rationalize the way in which taxes were levied. He also wanted to make sure that the central state knew how its revenue was spent. Besides *tanding rumu*, another reform that helped manage the political economy was the “return of the meltage fee to the public coffers” (*huohao guigong*) reform. Yongzheng hoped to rationally manage state revenue and control how local magistrates gained their income. Officials in each province could collect a fixed-percentage surcharge on all regular land and head taxes remitted to the central government. The surcharge was to remain in the province to pay officials' (substantially increased) salaries and pay for administration and public works. There would be an annual accounting system to ensure central-government supervision of all state income.

As Madeleine Zelin observes: “Although the concept of this reform was simple, its rationalizing impact on the structure of Chinese fiscal administration was enormous.

⁹² Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 80.

At the level of intrabureaucratic relations, the provision of adequate funds for local officials eliminated the need for institutionalized government corruption (*lougui*). The existence of a reliable source of funds for public expenses made it possible for officials to undertake the budgeting of local expenditure and engage in the long-range planning of local construction projects. Moreover, with income guaranteed, local governments were able to take on as their own responsibility many of the services and public works either neglected or relegated to the private sector during the last decades of imperial rule. Taken together, these measures constituted a major step forward in the evolution of China's administrative apparatus."⁹³

Despite its contribution to China's early modern development, *huohao guigong* failed as the reform met with resistance from the local governments. By the nineteenth century, China was ravaged by corruption and torn by centrifugal forces that the government was increasingly powerless to resist. After this experiment in rationally controlling local fiscal matters, the central government lost its control over the process of taxation. It then gave up the idea of building a rationally managed modern state but left matters in hands of local governments and the local elites. Thereafter, the dual rule of the elites and the state became stable. Collaboration between the formal state and the informal government remained and taxes were levied by *shenliang*, who remained powerful.

In Sichuan, migration and population growth continued after the Yongzheng reign. However, the arrival of migrants and the population growth throughout the eighteenth

⁹³ Madeline Zelin, *Magistrate's Tael: Rationalizing Fiscal Reform in Eighteenth Century China* (University of California, 1984). Introduction.

century led to a series of social problems in Sichuan. Disappointment was inevitable on both sides as new people arrived with expectations of inexpensive land and easy living, only to find that land was rarely available and earning one's livelihood was no simple matter. Many migrants left their own provinces poor and unemployed only to find a similar situation in Sichuan, where they became tenants, were sold undesirable land, or joined up with bandits and secret societies. Historian Robert Entenmann has concluded, "By the late eighteenth century, Sichuan itself was overpopulated and the province lacked a safety valve of its own."⁹⁴

After 1800, the rise of the silver price also led to hardship of peasants under the Old Regime. Because of the large amount of the opium import and the outflow of silver, the price of silver rose dramatically—from 700 to 2,000 copper coins per tael in Sichuan between 1836 and about 1860.⁹⁵ Because all taxes in the Qing were paid in silver and local landowners had to exchange copper coins to pay their tax, the increased price of silver was equivalent to an added tax burden on the Sichuan farmers. After the 1850s, Sichuan became a hotbed of tax resistance actions against the alliance between the county government and the *dahu* who monopolized taxation in a county, against the *guanshi* and those who were profiting by collaborating with *guan*. The injustice and unfairness of the Old Regime started to become apparent.

⁹⁴ Robert Entenmann (1982), "Migration and Settlement in Sichuan, 1644-1796" PhD. dissertation, Harvard University, 156, 261-62. In Judith Wyman, "The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism: Chongqing, 1870-1900," *Late Imperial China* 18.2 (1998): 90.

⁹⁵ Yan Zhongping, *Zhongguo jindai jingjishi tongji ziliao xuanji*, 37.

By the late nineteenth century, all these problems—institutionalized corruption, overpopulation, rise of the silver price, and lack of arable land—grew worse. The numbers of dissatisfied migrants and natives continued to increase, swelling the ranks of bandits and secret societies and threatening local order.⁹⁶ In 1883, Sichuan Governor-general Ding Baozhen reported that “Sichuan province is a vast area with bandit types (*feilei*) as ubiquitous as grass. The *Guofei* (*Gulu* bandits), *huifei* (brotherhoods), *jiaofei* (religious sects), and salt bandits are everywhere. They rob the people on the roads during the day and break into homes during the night.”⁹⁷

To make things worse, it was also after the Guangxu reign that the Qing state started levying serious taxes on Sichuan. In 1900, the total revenue collected in Sichuan became 8.7 million taels, raised under fourteen heads of taxation, which was approximately 3 percent of an estimated gross provincial product of 335 million taels, assuming a population of 45 million and a per capita income of 7.5 taels. This revenue figure and this level of taxation represented a sharp increase from the position half a century before. There was a substantial increase in the Xianfeng period from 1.3 million taels to 3.6 million, a lesser increase under Tongzhi from 3.6 to 4.5 million, and a further substantial increase from the beginning of the Guangxu period to 1900 from 4.5 million to 8.7 million. In other words, given the same per capita income of 7.5 taels of silver for the Sichuan people, taxation was in fact 6.7 times heavier in 1900 than in 1850.

⁹⁶ Judith Wyman, “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism,” 90.

⁹⁷ *Baxian dang’an* [Ba county archival records] “Junshi” [Military affairs] 3001, no.4, “Governor-general Ding Baozhen to Ba county magistrate” (1/26/1883). In Judith Wyman, 91.

An analysis of how Sichuan revenue was spent shows that between 1850 and 1900 the province became and remained a support region (*xieji sheng*). In 1850, Sichuan enjoyed exceptionally low rates of taxation. The revenue was only 1.3 million taels and of this, 0.7 million, that is, more than half, remained in the province while 0.6 million were assigned to Beijing. In effect the province was half governed and half integrated into the empire. The position was not radically changed during the Xianfeng period: indeed the exigencies of Shi Dakai's threatened invasion threw the province back on its own concerns. In 1861 revenue amounted to 3.6 million. Of this, 2.1 million remained in the province, 1.1 were assigned to Beijing, while a small but significant new item of expenditure had appeared, subsidies to other provinces of 0.3 million.

By the accession of Guangxu, however, Sichuan had become a support region, spending more of its revenue in assignments to the capital and to other provinces than within its own borders. In 1875, the revenue was 4.4 million; of this, 2.1 million remained in the province, 1.1 million were sent to Beijing and 1.24 million were assigned to other provinces. This reorientation of expenditure begun by Governors-general Luo Bingzhang and Wu Tang was extended by Ding Baozhen, the support governor-general par excellence. In 1886, Sichuan's revenue was 5.8 million taels: 2.5 remained in the province, 1.2 was sent to Beijing and 2.1 were assigned to other provinces. The same pattern prevailed in 1900: the revenue was 8.7 million taels, 4.2 retained in Sichuan, 1 million sent to Beijing, and 2.9 sent to other provinces, and a new item, the Sino-

Japanese war indemnity, was 0.67 million. In these years, more revenue was spent outside the province than in it.⁹⁸

Thus, even though the Sichuan governor-general was not a top-level political leader, his ability to produce a budget surplus and channel it in a desired direction made him a significant figure in the politics of the late Qing. If governors-general and local elites did in fact increase their political standing from the 1850s onward, it was through their acquisition of new functions, which were exercised for imperial rather than regional purposes. The legitimacy of the Old Regime was kept and the status and prestige of provincial officials and elites still came from recognition from the center.

The Political Reality of the Old Regime: Order

In the Old Regime, another indication of the limited power of the formal bureaucracy was the small number of people it employed and troops it commanded. In 1900, there were 168 civil officials in Sichuan. They were the heads of a pyramid of government offices, each staffed by a considerable apparatus of private secretaries, personal servants, indoor clerks, and outdoor runners. In 1900, the military establishment of Sichuan consisted of the banner garrison in Chengdu of 2,500 men and the Green Standard army of 24,900 men, a total of 27,400 soldiers. Taking the two together, the Sichuan bureaucracy was small compared to the 45 million people of the province it had to control in 1900. For the Qing rulers to maintain order and survive riots, they had to rely upon other forms of power.

⁹⁸ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 17.

Among these local forms of power, the local militia (*tuanlian*) was the most prominent. At the beginning of the dynasty the rulers were very suspicious of any organized forces and did not allow the local power groups to have armed forces. But the White Lotus Rebellion changed that attitude. After the state pacification strategy shifted toward increasing civil defense mobilization in 1799, local people were organized to “strengthen the walls and clear the countryside” (*jianbi qingye*) as a way to isolate rebels from the resources they needed to survive. The new plan succeeded over the next four years, as large rebel groups were worn down to smaller, more elusive groups and as years of warfare took their toll.⁹⁹

Tuan referred to local militia (*mintuan*); its members were called *tuanding*. Organized by local elites from counties or countryside, *tuan* was used to “keep local order and to watch out for each other” (*shouwang xiangzhu*). *Lian* were organization of selected *tuanding* who were sent to the county seats, where they were organized into *tuanlian* bureaus and put under the command of the county magistrate. The members of *lian* were called *lianding*; they assumed the responsibility of capturing thieves, repelling local riots, and guarding the city doors.

In Sichuan, big households were ordered to provide three to four *tuanding*, middle-size households two to three *tuanding*, and small households, one *tuanding*. During peaceful times, *tuanlian* were used to capture thieves, fend off ruffians, and

⁹⁹ Philip Kuhn, *Rebellion and its Enemies in Late Imperial China, Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1970). Section on the development of Qing militia policy.

counter any challenge to the Qing order. During chaotic times, *tuanlian* were used to suppress rebels and to cut off food supplies and other provisions of the rebel armies. Because Sichuan was one of the three provinces (with Hubei and Shaanxi) involved in the White Lotus Rebellion, *tuanlian* in Sichuan started to be organized extensively and they played a significant role in suppressing the White Lotus. In Daning county of Sichuan, for example, it was the local *tuanlian* who encircled and exterminated the White Lotus sect leader in 1802. According to a later Qing official's report, "During the Jiaqing period, the religious rebels (*jiaofei*) harassed the locale. Sichuan started to organize peasants into *tuanlian* from then on. These people were organized to 'strengthen the walls and clear the countryside' (*jianbi qingye*). When the locale was peaceful, they went back to their farm work. When rebels came to the locale, the *tuanlian* quickly took up arms and attacked the bandits. Because there was no need to bring soldiers from outside the locality, and their provisions all came from the local people, this device [*tuanlian*], after it had been tried out for several years, proved to be extremely effective and useful."¹⁰⁰

After the White Lotus, *tuanlian* remained in the local society. In the Taiping Rebellion, the importance of *tuanlian* was revived. In February 1853, to save itself from the Taiping armies, the Qing court issued an edict asking each province to imitate the 'strengthening the walls and clearing the countryside' strategy of the Jiaqing period, and

¹⁰⁰ Zhao Shuji, *Cunwushan fang shucao* [Writings and drafts compiled in the room called Cunwushan] vol.1, 19. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 46.

to organize *tuanlian*.¹⁰¹ The court decided to bring the foremost of the local elite, the high-ranking official gentry, into the network of local responsibility and the Qing central state issued a number of edicts, making sure that the local officials would still play a leading role in the *tuanlian* organization. Sichuan responded to this order and started organizing *tuanlian*. In a way, *tuanlian* helped the Qing state mobilize local elites and survive rebellions, but the consequence of developing *tuanlian* was also disturbing. The militarization of the local elites created a competing power against the state. Local elites had their own armed power and would not be satisfied to only be led by the officials.

Besides the militarized local elites, another social force, the secret societies, also gathered more power after the Taiping Rebellion. There is no doubt that *shenliang* were still the dominant power in Sichuan local society. However, as the inadequacy of the traditional bureaucratic system to govern a rural population that was growing alarmingly in density became obvious, secret societies became increasingly potent.

In Sichuan, *paoge* was the dominant group among all secret societies. As the 1890 Sichuan local gazetteer which we have quoted stated: “Ranked number one was *shen*; number two was *liang*; and number three was *paoge*.”¹⁰² Historian Fu Chongju provides this definition: “*Paoge* was the association of members who were linked by sworn brotherhood in ceremonies of mixing blood and lighting incense. If mingled with

¹⁰¹ *Donghua xulu* [The continued Records of the Donghua Gate] “Xianfeng chao” [Xianfeng reign] vol.21. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 46.

¹⁰² Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*, 96.

bandits, *paoge* was called *huidang* or *huifei*. Otherwise, those who had not been involved in criminal activities were simply called “*paoge*,” “*pao-er-ge*,” or “*maoding*.”¹⁰³

Differing from *shenshi* and *lianghu*, who won prestige from state authority, *paoge* did not gain recognition from the Qing state. In general, *paoge* were divided into two types, the *qingshui paoge* and the *hunshui paoge*. *Qingshui* were those who “were the powerful in the locale” (*zixiong xiangli*), socializing with others but not conducting robbery and killing. In contrast, *hunshui paoge* contained “evil people and those who had convicted crimes and violated the laws.” Some say that there were five divisions of the *paoge* in Sichuan, called the benevolence, the righteous, the gracious, the intelligence, and the reliance division. Among these five, the benevolence branch, joined mainly by *shenliang*, was considered the most respectable one. A branch of the *paoge* was called a “mountain hall” (*shantang*). In each *shantang*, the organization of *paoge* was hierarchical.¹⁰⁴ They had their own regulation and promoted virtues of filial piety, righteousness, benevolence, and respectfulness.

In a sense, *paoge*'s power came from the strict discipline and connectedness this organization entailed. Whoever violated the regulations of *paoge* would be punished

¹⁰³ Fu Chongju, *Chengdu tonglan* [Investigation of Chengdu] (Chengdu: Chengdu shidai chubanshe, 2006), “Chengdu zhi *paoge* hua” [Language about *paoge* in Chengdu], 275. Originally eight volumes printed by Chengdu tongshu baoshe in 1909-10.

¹⁰⁴ The leader was called *daye*, *longtou daye* or *duobazi*. He assumed important authority as a patriarchal leader in the family. The *erye* served as advisors for the *daye*, offering ideas, and were also intellectuals. The *sanye* took charge of the daily management of the *paoge*, such as raising money, receiving other people, managing property, and etc. The *wuye* was in charge of the discussion of matters and the execution of decisions. There were no *siye* or *qiye* because *si* and *qi* were numbers that were considered unlucky and got skipped.

severely. More importantly *paoge* promoted a notion of mutual help beyond one's own region. Any *paoge* branch would help out members of other branches as their own, providing them lodging, spending money, and protection for those wanted for crimes by the authorities. In this way, *paoge* established a very closely knit self-protection network. One exaggerated account at the end of the Qing was that whenever *paoge* members came to a place, there would be a banquet prepared for them by the local *matou* (branch), with money given by the local branch to the leader of the visitors, which would be distributed to each member of the *paoge* as they needed. Exaggerated it might be, the power of the *paoge* at the end of the Qing Dynasty was tangible.¹⁰⁵

For years, scholars have debated the origin of *Gelaohui* and its relation to *paoge*. Apparently both *paoge* and *Gelaohui* developed from the Sichuan local bandits, *gulu*. Starting in the 1850s, other members of society started to combine with *gulu* and *gulu* thus extended forces in Sichuan and elsewhere, and became increasingly organized, as several military and civil officials in Sichuan concluded. The erstwhile Sichuan official Li Rong wrote: "In Sichuan, there had always been *gulu* bandits. After the raising of the local armies [because of the Taiping Rebellion] and especially after the demobilization of these armies after the Taiping, many of the soldiers joined the *gulu*. After ten years or so,

¹⁰⁵ Chen Shulong, "Sichuan paoge yu Xinhai geming" [The Sichuan paoge and the 1911 Revolution], in *Xinhai geming huiyilu* [Memoirs on the 1911 Revolution] vol.3. In Wang Di 1993, 549.

they started to make connections with each other, instigating and forming a popular force. These people became true poisonous elements for Hunan and Hubei.”¹⁰⁶

Both *Gelaohui* and *paoge* started flourishing in the Xianfeng and Tongzhi periods. In Sichuan, *Gelaohui* and *paoge* are considered the same group of people and the two terms are used interchangeably in scholarly writings.¹⁰⁷ It was during this time that the rituals and the ceremonies of the *paoge* (or *Gelaohui*) became sophisticated.¹⁰⁸ By 1870s, the *paoge* had emerged as a powerful social force in Sichuan, drawing members from a wide variety of occupations, including soldiers, sailors, miners, laborers, salt smugglers, unemployed vagrants, actors, yamen runners, craftsmen, small shopkeepers, pawnbrokers, water carriers, and sedan chair carriers. These people, as we shall see below, would become a leading force in the following anti-Qing and anti-foreign resistance.¹⁰⁹ The

¹⁰⁶ Li Rong “Ping Zeng zhongtang Li zhijun Peng gongbao Liu zhongcheng” [Letter to Zeng Guofan, Li Hongzhang, Peng Yulin and Liu Kun], in *Shisanfeng shuwu* [Bookstore of thirteen mountains] vol.1. In Wang Di 1993, 544.

¹⁰⁷ For example, Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie* and Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*.

¹⁰⁸ *Paoge* held a “Kaishan” [Mountain opening] ceremony when recruiting members. “When recruiting new members, *paoge* would form an alliance and practice Kaishan. Every time, several hundred people would join. The ceremony would not be wrapped up if not enough people had joined. Kaishan always happened at quiet and isolated places, where yamen runners would leak the searching notice. Before each Kaishan, *paoge* leaders would use the excuse of holding a birthday banquet, send out red invitations, and invite fellow *paoge* to come. Quite often more than a thousand people come.

¹⁰⁹ Besides them, the Hunan Army organized by Zeng Guofan to fight the Taiping rebels was also a major source of *Gelaohui* membership, and the dissolution in 1864 of this army of 100,000, many of them Sichuanese, contributed to the rapid growth of the society in Sichuan, especially in the eastern region of the province, which bordered on Hunan. In particular, General Bao Chao’s battalions, which were mainly composed of Sichuanese soldiers, also contributed the most *paoge*. Zuo Zongtang wrote: “Bao Chao was a Sichuanese who stayed in Hunan for a long time. His subordinates were all rather brawny soldiers. Among these soldiers, many were *gelaohuifei* from Sichuan and

expansion of the *paoge* continued. A Sichuan magistrate during the Xuantong reign noted: “By the time of the Guangxu reign *huifei* and *guofei* both existed extensively in Sichuan ... These strongmen (*jianghu haojie*) join up with each other. If one rises up, a group of people will follow.... Their branches (*gongkou* and *matou*) are everywhere to be found. They are innumerable.... *Paoge* would mobilize thousands of people, who all have guns and weapons and were able to offer an effective resistance to the officials and the soldiers.”¹¹⁰

Gradually, even *shenshi* and *lianghu* started to join *paoge*, both for self-protection and to tap into this network of power. According to the estimate by Republican scholar Liu Shiliang, at the end of the Qing, in the one city of Chengdu, merely the benevolence branch *matou* (which consisted only of *shenliang*) numbered 374. One report noted that “at the very beginning, *huidang* were those unlawful bandits who joined together to bully other people. Later, the *shenshi* and the wealthy people all followed suit one after the other. *Shenliang* also formed associations to protect themselves.”¹¹¹ In a similar vein, *Sichuan Gazette* (*Sichuan guanbao*) reported: “*Shenliang* used this act [affiliating themselves into *gelao*] to protect themselves, but in actuality, they were forming a wide

Hubei.” “The ten battalions of the Sichuan armies in the Hunan Army, no matter captains or ordinary soldiers, were all *huifei* members.” In Wang Di 1993, 547.

¹¹⁰ Sichuan sheng ziyiju [Sichuan provincial assembly], ed., *Sichuan ziyiju diyici yishilu* [Transcripts of the proposals by the first Sichuan provincial assembly], in Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing, vol.1, 134-135. Also, original document found by the author at Sichuan Provincial Library, same content.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

alliance in order to strengthen their dominance and build their prestige in the locale.”¹¹²
 In 1910s, even the newly educated elites who had studied in Japan also joined the *paoge*.

At the end of the Qing, *paoge* had transformed from a group of social outcasts into a powerful social force that officials had to tolerate and *shenliang* had to join for protection. As *paoge* became increasingly important in the late nineteenth century, they also started to assume more responsibilities, particularly in matters of local defense. A Sichuan prefect wrote at the end of the Qing: “I realized that the trend of forming secret societies was the most severe in Sichuan.... Once [bandits] were charged with crimes, they would seek protection from their public-office-holding fellow *paoge* members. Because members of *paoge* were everywhere in Sichuan, it was really hard to prevent their unlawful behavior. There were too many of them for all to be completely exterminated.... [In parts of Sichuan,] in almost every market town, there was a *paoge* branch.”¹¹³ In a village, a *bao*, or even a temporary lodging, there might be a *paoge* branch. In fact, a popular saying in Sichuan was that: “No illiterates lived at the end of the Ming Dynasty; yet no non-*paoge* members existed at the end of the Qing.”¹¹⁴

Let us summarize the political reality of the Old Regime. Before the 1850s, the Old Regime functioned well in Sichuan. The province had a limited but effective imperial administration; with the help of the *shenliang*, it engaged in easy relations with a

¹¹² *Sichuan guanbao* [Sichuan Gazette] (1911) vol.9. In Wang Di 1993, 546.

¹¹³ Wang Chaoyue, “Wang Chaoyue bing” [Memorial by Wang Chaoyue] in *Xinhai geming qian Shinian minbian dang’an shiliao* [Historical materials on riots before the 1911 Revolution], (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1984), vol.2, 792.

¹¹⁴ Liu Shiliang, *Hanliu shi* [History of *paoge*] (1938). Quoted in Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*, 19.

loosely structured provincial society. In the mid-nineteenth century, particularly during the Taiping Rebellion, the central government relied more upon Sichuan province for money and manpower, which increased the province's importance within the empire. By relying more heavily on the provinces, including Sichuan, the Qing succeeded in suppressing the Taipings. Yet at the same time, both the local governments and the *shenliang* became more powerful after the Taiping Rebellion. And *paoge* as a group started to grow too.

In a way, the Taiping Rebellion did change the local power dynamics in Sichuan. Afterwards, the power of both the local elites and the provincial governors rose, and the local chaos gave rise to a new power, *paoge*. However, the Taiping did not change the authority of the Old Regime. Scholars, Philip Kuhn for example, have described the late Qing political system as regionalism, saying that powers and functions formerly exercised by the central government were allowed to lapse to regions or that regions became increasingly self-sufficient. This is not the case for Sichuan. Beijing's prerogatives of official appointment and fiscal extraction were still maintained and the province became more involved in the empire's business. The collaboration between Sichuan and Beijing was greatly intensified. Despite their increased power, the local officials and elites did not challenge the legitimacy of the Old Regime. In addition, the collaboration between the *guan* and the *shenliang*, as shown in the tax resistance cases, continued and even intensified.

Thus, the Taiping did not bring down the Old Regime. It made the old system adjust. This adjusted equilibrium was, nevertheless, a precarious one. It needed only a rise in the level of tension in one or other direction—imperial, provincial, or

international—for the balance to come unstuck. A rise in the imperial demand for subsidies might mean tax increases, which would upset the balance of provincial politics. A push from the foreigners for more political and economic rights would antagonize the already strained relation between the central state and the local people: provincial frustration and xenophobia might produce a confrontation with foreigners undesired by Beijing, and big indemnities for foreign missionaries made it difficult for the province to pay imperial subsidies without yet more tax increases. This is exactly what happened in Sichuan.

IV. Crisis in the Old Regime: The Religious Cases (*Jiao'an*) from 1870s to 1900s

One important political episode in Sichuan from the 1870s to the 1900s was the numerous “religious cases” (*jiao'an*)—that is, confrontations between Christians and non-Christians ranging from harassment to deadly riots. Missionaries complained of Sichuanese xenophobia. For example, the twentieth-century Protestant missionaries Davidson and Mason noted that “in no province probably, has there been more frequent interruption and unsettlement. Again and again there have been serious riots [in Sichuan].”¹¹⁵

If the Taiping Rebellion did not change the alliance between the local elites and state, *jiao'an* put such collaboration in question. In *jiao'an*, the backbone of the Old Regime, the *shenliang*, was disappointed in and alienated by the Qing central state and its policies. At the same time, the group that had emerged after the Taiping Rebellion,

¹¹⁵ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 105.

paoge, became stronger. They were actively engaged in *jiao'an* and gained wide sympathy and even support from the *shenliang*. A new affinity was developed between *shenliang* and *paoge*. And the authority of the Qing state diminished.

How did this happen? What challenge did the Old Regime encounter during the prevailing *jiao'an* period in Sichuan? How did the equilibrium between the Qing central and provincial state, the local government, the local elites, and the local masses change because of the religious cases? How did the status quo in Sichuan change? Near the end of the Qing, what were the local power dynamics after *jiao'an*? Before answering these questions, we shall first look at the Christian development in Sichuan.

Christian Development in Sichuan

Sichuan was always a key target for Catholicism. S.A.M Adshead notes that it was members of the Société des missions Étrangères in the eighteenth century, in particular Jean-Martin Moye (1730-93), who created what Richthofen described as “a far more numerous community of Catholic Christians than in any other province.”¹¹⁶ The Tianjin Treaty of 1858 and the Beijing Treaty of 1860 had given foreign missionaries the right to enter inland China and to obtain their own lands and properties. In particular for Sichuan, after the Yantai Treaty of 1874, which made Chongqing a treaty port, Catholicism expanded and the Catholic Church obtained more land and property. In 1904, according to the British Consul in Chengdu, there were 379 French missionaries in Sichuan, ministering to a large Catholic community and operating schools, hospitals,

¹¹⁶ Adshead, *Province and Politics*, 22.

dispensaries, orphanages, and seminaries. Protestantism came much later. The first permanent Protestant mission station was established by the China Inland Mission only in 1877, but progress thereafter was rapid. In 1897 Mrs. J.F. Bishop reported that there were 2,458 workers including wives and 80,632 communicants and by 1904 ten non-Catholic communions were active. (The Sichuan Foreign Affairs Bureau in 1909 recorded that there were altogether 514 foreign priests in the province, with French and British predominant. Chinese Catholic converts were as many as 141,135 people, Protestants 36,823.¹¹⁷)

Taking Catholicism and Protestantism together, the distribution of Christian converts was uneven. In the Sichuan border region of Xichang, converts accounted for 3.4 percent of the entire population, making it the densest Christian community of all Sichuan. In Chengdu, about 0.6 percent of the people were Christians and in Chongqing, about 0.2 percent. In total, of the entire 45 million people at the end of the Qing Dynasty, Christian converts were about 0.178 million, or 0.4 percent of the entire population. Although it did not comprise a high percentage of the population, Christianity had a disproportionately large effect on late Qing Sichuan's cultural life.¹¹⁸

Because the French Catholic Church was the most powerful missionary group in Sichuan, we shall focus on the Catholic Church here. Judith Wyman argues that the Catholic Church in Sichuan developed in a context of domestic unrest, where migrants arrived continuously and communities were divided by geographic roots and different

¹¹⁷ “Sichuan tongsheng guanmin tongji biao” [Statistics on All Sichuan Foreign Officials and Citizens]. Special thanks to Professor Dai Zhili in giving me this original document.

¹¹⁸ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 671.

dialects, and where social relations were strained by competition over limited resources. This milieu of regional, ethnic, and cultural diversity explains in part why, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Catholicism was viewed not as a foreign religion but as a Chinese popular religion. In Sichuan, de facto toleration of the Church, despite imperial proscriptions from 1724 to 1844, enabled the Church to flourish, reaching sixty thousand followers when the proscription was repealed in 1844.¹¹⁹

In China as a whole, the signing of the Beijing Treaty in 1860 started a new wave of missionary expansion around the empire.¹²⁰ But because Sichuan was distant and far away, it was after the Yantai Treaty of 1874 that there was a sharp increase in missionary power in the province.¹²¹ In the late Qing, there were three formal episcopates of the Catholic Church in Sichuan: the Chuandong, Chuanxibei, and Chuannan Episcopates. In 1875, they had about 40,000, 33,000, 14,749 converts, respectively.¹²²

As Wyman points out, scholars in the past have pointed to western imperialism as the explanation for the hostile treatment of westerners and Chinese Christians in the nineteenth century.¹²³ She agrees that the new privileges exacted in the post-Opium War treaties did make western missionaries and Chinese Christians more aggressive in their

¹¹⁹ Judith Wyman, “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism,” 92.

¹²⁰ *Jiao’an*, 1.

¹²¹ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 665. Wang Di quotes a contemporary source of the time, which wrote: “In the Guangxu reign, the churches of Sichuan were ubiquitous, and the priests were everywhere to be seen. After staying for a while, they were very familiar with the local situation.”

¹²² Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 666.

¹²³ Judith Wyman, “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism,” 86.

efforts to encroach upon the local power structure. But, Wyman argues that more importantly, the expansion of Christianity was set in the local situation. “In Sichuan, local responses to this behavior must be viewed in the context of the region’s own development since the founding of the Qing. Catholicism.... also happened in the atmosphere of heightened fear of those who threatened the status quo in many spheres of life.”¹²⁴

The rapid expansion of Christianity in Sichuan corresponded to Sichuan’s economic conditions in the second half of the nineteenth century. The special influence of Catholicism over peasants in 1860s was closely related to the locale’s economic situation, which, as we have seen, was deteriorating. Historian Wang Di argues that peasants joined Christianity to avoid the increasing oppression from the officials and the *shenliang*. In some regions in Sichuan, “commoners (*min*), either virtuous or evil, converted themselves into Christians jointly. In one day, there would be dozens or even hundreds; in a few days, there would be several thousands. They all used this [being Christian] as their protection (*hufu*).”¹²⁵ “When the Chinese Christians have a legal case, the runners and clerks dare not to extort them for extra service fees. Even officials changed their attitude: they respect them and dare not directly curse them as stupid. This is actually why people were willing to become Christians and why later on there were so many incidents of revenge and hatred.”¹²⁶ Many tenants and poor farmers converted to

¹²⁴ Judith Wyman, “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism,” 87.

¹²⁵ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 684-685.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

Catholicism because they hoped to find support so that they could survive in difficult times.

After the 1860s legalization of missionary activities, evidence shows that Catholicism was indeed something lower-class peasants relied upon to fight against *shenliang*. Ba county documents record a story in 1862 of a Chinese Christian by the name of Zhang Zizeng. According to Zhang Zizeng, he was wrongfully ordered by the *tuanlian* leaders to pay fees, and he resisted against such an unfair order:

I was the tenant of Zhang Dexiao and his brothers, and I was always shaken down by people like Zhao Peisan. One day, Zhao Peisan came with Xu Huizhi and some others. They shouted “You should not work in the field on Wu day [a special day when work was forbidden in order not to disturb the local earth god] and thus you have committed a big crime!” These people took my hoes. After that, they then came to extort 2,000 copper coins from me. Zhao Peisan and those people were the powerful ones in my locale (*deshi*), and he even wanted me to prepare a banquet to treat him and to apologize to him. He also wanted me to withdraw from Catholicism.... I have been a Christian for years. I have always paid my dues as a good tenant and have never done anything illegal. However, such a deed was pure extortion!¹²⁷

As in most of the Chinese legal cases, there are two different versions of the same story. The other side of the story was told by the *tuanlian* leaders.

In the spring of 1862, Xu Huizhi and other *tuanlian* leaders went to the neighborhood to raise funds and train *tuanding*. On every Wu day, all *tuanding* were to gather together and train themselves rather than working in the field. However, Catholic convert Zhang Zizeng, based on the fact that he was a Catholic, resisted such an order. In addition, Zhang threatened us with his hoe.... Zhang again scandalized us and made false accusations about us, saying that we had taken his land and robbed him of

¹²⁷ “Jiaomin Zhang Zizeng gaozhuang” [Legal case filed by Chinese Christian Zhang Zizeng] (March 5, 1865), in *Jiao’an*, 29.

money. However, the fact is that Zhang was always a tenant and has never had lands or property in his life; thus, there was no way that we could confiscate his “land and property” for public use. In addition, it is merely because Zhang is a Christian that he could arbitrarily accuse us of such wrong deeds. He did this because he had support from the Church!¹²⁸

No matter who was lying here, Zhang’s case indeed attracted the attention of the Bishop of the Sichuan Catholic Episcopate. Even though we cannot know the nitty-gritty details of what happened, we can clearly see that poor tenants in Sichuan now could stand up for themselves against the powerful *tuanlian* leaders, who were mainly lower-class *shenshi* and resourceful *lianghu*. Indeed, Christianity provided protection for people like Zhang Zizeng, which irritated the preexisting powerful elite class in Sichuan’s counties and affected their formerly absolute dominance in the Old Regime. Besides Ba county, in fact, in many other places in Sichuan, the Church became deeply involved in local economic disputes. In Guang’an county, for example, some tenants, after becoming Christians, were emboldened and decided not to pay their rents, which created trouble for the local landlords. When the local non-Christians and Christians got into an argument, the Chinese Christians would seek help from the churches, and local churches would side with its converts and defend them. The church would challenge the authority of the Qing local yamen, which left the *shenliang* unprotected and helpless. Again, in Guang’an county, the local *shenliang* complained about the power of the Christians, stating, “Whenever a member of our lineage became a Christian, then our entire countryside and

¹²⁸ “Jianzheng Xu Huizi deng bingzhuang” [Legal case filed by *jianzheng* Xu Huizhi] (October 24, 1862), in *Jiao’an*, 28.

our lineage would be restless.”¹²⁹ The dominating position of the *shenliang*, who had controlled the political, economic, and policing power in the local society of Sichuan and enjoyed great prestige and authority in the locale, was now severely challenged by the foreign churches. It was exactly under this circumstance that *jiao’an* became prevalent in Sichuan.¹³⁰

Jiao’an and their Impacts

Jiao’an started occurring in big numbers in the 1860s. Wang Di states that from 1861 to 1910, there were as many as 127 large-scale religious cases. Among the big *jiao’an* that happened in Sichuan was the Youyang riot in 1865. In the 1870s, there was the robbery in Qianjiang and the disputes in Jiangbei, the latter leading to a metropolitan accusation (*jingkong*). In 1886, in Chongqing, there was the insurgence involving the powerful Christian Luo Yuanyi, which caused the demotion of the Ba county magistrate and a handsome indemnity to the Catholic churches. Again, there was the riot in Chengdu in 1895, causing an indemnity of as much as 750,000 taels of silver. And last, as a climax of all these *jiao’an*, from 1897 to 1898, the famous Yu Dongchen Rebellion

¹²⁹ “Neige xueshi Guang’an zou” [A grand secretariat reports from Guang’an] in Wang Minglun, ed., *Fan yangjiao shuwen jietie xuan* [Selected announcement of the anti-missionary propaganda], 50-51. In Wang Di 1993, 685.

¹³⁰ Paul A. Cohen gives a wonderful depiction of the *jiao’an* from early period, 1860-1870s. Paul A. Cohen (1963) in his pathbreaking study of anti-Christian incidents in the 1860s, moved beyond simple xenophobia as an explanation to explore a sophisticated legacy of anti-Christian thought that dated back to the Ming. Cohen also stressed social factors, emphasizing the importance of missionary encroachment upon the cultural, social, economic and political power structure of the local Chinese elite. Paul Cohen, *China and Christianity: The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism 1860-1870*, (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1967).

in Dazu county took place, which cost Sichuan one million taels of silver. In Sichuan, the development of these *jiao'an* experienced different stages: the early stage from the 1860s to the 1870s, the developmental stage in the 1880s, and the climax in the 1890s.¹³¹

From 1860s to the 1870s, during this early stage of *jiao'an*, most cases happened because of the anxiety that *shenliang* had about the churches. In the cultural sphere of the Old Regime, Christianity was considered a heterodoxy, a cult, and Confucian scholars and local gentry then spread various rumors on the inhumanity and the unethical side of Christianity, such as rumors of cannibalism.¹³² In the economic sphere of the Old Regime, the church started influencing the economic order as well. In 1846, for example, the central government announced that in the Qing Empire, all the properties of the Catholic Church confiscated during its proscription in the Yongzheng period should be returned. After this edict, in Sichuan, priests, using the reasoning “it was long ago and contracts and evidence are no longer available,” claimed ownership of properties of some public offices and *shenshi* homes and successfully took over quite a number of properties.¹³³ In the political sphere of the Old Regime, foreign missionaries enjoyed extraterritoriality, and thus could not be controlled by local officials. This privilege unavoidably threatened the domination of officials and *shenliang*. In the 1860s and 1870s, these threats from Catholicism were felt clearly by the Sichuan *shenliang*, who were eager to do something about it. Ba county documents detailed the *shenliang*'s

¹³¹ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 686.

¹³² “Houxuan zhixian Feng Wenyuan zao jiaomin wukong cheng” [Legal case filed by magistrate candidate Feng Wenyuan on him being stigmatized by Chinese Christians] (September 19, 1865), in *Jiao'an*, 345.

¹³³ Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 684.

responses. These documents show that all three big *jiao'an* from the 1860s to 1870s—the Youyang, Qianjiang, and Jiangbei cases—were struggles between Chinese Christians and *shenliang*. In fact, these were struggles initiated by the *shenliang*, out of their fear of losing control of their locale.

The first one, the Youyang *jiao'an*, was a clear-cut robbery, committed by bandits against Chinese Christians, but strongly endorsed by the local *shenshi*. In the 1865 petition concerning the Youyang case, a magistrate candidate (*houxuan zhixian*), who ranked as high as the Youyang magistrate, used a didactic tone to remind the magistrate to “respect the literati and pay respect to the Confucian principles and those degreeholders.”¹³⁴ He urged the magistrate “not to hurt the authority of our state (*yimian youshang guoti*).”¹³⁵ The bandits were left scot-free for a while. In the end, it was the intervention from the center (actually from Imperial Commissioner [*qinchai dachen*] Li Hongzhang in 1870) that brought the Youyang riot case to a conclusion. Li ordered the local Youyang people to make peace with Christians and claimed that attacking the Christian religion was a “severe crime” (*zhongcheng*).¹³⁶

In a similar manner, the Qianjiang *jiao'an* was also instigated by local Christianity-haters. They gathered together, started a fight, and bullied Chinese Christians. The initiators were educated elites who accused Chinese Christians of

¹³⁴ “Houxuan zhixian Feng Wenyuan zao jiaomin wukong cheng” [Legal case filed by magistrate candidate Feng Wenyuan on him being stigmatized by Chinese Christians] (September 19, 1865), in *Jiao'an*, 345.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 346.

¹³⁶ “Chuangdong dao zhuanfa qinchai dachen Li Hongzhang chuli Youyang jiao'an gaoshi zha” [The edict by Chuandong *daotai* that forwards Imperial envoy Li Hongzhang's announcement in dealing with the Youyang case], in *Jiao'an*, 356-357.

mistreating them. The Qianjiang *jiao'an*'s connection to upper-level *shenshi* was even clearer: a *gongsheng* directly took part in this anti-foreign activity. Because two deaths occurred in this case, it resulted in the French Consul's intervention and made the Sichuan governor take notice of it. The gentry and their followers were punished severely.¹³⁷

Last, there was the Jiangbei *jiao'an*, which was actually a series of local disputes at Jiangbei district in Ba county. In this Jiangbei case, we again see the familiar opposition between *shenliang* and Chinese Christians. Yet it is obvious that by the late 1870s, Christians had gained more power. The first dispute of the series was the 1876 case initiated by a Chinese Christian named Xiong Zhaoxiu, who sued a *jiansheng* named Tao Jiechen for burning down his shops. To defend himself, Tao aggressively marshaled the help of eleven *baozheng* and commoners as his supporters. They sued Xiong for “making a false accusation to get personal revenge.”¹³⁸ Chinese Christian Xiong Zhaoxiu now was strong enough to stand up against Tao, clearly a local powerholder, who was responsible for collecting taxes to support a local militia and to rebuild the local Guandi temple.¹³⁹ In Jiangbei, Christians became increasingly skillful and articulate. Another

¹³⁷ “Houbu junliangfu Lü Liejia deng huixian dajiao renyuan dingzui bing,” [The case about the sentence of the attackers of the foreign missionaries, filed by Lü Liejia] (July 2, 1875), in *Jiao'an*, 368-371.

¹³⁸ “Chongqing fu zha fa Jiangbei ting jiansheng Tao Jiechen jukong Xiong Zhaoxiu deng an chengci qingdian” [The edict by Chongqing prefect on the case of *jiansheng* Tao Jiecheng accusing Xiong Zhaoxiu] (August 25, 1876), in *Jiao'an*, 382.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 383. In Tao's exaggerating words, we see that people like Xiong's power had grown: “the evil Christian Xiong Zhaoxiu...emboldened by the fact that he was Christian, have engaged in bad behavior in our locale and committed numerous evil deeds. He bullied his fellow lineage members....After I became the one who was responsible for the

illustrative case was the one by the Christian Yang Zhaoxue who, after not getting the result that he wanted from the Jiangbei local yamen, went to Beijing and issued a metropolitan accusation (*jingkong*) against the local powerful. In this way, Yang quickly got attention from the county yamen to retry his case.¹⁴⁰

It is important for us to pause a moment and see the attitude of the Qing state. We see that local governments, even the Sichuan provincial government, were on the side of the *shenliang*. For the Jiangbei *jiao'an*, the Vice Bishop in Chuandong Episcopate wrote to the French Ambassador:

Beginning in 1875, in Chuandong, a number of local churches were destroyed and numerous Chinese Christians robbed or killed by a large number of local bandits. Many of those cases were never resolved. Even in the two cases that were resolved by contracts, the Jiangbei case and Fuzhou case, items in the contracts were never fulfilled. Churches were still not rebuilt and Chinese Christians were not able to go back home. The perpetrators who committed homicide were not punished according to the law. Quite to the contrary, those who were killed never got their compensation.... As for the unresolved cases, local officials did not pay any attention to those issues. They were not serious and only gave people empty words. In addition, they claimed to have received an order from the Sichuan governor-general saying that those past cases should not be bothered with any more. Thus, in Sichuan it was true that Chinese Christians suffered much by believing in the religion.... They were actually discriminated against because they were Christians.¹⁴¹

charges of the Guandi temple and the military charges (*junxu*), he resisted it and refused to pay the number that his father used to pay.”

¹⁴⁰ “Baxian kaiju ge jiao’an xingming shiyou qingzhe shenwen” [The list by Ba county on the reasons and names concerning jiao’an] (April 2, 1879), in *Jiao’an*, 406.

¹⁴¹ “Chengdu jiangjun Sichuan zongdu ying faguo gongshi qingqiu zixing quecha jiao’an chiping chuli zha: fu er: Chuandong fu zhujiao cheng Faguo gongshi binghan” [The edict by Chengdu General and Sichuan Governor-general on impartially dealing with religious cases: appendix two: the letter by Vice Bishop in Chuandong Episcopate to the French Ambassador] (September 3, 1879), in *Jiao’an*, 413.

The Vice Bishop did not lie about Sichuan officials' aversion toward the Christians. On August 6, 1878, Sichuan Governor-general Ding Baozhen ordered that the Jiangbei case "be resolved as soon as possible" to "prevent Chuandong Bishop Eugène Desflèches from gaining more time to better extort money from us."¹⁴² In his tone, Governor-general Ding did not hide his antipathy toward the missionaries. Ding called Bishop Eugène Desflèches "cunning and unrelenting" (*jiaozhen baichu*) and claimed that the bishop always "finds excuses to obtain more money from Sichuan."¹⁴³ With Ding setting the tone, Chongqing prefecture issued an order to all its counties: "All religious cases, except for the two resolved Jiangbei and Fuzhou cases, should not be dealt with and should all be canceled (*zhuxiao*)."¹⁴⁴ In Sichuan in the 1870s, the local powerholders (local officials and elites) of the Old Regime were doing their best to survive the new situation and preserve their dominance, at a time when the Chinese Christians had clearly become a force that could compete with the gentry.

However, despite the desire of the Qing local and provincial governments to preserve the old way of dominance, they had to listen to their Beijing superiors. Beijing's policy was, unfortunately, different from theirs. The French missionaries, having complained numerous times before the prefectural and the provincial authorities in Sichuan and having gotten no answers, had no other way to go than to seek help from

¹⁴² "Sichuan zongdu Ding Baozhen zouyi jie Jiangbei jiao'an pian" [The memorial by Sichuan Governor-general on drawing a conclusion of the Jiangbei religious case] (August 6, 1878), in *Jiao'an*, 404.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 405.

¹⁴⁴ "Chongqingfu zhuanchi geshu zhizhao faguo siduo suokong ge'an yi zhuxiao buying fankong zha" [Chongqing prefect notifying its sub-districts on not retrying religious cases that have been concluded] (April 29, 1879), in *Jiao'an*, 408.

Beijing.¹⁴⁵ In 1879, French missionaries got support from the French ambassador, who then forced Zongli Yamen to order the Sichuan Governor-general to revisit all the religious cases.

The intervention from Beijing and Zongli Yamen started a new power dynamic for local Sichuanese. The Chinese Christians realized that they had support from Beijing and from the higher-ups.¹⁴⁶ The local officials learned that they had to be more careful when dealing with Christians and could no longer simply support the gentry and accept all their demands. Indeed, Christianity had gradually become a form of power that started affecting the local dominance of Sichuan officials and *shenshi* by the end of the 1870s.

After the 1880s more people with local power became Christians, bringing contradictions in the loyalties of gentry and officials into the open. In Sichuan, a new term, “religious gentry” (*jiaoshen*), appeared frequently in the local documents, indicating the power that Chinese Christians had assumed. It was in these circumstances that the massive 1885 Chongqing *jiao’an* took place. It involved Luo Yuanyi, a wealthy fifty-four-year-old salt magnate from Chongqing city, who carried gentry standing and whose family had belonged to the Catholic Church for many generations. In the process,

¹⁴⁵ “Chongqing fu zhuanchi geshu zhizhao faguo siduo suokong ge’an yi zhuxiao buying fankong zha” [Chongqing prefect notifying its sub-districts on not retrying religious cases that have been concluded] “Fu Faguo siduo cheng Sichuan zongdu bingzhuan” [Appendix: French priest to Sichuan Governor-general] (April 29, 1879), in *Jiao’an* 409.

¹⁴⁶ “Chengdu jiangjun Sichuan zongdu ying faguo gongshi qingqiu zixing quecha jiao’an chiping chuli zha” [The edict by Chengdu General and Sichuan Governor-general on impartially dealing with religious cases] (September 3, 1879), in *Jiao’an*, 410-411.

the case became so urgent that it involved an edict directly coming from the Guangxu emperor.¹⁴⁷

The story of Luo started with attacks on the homes, churches, and offices of western missionaries, merchants, and diplomats in Chongqing city on July 1, 1886. By the second day the focus of hostility had turned toward Chinese Christians, with assaults launched against more than a dozen Chinese Christian families living in the vicinity of the Catholic church.¹⁴⁸ When the focus turned toward Chinese Christians, Luo Yuanyi's house was a primary target. In preparation, Luo had hired more than one hundred men to protect his home.¹⁴⁹ When eight of his men were harmed, Luo angrily ordered his men forward, armed with guns, knives, swords, and clubs, urging them to use force. Luo promised to take full responsibility for their actions. Three people were killed by Luo's men and twenty-two were wounded. Eight more were trampled to death as they tried to escape down the narrow alley.¹⁵⁰ While Luo and the Catholic missionaries saw this as a clear-cut case of self-defense, Chinese officials felt otherwise. In late August, the families of the people who died while attacking Luo issued a legal case against him. 1886, Luo was arrested and charged with murder for the killings committed by his men outside his home. Several months later, he was accused of provoking the entire incident

¹⁴⁷ “Chaban Chongqing jiao'an shangyu” [The imperial edict on solving the Chongqing religious case] (August 1886), in *Jiao'an*, 426.

¹⁴⁸ “Zuifan xiongxing” [Crimes of the perpetrators] (1886), in *Jiao'an*, 429-435.

¹⁴⁹ “Shouhai shi qin kongzhuang” [Accusations made by relatives of those were killed] (1886), in *Jiao'an*, 417-420.

¹⁵⁰ Judith Wyman, “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism,” 105.

by dealing dishonestly with the local people during prior years.¹⁵¹ Citing precedents from Chinese law to back his decision, the Qing emperor convicted Luo as primary provocateur. On January 30, 1887, Luo was executed in Chengdu.¹⁵² His head was sent to Chongqing and, as a public message to all, hung in a cage outside the city gate.¹⁵³ Luo became both victim and perpetrator of the attacks on foreigners and Chinese Christians.

What is particularly interesting in this case was the defendant's attempt to enlist the central Qing government against the local Qing authorities who were prosecuting him. Luo Yuanyi, well aware of the problem he had brought upon himself, engaged in a metropolitan accusation in 1886, hoping to gain support from the higher-ups in Beijing. He was fully aware of the people and institutions he could make connections to in his defense, especially the Zongli Yamen.¹⁵⁴ Although he failed to save himself, and the Ba county magistrate was considered rightful in charging Luo with "connecting with hooligans and doing wrongs," the official was still demoted and Sichuan province and Chongqing prefecture still paid a great sum of indemnity to the Church.¹⁵⁵ And although the top provincial officials memorialized to the court that Luo had been the instigator,

¹⁵¹ "Baxian chengbao Luo Yuanyi juzhong xingxiong niangcheng zhong'an xiang" [Report sent by Ba magistrate on Luo Yuanyi committing crimes] (September 6, 1886), in *Jiao'an*, 438-445.

¹⁵² "Sichuan buzhengshi fengzhi chufen Baxian zhixian zha" [Sichuan provincial treasurer punishing Ba magistrate according to edict from Beijing] (January 22, 1887), in *Jiao'an*, 468.

¹⁵³ Judith Wyman, "The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism," 105.

¹⁵⁴ "Luo Yuanyi jingkong" [Luo Yuanyi's metropolitan accusation] in *Jiao'an*, 422.

¹⁵⁵ "Baxian xiaoyu shiqin huijia tinghou jiejie wu zai zuoshou zishi paishi" [Ba magistrate notifying the relatives of those that were killed to go back home and wait for the result and not to bring trouble] (October 24, 1886), in *Jiao'an*, 449.

and that “the origin of the problems was the French and the British occupying strategic spots in Chongqing city, which incurred commoners’ worries and fears,”¹⁵⁶ the Sichuan provincial government still had to pay 220,000 taels of silver to the French missionaries, 23,000 to the Americans, and 18,000 to the British. A detailed indemnity contract was signed by the Chinese and the French governments, listing all the churches that needed fixing, the number of families that needed compensation, and the concrete ways to pay those compensations. The contract also emphasized that it was the local magistrates’ and the *baojia*’s responsibility to prevent bandits from harassing churches.¹⁵⁷

Over the course of the 1880s, continual indemnities and demotions showed that the power of missionaries kept expanding, the authority of the Qing state kept declining, and local officials became conflicted between support for local gentry and loyalty to their superiors. As interventions from Beijing and Zongli Yamen occurred more frequently, it was evident to the local elites that the local government was not able to help them fend off the ever more aggressive missionary powers.

In the 1890s, the missionary power expanded even more. After the failure in the Sino-Japanese war in 1894-95, Beijing had less and less bargaining power as it faced the foreign missionaries. western ambassadors constantly intervened and protested. In these circumstances, requiring local governments to “protect the churches (*baojiao*)” became the empire-wide policy of the Beijing government. Posters and announcements ordering

¹⁵⁶ “Chengdu jiangjun Sichuan zongdu chaofa chuli Chongqing jiao’an peikuan zouzhe zha” [Chengdu General and Sichuan Governor-general on dealing with the indemnity initiated by the Chongqing religious dispute] (January 11, 1887), in *Jiao’an*, 456.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 460.

people not to disturb the churches appeared all over Sichuan.¹⁵⁸ On September 29, 1895, Ba county issued an order to stop the rumors of foreign soldiers coming to Sichuan. This order was posted in all places around Chongqing. Again, on October 23 and on October 29, 1895, the Chongqing prefect and Chuandong *daotai* respectively issued orders to investigate the announcements (*jietie*) that called up people to join the attack against the churches. It was evident from local documents that in Sichuan, the Church was gaining more power.

The Chengdu *jiao'an* of 1895 was a good example of churches' increased power in this period. It was a rather minor robbery, involving only a small number of people aroused by a rumor of foreigners eating children, and initiated by a shout of "attack foreigners!" According to an American missionary priest, the riot also was owing to Sichuan people's huge distrust of foreigners, which "became particularly acute after China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese war."¹⁵⁹ However, this rather simple and small riot led to an indemnity of 750,000 taels of silver!

The old way of ruling that used to work in the Old Regime was not able to handle the numerous disruptions. The newly signed unequal treaties gave missionaries more privileges. *Shenliang*'s dominating position was challenged and their dominance in the locale confronted. More fundamentally, the authority of those whom the *shenliang* relied

¹⁵⁸ "Chuandong zhen, Chuandong dao, Chongqing fu ji Baxian huixian wei sheng yuan min jiao qi xin xiaoyu yanjin dajiao gaoshi" [Announcement jointly issued by Chuandong zhen, Chuandong daotai, Chongqing prefect and Ba magistrate on not following Chengdu people's precedents and attacking missionaries] (June 20, 1895), in *Jiao'an*, 476-477.

¹⁵⁹ "Meiguo chuanjiaoshi He Zhongyi tan Chengdu jiao'an" [American missionary He Zhongyi on the Chengdu case], in *Jiao'an*, 499.

upon—the local governmental officials—also crashed and burned. *Jiao'an* ignited the downward spiral for the Qing's authority and alienated the Qing state and its subjects.

Importantly, as *jiao'an* developed, one peculiar social group, *paoge*, expanded its power with *jiao'an*. *Paoge* was used by the local elites to fend off Christians. Already in the 1870s, the *Gelaohui* and some other secret societies, along with bandits, joined forces to attack official institutions. Governor-general Ding Baozhen indicated that “secret society bandits in all quarters are in league with each other. They oppose officials and resist arrest, so the situation is gradually getting out of control.”¹⁶⁰ From 1870s, secret societies turned their spears toward westerners and Chinese Christians. In addition, because *shenshi* and other *guanfu* members supported them, they were reckless. As early as 1876, the *Gelaohui* participated in attacks on Christians in Jiangbei, just across the river from Chongqing city, and in Fuling, a county located downriver but still a part of Chongqing prefecture. In Dazu, the *Gelaohui* was the main force organizing campaigns against European and Chinese Catholics from 1886 to the late 1890s.

This was exactly what happened with the famous *jiao'an* of Sichuan, the Yu Dongchen Rebellion. The rebellion took place at Longshui town in Dazu county. Close to Chongqing, Dazu was a rich county to which various kinds of people came to make a living. In Longshui, Christianity had become a powerful force that was competitive with *shenshi*, *lianghu*, and *paoge*: The gazetteer that ranked *shen*, *liang*, and *paoge* as first, second, and third in local power continued by saying, “in addition, we also have to count

¹⁶⁰ Cai Shaoqing, “On the Origin of the Gelaohui,” *Modern China* 10.4 (1984): 499.

Christianity in.”¹⁶¹ In Dazu, because of the influence that Christianity commanded, as early as 1861, there had been resistance against Catholicism. After that, there were the 1890 and 1898 rebellions by *paoge* leader Yu Dongchen.

In Sichuan, as we have seen in the previous religious cases, local yamen officials did share with the elites and commoners in their repugnance against Christians and foreign priests. In fact, the many *jiao'an* that happened in this province were themselves a demonstration of the local officials' attitudes: they tolerated the attacks against the local churches. This is also why Yu Dongchen could rise up several times in Dazu. However, despite the solidarity that Sichuan officials formed with the local *shenliang* and *paoge*, imperial edicts and orders of Zongli Yamen put these officials in a quandary. They had to obey rules to maintain their posts and in doing so, they alienated the local people, who also lost their loyalty to Beijing. As Yu Dongchen eloquently pronounced in his billboard in 1897:

We, the humble subjects, have been living under our dynasty for two hundred years. We have been gratefully living on the ruler's land and eating the grain growing on that land (*shimao jiantu*). We always maintain loyalty and filial piety. We have learned teachings from Yao and Shun, studied classics, and obtained methods in dealing with outsiders. However, as foreigners came via steamships and commerce developed, foreign missionaries also expanded their power. Foreigners took over our lands and businesses and used opium to poison our bodies and our hearts. Ever since the Daoguang reign, they have become increasingly menacing. They raped our women and irritated our people. They controlled our yamen and humiliated our court. They occupied our capital, Beijing, and took our treasure. They took our children as food and they made our debt humongous. They burned down our palace and invaded our tributary states. They occupied Shanghai and took over Taiwan. They forced us to

¹⁶¹ Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*, 96.

open ports in Jiaozhou and partitioned our territory. There was not a point in our history when we were humiliated like this!

Even though I, Yu Dongchen, have not really read much, I still understand the great principle (*dayi*). I have always obeyed rules and have never done anything wrong. However, faced with the increasingly overbearing (*manheng*) Christian converts (*jiaomin*) who had bullied my friend Jiang Zanchen, I could not bear it any longer. I also blame local officials (*guanfu*). They did not do a good job in judging the matter. They actually encouraged the foreign tigers and wolves and did wrong to the good people in our dynasty.

I decided to attack foreign churches. Even though this is doing wrong things, by doing wrong things against the bad people, I am actually doing good deeds for my friends. Fearlessly, I decide to rise up to clear away all the humiliations for our country (*xue guochi*). I order that we shall only exterminate the foreigners and we are not rebelling against the state (*dan zhu yangren, fei pan guojia*). Whoever treats us like enemies, we shall treat like foreigners and like those who are not subjects of our dynasty (*bingfei wochao chenzi*). We will kill them as if they had violated the state law and as if they had violated our principles of the righteous people.

Therefore, we call upon all *shenliang* to join us, to seek revenge against those who mistreated us. We also call upon the *shenliang* to support us with money and grain. If we do the very best we can and decide to suffer all the hardships, there was no way that we will not succeed! We also call upon the court to be kind and to eliminate the Sino-Japanese war indemnity of 200 million taels of silver, plus the Zhaoxin stocks levied in order to pay for the indemnity....¹⁶²

As we can see, Yu Dongchen championed an elaborated rhetoric that best demonstrated his principles, which was clearly written with the help of the local elites. In fact, the reason that Yu Dongchen was able to avoid punishment for eleven years owed to the protection that elites and the local yamen offered (despite the fact that they had to claim otherwise). Local officials were sympathetic to the anti-Christian powers. However, no matter what the local officials really thought, the consequence of the Yu

¹⁶² “Yu Dongchen chou jiao ji” [Chronology of Yu Dongchen hating the missionaries] in *Jiao’an*, 513. Originally from Wang Maoxiu, *Qishinian Riji* [Diary of Wang Maoxiu of Seventy Years]. Wang was a Dazu native and had experienced the Yu Dongchen case.

Dongchen Rebellion was a one-sided loss for the local people. Solely because of Yu's act, Sichuan was forced to pay one million taels of silver.¹⁶³ After this, it was obvious to the Sichuan *shenliang* that the Qing state was not able to give them what they wanted or to protect them. After *jiao'an*, the old way of dominance and the old alliance between *shenliang* and officials was on shaky ground. A new affinity, the one between local elites and *paoge*, as was demonstrated in Yu's mass-scale rebellion, was formed and became strong. The authority of the Old Regime diminished.

Conclusion

The consequences of *jiao'an* upon the Sichuan politics were far-reaching. First, *jiao'an* were very expensive. For example, France obtained 943,597 taels for the Chengdu riot and 1,186,100 taels were paid as indemnities for the Yu Dongchen Rebellion, which were considerable sums when the provincial budget was under 9,000,000 taels. In 1900, damage to Christian properties resulted in indemnity payments to western powers equivalent to thirteen percent of Sichuan's annual tax revenue.¹⁶⁴

More importantly, *jiao'an* shook the authority of the Old Regime. *Jiao'an* transformed Sichuan elite's attitude toward the Qing state. Local elites now realized that they could not rely upon the Qing government for protection. The very foundation of the Old Regime, that is, the alliance between the state and the elites, was shaken. Instead,

¹⁶³ “Chongqing haiguan (ying) daili shuiwusi Huatesen ge Haiguan zongshu (ying) zong shuiwu si Hede de baogao” [Report from Chongqing Custom officer Huatesen to Beijing Custom officer Hart] (December 31, 1901), in *Jiao'an*, 629.

¹⁶⁴ Judith Wyman, “The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism,” 91.

some Sichuan elite chose to support *paoge*, as the Yu Dongchen case has shown. In addition, as the foreign presence increased after the 1880s and foreign power became ever more evident in the 1890s, secret societies joined forces with each other to attack their enemies—westerners, Chinese Christians, and the Qing rulers. More people were joining the secret societies and strengthening the organized networks that challenged the traditional social and political structure.

The consequences of the *jiao'an* taught elites about the influence that foreigners held. To effectively maintain their power, elites realized that attacking churches would not be the best way. They had to do something different. The Old Regime was unstable. The new ways of reorganizing power had not yet come. But soon, they would.

Chapter Two. The Idea. “Sovereignty lies with the People”

At the most turbulent moment of the 1911 Railway Protection Movement, Sichuan Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng expressed his shock and disbelief that the leaders of this conflict with Qing authority were not common rioters (*luanmin*) or rebel bandits (*panzei*), but renowned members of the gentry class (*shen*).¹ All of them were well-trained, degreeholding, and highly respected in Sichuan. Most of them had studied in Japan and held important official posts in the Qing government. But rather than conforming to the conventional notion of what a Confucian gentryman should do, that is, help solve problems for the emperor, these Sichuan elite took a confrontational stand. Using a new political discourse, they instigated the movement by publishing numerous pamphlets and newsletters, powerfully argued against the state policy of nationalizing the railway company, and forcefully mobilized a crowd of supporters.

Among the movement leaders, Deng Xiaoke was from an influential industrialist family in Chongqing and was among the first cohort of Sichuan students who studied in Japan. After receiving his law degree from the prestigious University of Law and Political Science (Hōsei Daigaku), Deng became the secretary of the Ministry of Finance (*Duzhibu zhushi*). Deng later went back to his family business and became an influential spokesperson for the Sichuan merchant community. Lou Lun was vice chairman of the

¹ Zhao Erfeng, “Zhao Erfeng zhi Zhao Erxun shu jubu Pu Dianjun deng ji tongzhijun weigong Chengdu dian” [Telegram from Zhao Erfeng to Zhao Erxun on the capturing of Pu Dianjun and others and the encirclement of Chengdu by railway protection armies], September 17, 1911, in Dai Zhili 1994, 1160. In this telegram, Zhao Erfeng wrote: “the Sichuan people’s power of fighting for the railway has reached a peak. All this was propagandized by Deng Xiaoke, Luo Lun, Yan Kai, and Zhang Lan, with Pu Dianjun helping and feeding them ideas the behind the scenes.”

Sichuan Provincial Assembly and was influential among the student circles in Chengdu. Coming from a rich landlord family in Xichong county, he earned his civil service examination *juren* degree at an early age and became an influential teacher in Chengdu, where he introduced students to the revolutionary newspaper *Minbao*. Yan Kai's choice must have been even more upsetting to Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng. Yan was the son of Yan Qi, a long-term friend of the Zhao family. After studying at Tokyo Imperial University, Yan Kai was appointed Hanlin Academician and the chief manager of the Chuanhan Railway Company in Chengdu. As for Zhang Lan, he came from Nanchong. In 1904 when he was studying in Japan, he had petitioned for the drafting of a constitution for China. Having been influential in local educational circles, Zhang was also in charge of Nanchong's election for provincial assemblymen. Finally, the chairman of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly, Pu Dianjun, had been sent by the court to Hōsei Daigaku to study law and political science in 1904 after getting his *jinshi* (metropolitan graduate) degree. Upon returning, he was appointed secretary of the Ministry of Law (*Fabu zhushi*). Pu served as an adjunct of the Institute for Constitution Compilation (*Xianzheng bianchaguan xingzou*). In 1909, at the age of thirty-four, Pu was elected chairman of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly.²

What had happened that made these gentrymen change their political attitude toward the Qing? What were the new political ideas and discourse that inspired these members of the elite to action? As they questioned the very notion of the legitimacy of the Qing monarchy, what were the alternative ways they proposed to reconstitute the

² Xiao Xiang, "Guang'an Pu Dianjun Xingzhuang" [The life of Pu Dianjun of Guang'an county], in Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing, vol.2, 612.

Chinese polity? And how did these ideas influence the people of Sichuan? This chapter is about the ideas that made the revolution.

I. New Political Legitimacy: From *Junquan* (Monarchy) to *Minquan* (People's Rights)

The Old Regime, as I elaborated in Chapter One, was an imperial system of government. At the top ruled the emperor, surrounded by relatives and trusted councilors. As the “Son of Heaven,” the emperor enjoyed incomparable authority and legitimacy. “All lands under Heaven belong to the emperor and all people under Heaven are submissive servants to the emperor” (*putian zhixia mofei wangtu, shuaitu zhibin, mofei wangchen*) was the most widespread and deeply rooted political notion among the Chinese educated elite.³ According to these political values, people should all live humbly and feel grateful to the monarch for having a plot of land to live on. Even though the “people as the base” (*minben*) argument persisted, popular discontent did not by itself invalidate an emperor’s claims, nor did popular approbation legitimize the emperor. The people’s will was symbolic, rather than effective, in establishing a political legitimacy.

Importantly, in this classical political system, the educated elite (*shi*) were the ruling class. They had always played a crucial role as exemplars and operated within a political culture that valorized the monarchy. However, after the Sino-Japanese War of 1895, the political attitude of these elites changed. The fear that China would be “carved up like a melon” made these educated men become more critical toward the Qing rulers, and this newly assumed stand differentiated them from their earlier *shi* counterparts.

³ Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian*, 469.

Their stated goal was to rescue China from its weakness, to save the country, by reforming the political system.

Everyone in China was threatened by national weakness: as Liang Qichao wrote in “General Arguments for Reform” in 1895 after China’s defeat in the Sino-Japanese War: “Nowadays, we four hundred million Chinese, no matter whether elite or commoner, all share the same fate. We are in a collapsing room and on a sinking boat. We are like birds snared in a cage, fish trapped in a jar, and prisoners locked in a cell.”⁴ Indeed, after thirty years in the Self-Strengthening Movement, many Chinese intellectuals finally realized that it was the political system that made the big difference between defeat and victory. Developed by important thinkers such as Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, the new learning (*xinxue*) focusing on political change soon thrived, striving to find an alternative way in constituting China’s polity.

It was Kang Youwei who first stated the idea of involving all people of the nation to come together in force in 1895. He argued that if the court did not give people a stake in the nation, they would not stand up and defend it. Thus, the government had to offer people the right (*minquan*) to participate in the political decision-making process. To do this, Kang proposed the idea of opening a parliament and drafting a constitution, so that the nation would become stronger:

A constitution, once enacted, binds the rulers and all others alike. The ruler’s person is inviolable, as administrative responsibilities are shouldered by the government. In this way the sovereign and the people

⁴ Liang Qichao, “Bianfa tongyi” [General arguments for reform], in *Shiwubao* [Current Affairs], vol.2. In Zhang Pengyuan, *Liang Qichao yu Qingji geming* [Liang Qichao and the late Qing revolution] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1982), 47.

are welded together into one body politic. How can the nation not be strong?⁵

And Liang Qichao most eloquently expressed the idea of people's rights (*minquan*) as necessary to strengthening the nation, and made this conception spread to millions of Chinese minds. For Liang, expanding ordinary citizens' political rights was both urgent and necessary because without doing so, people could never be solidified into a strong group and China could never be saved. The promotion of people's rights remained a key agenda of Liang's. Liang argued further that to promote people's rights, one also needs to liberate their thoughts and develop their independence. Liang criticized despotism as the reason for China's current peril:

We should all know that ever since the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, Zhou, in ancient times), the power of the monarch has been exalted and the power of the people increasingly reduced. This was the origin of China's weakness. The people who committed the biggest crimes were the first emperor of the Qin Dynasty, the first emperor of the Yuan Dynasty, and the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty.⁶

Liang argued that only by saving people from despotism and giving people their rights could the country be saved.

In Liang Qichao's articles, people's rights (*minquan*) were frequently held up in juxtaposition to the right of the emperor (*junquan*). For example, even when Liang was criticizing Chinese historiography, he wrote: "There are histories of monarchs, histories of countries, and histories of the people. Histories of the people flourished only in the

⁵ Hsiao Kung-chuan, *A Modern China and a New World*, 202.

⁶ Liang Qichao, "Xixue shumubiao houxu" [Epilogue to the bibliography of western scholars' works], in *Shiwubao* vol.8. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 55-56.

west; while in the Middle Kingdom, such history almost never existed at all.” In a more direct critique of Chinese state ideology, he lamented the fact that in Chinese history, all institutions existed “to preserve the one household of a king, rather than to preserve the people under Heaven.”⁷

Interestingly, this early (roughly from 1895 to June 1898) *minquan* discourse often appeared under a Confucian trope. Following Kang Youwei’s strategy of taking Confucius as a reformer, Liang Qichao also went back to the classics to promote his *minquan* idea. Liang wrote, “Studies of the great harmony in the Spring and Autumn period (*chunqiu datong zhi xue*) were all about popular rights (*minquan*),” and “All sagely rule and the rule of benevolence was to serve the people. The practice of the politics of western nations of today is almost similar [to the sagely rule and the rule of benevolence].”⁸

Yet, despite the traditionalistic cover, Liang Qichao’s definition of *minquan* was subversive. Liang analogized the state to a business, implying that the people were the “owners” and should hold the ultimate power: “A minister is one who works with the sovereign” (*Chen zhe ye, yu junwang tong banshi zhe ye*).⁹ The monarch, in Liang’s metaphor, was only the chief manager of a small shop, and the minister was only a

⁷ Liang Qichao, “Yu Yan Youling xiansheng shu” [Letter to Yan Fu], in Liang Qichao, *Yinbingshi wenji* [Collected essays from an Ice-Drinker’s Studio] (Taipei: 1960), vol.4. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 54.

⁸ In Su Yu, ed., *Yijiao congbian* [Collection of writings by the reformers], vol.5. In Shen Yunlong comp., *Jindai Zhongguo shiliao congkan* [Collection of historical materials of modern China] no.647 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1971). In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 56.

⁹ In Su Yu, ed., *Yijiao congbian*, vol.5. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 57.

subordinate manager.¹⁰ For the people to exercise “their rights of self-determination” (*zizhu zhi quan*), Liang argued that it was crucial for national citizens to open a parliament, so that their wills and requests would be announced and they could really achieve self-determination.¹¹ Liang Qichao maintained that the relation between the monarch and the minister, and the relation between the monarch and the people, must be changed: the people should be the real owners.

Liang Qichao’s argument for *minquan* as requiring “self-determination” was destabilizing in the political arena. It made conservatives feel that the preexisting hierarchical order was threatened. They summarized Liang’s ideas as “an equalization of power between the emperor and the people (*junmin pingquan*).” In a letter to campaign for the closing of the Shiwu Academy, Bao Fengyang and seven other Hunan conservatives wrote to Confucian scholar Wang Xianqian:

Nowadays, the idea used by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao to confuse the world is the chanting of people’s rights (*minquan*) and equality (*pingdeng*). Now, our question is: If power were channeled downward, then who would rule the state (*guo shuiyu zhi*)? If all the people are self-determining (*zizhu*), then what should the monarch do? In that sense, the earth under Heaven will be in great chaos. This teaching of equality is an abandonment of the principles of ethics (*pingdeng zhi shuo mieqi renlun*) and is most abhorrent.¹²

The letter then suggested that Liang Qichao’s Shiwu Academy be closed because it was not what it claimed to be. Shiwu Academy was originally established to [prepare quality

¹⁰ This metaphor, as we will see, will appear repeatedly in the later political discourse of the Chinese elite as they struggled against the Qing state.

¹¹ Liang Qichao, “Gu yiyuan kao” [Study on the ancient parliament]. In Su Yu, ed., *Yijiao congbian*, vol.5. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 58.

¹² In Su Yu, ed., *Yijiao congbian*, vol.5. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 61-62.

candidates] to help with “the urgent situation;” however, it had now become a place for “teaching people about equality and giving people political rights.”¹³ Even more subversively, it had become a force in Hunan advocating “collective rule by both the monarch and the people together” (*biekai yi junmin gongzhi zhi guimo*). Fundamentally, the teaching of the rights of the people had promoted a sense of equality that deeply threatened those who were hoping to reinforce monarchical rule and traditional social hierarchies.¹⁴

In June 1898, the Guangxu emperor launched the Hundred Days Reform and announced his decrees enacting many of the reform proposals of Kang and Liang, but the conservatives at court quickly carried out a coup. The failure of the Hundred Days Reform led to Liang’s exile in Japan. Yet the *minquan* argument was already spreading among the elite class in China. Maybe because the teachings of Kang and Liang “were easy and graduation [from the Shiwu Academy] was not difficult,” maybe because “they used the façade of great harmony (*datong*) to capture people’s attention,” the influence of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao was such that “at the top, they had supporters, and from the bottom, they had followers.”¹⁵ Even though at this moment the understanding of self-determination or anti-despotism had not yet been clearly presented, still, the notion implied by “people’s rights” (*minquan*), in which citizens should have some participatory role in the polity, was established.

¹³ In Su Yu, ed., *Yijiao congbian*, vol.5. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 62.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ In Su Yu, ed., *Yijiao congbian*, vol.4. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 63.

Take the railway movement leader Pu Dianjun as an example. Pu became a Kang-Liang follower in 1898. In January of that year, together with thousands of civil service examinees from all over China, the twenty-three-year-old Pu came to Beijing from Sichuan to take his *jinshi* examination. It was then that Pu first encountered constitutional politics and various reform agendas. Pu participated in his fellow Sichuanese Yang Rui's reading group, the Sichuan Study Group (*Shuxue hui*). At a meeting of Kang and Liang's Society for the Preservation of the Nation (*Baoguo hui*), Pu heard Kang speak for the first time and found his call for a constitution strongly attractive.¹⁶ From that time onward Pu Dianjun believed that citizens had both the right and the duty to be involved in political affairs.

The legacies of the Hundred Days Reform were enormous. After the reform's failure, many members of the elite realized that the people must have much wider political participation in order to save China from the foreign imperialists. The failure of the Hundred Days Reform shook the educated elite class and set a number of them against the Qing court.¹⁷ Yet more importantly, the notion of *minquan* emerged for the first time in the political discourse of China. Educated people voiced their aspirations to participate in the decision-making process and to express independent opinions on

¹⁶ Hu Chongshu, "Pu Dianjun yishi" [Anecdotes of Pu Dianjun], in Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Sichuan sheng Guang'an xian weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao bianweihui, ed., *Guang'an wenshi ziliao xuanbian* [Selected personal histories of Guang'an county], (Guang'an: 1987), vol.4, 35.

¹⁷ Wu Yuzhang, "Jiawu zhanbai yu bairi weixin de huiyi" [Memories on the defeat of the first Sino-Japanese war and the One Hundred Days reform], in Sichuan sheng zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui ed., *Sichuan wenshi ziliao jicui* [Selected personal histories of Sichuan province], (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1996), vol.1, 3-16.

politics. The dominating argument of *minquan* at this time, made by Kang Youwei, was that “the sovereign and the people are welded together into one body politic (*junmin yiti*).” It was later in Japan that the more radical *minquan*—the self-determining, anti-despotic *minquan*—was established and well articulated.

II. Setting up the Principle: Sovereignty Lies with the People (*zhuquan zaimin*)

After the humiliating Boxer Debacle (1899-1900), the great fear of being carved up by foreign invaders, the strong yearning for national salvation, and the consensus favoring serious political reform prompted China’s educated elite to take even more radical political steps. From the Qing court at the top to common local gentry at the bottom, there was widespread determination for the reform process. In Li Jieren’s novel, a Sichuan literatus states: “After the allied troops of eight nations invaded China [the Boxer Debacle], the court is really in a disadvantaged position.... Officials, educated elite, and even commoners all realize that things cannot go the old way any more.... All of them who have any knowledge about the international situation tend to accept the new teachings. All people, if they know something about the global situation, know that it is necessary to reform (*weixin*).”¹⁸

It was under these circumstances that the Sichuan students first arrived in Japan in the early 1900s, and they were excited by the intellectual environment there, especially in Tokyo. In Tokyo, from 1899 to 1904, numerous books, journals, and pamphlets were published among Chinese student circles, propagating new ideas and western political

¹⁸ Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian*, 469.

theories, with the year 1903 being a peak.¹⁹ Some of the most emotion-laden, most serious and vigorous political essays were produced in the period of 1899-1904, prior to the debate between reformers and revolutionaries starting in 1905.

Conventional historiography has portrayed the intellectual scene in Tokyo as a competition between reform and revolution, represented by the antagonistic debate between constitutionalists and revolutionaries from 1905 to 1911. However, such a portrayal seems not have done justice to the complex intellectual environment before the 1905-11 debates. In my opinion, the period from 1899 to 1904 was the time when crucial concepts like “sovereignty,” “nation,” and “rights” were widely discussed and worked out. These debates left students in Japan with new notions of how public affairs should be run. Discussions during this early period did not focus just on the means of political transformation (which was the chief divergence between reformers and revolutionaries); it focused on mapping out the organizing principles of a new national entity called “China.”

Importantly, essays produced in this early period defined new concepts like nation (*guo*) and the people (*min*) and elaborated the relation between them. The crux of these writings was a discourse of rights (*quanli*)—national sovereignty (*guoquan*), people’s rights (*minquan*)—and a debate of where sovereignty (*zhuquan*) should be located. Although some writers had to change their political ideals and convictions after 1905 because of their political affiliations, the essays they produced in the early years

¹⁹ Xu Xiaoqing, “Liuri xuesheng kanwu de chuanbo wangluo” [Circulation network of the magazines by the Chinese Students in Japan], *Zhongzhou xuekan* [Zhongzhou Academic Journal], no.6 (2001): 92-96.

continued to have long-lasting effects. These ideas would inspire the future Sichuan Railway Movement leaders to first formulate their political visions and they also created a long legacy that has lasted until today in China.

Not surprisingly, Liang Qichao was again the intellectual center and his notion “sovereignty lies with the people” (*zhuquan zaimin*) became solidly established. Among the students in Tokyo, this version of sovereignty was the dominant one. Upon arriving in Tokyo, Liang Qichao was able to read more western political theory that had been translated into Japanese. From 1899 to 1902, he wrote some of his most radical and influential essays, most of which were published in the newspapers he established, *The China Discussion (Qingyibao)* (1898-1901) and *New People’s Journal (Xinmin congbao)* (1902-07).

Unlike his writings from before the 1898 exile, in these articles, Liang established a radical notion of sovereignty, shedding the Confucian classical overtones and leaving the Mencian notion of *minben* behind him. Liang differentiated *minben* from *minquan*: the former was to preserve the material basis of people, while the latter was to enable them to have an independent political stake. He wrote:

The sages in China used to talk about benevolent rule, while scholars in the west promoted the idea of freedom. These two concepts have some similarities on the surface yet are dissimilar in essence. What is the distinction? Benevolent rule talks about protecting the people and ruling them (*biyan baomin, biyan mumin*). But ... the rulers did not have their power restrained. Therefore, talking about benevolent rule is only just talk [because] there is no guarantee that benevolent rule will be carried out. Therefore, even though there were Confucius and Mencius and all those great sages who persistently propagated [the idea of benevolent rule], they still could not prevent tyrannical and despotic kings from coming

constantly and exploiting our people (*wo min*). All this was because only the rulers had power (*quan*)²⁰ and the ruled people did not have any.

Thus, even under a sagely system of *minben* and benevolent rule, in reality, “benevolent rule was hard to realize and tyranny was easy to advance.”²¹

The only way for the people to avoid being mistreated, then, said Liang, was to demarcate boundaries of power and to recognize the people’s innate equal status to that of the rulers. In particular, equality and freedom were emphasized in this new understanding of *minquan*:

If political affairs were not conducted single-handedly by one or two persons, but shared by the people, then good politics would be achieved. People who conduct tyranny must have their power limited.... This is what we mean by demarcating the boundary of power between the government and the people, and this is what we mean by granting the people an equal status when they face the government. The government and the people ... negotiate and decide the boundary between them. It is not the government that grants the people their rights (*fei wei zhengfu bi min yi quan ye*).... If the government can give people their rights, the government can easily take the rights back. This is exactly the difference between the essence of western government and Confucian-Mencian benevolent rule.²²

Liang firmly held that the rights of the people are innate and not “proffered” by the ruler, whether he is benevolent or not. Neither are such rights dependent on endorsement by officials. On the contrary, the people have an equal status [to that of the officials] and should proudly claim their naturally given rights. By this time, Liang Qichao clearly

²⁰ The character “*quan*” in Chinese also carries the meaning of “power” as well, as this case particularly shows.

²¹ Liang Qichao, “Lun zhengfu yu renmin zhi quan xian” [On the boundary of power between the government and the people] (March 10, 1902). Viewed from <http://www.bwsk.net/mj/l/liangqichao/000/033.htm> (August 2008).

²² Ibid.

understood the possible clash between the ruler and the people, and contrary to Kang Youwei's ideas in 1898, Liang argued that letting sage kings govern people was not enough.

Even more, Liang Qichao claimed that the real master in a state (*guojia*) ought to be the people. In addition to the office/manager/owner metaphor for government quoted earlier, Liang wrote:

The state is like a village. The court is like a guesthouse for this village. Those who are in charge of the court are like the ones who manage the guesthouse. Does this mean that the company was established for the office? Does this mean that the village was set up for the guesthouse? The answers [both being no] are too obvious to be debated.²³

Thus, neither the office nor the guesthouse is important; likewise, the imperial court is not the master of the state, but is rather the guest.

Why had the Chinese people not exercised their innate rights before? Liang was worried that they had been in blinders for so long that they would not understand the meaning of an electoral system or other rights:

From the early history of ancient Greece, there was the political system of an elected parliament. And we in China had not heard about it at all. Why did not we have elected representatives? It is because the people did not demand extending their rights. And the reason they did not request or fight for their rights was because that they did not see other people having such rights.²⁴

²³ Liang Qichao, "Aiguo lun" [On loving one's country], in *Qingyibao* [Chinese discussions], vol.6. In Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 98-99.

²⁴ Liang Qichao, "Lun zhengfu yu renmin zhi quan xian," (March 10, 1902).

The only way to prevent the tyranny of an emperor was to awaken the sense of rights among people and allow people to exercise their rights. By then, Liang Qichao had decided that even though the nation needed to be solidified so as to survive, *the people* should be the chief decision-makers in the polity called “China.” Liang gradually shed the notion that “the sovereign and the people are welded together into one body politic,” and soberly emphasized the possible clash between the ruler (*jun*) and the people (*min*), clearly advocating that it is the people that should be listened to.

Liang’s anti-despotism, pro-democracy, pro-equality version of *minquan* was effectively propagated. *The Chinese Spirit (Zhongguohun)*, one of the most influential pamphlets of the 1900s, crystallized this radical view.²⁵ *The Chinese Spirit*, first published in 1902, contained a number of articles that Liang Qichao and his colleague Meng Maihuai wrote for *The China Discussion (Qingyibao)* from 1899 to 1901 along with articles Liang wrote for *New People’s Journal* in 1902 during most radical phase of his political thinking. In addition to this small pamphlet, Liang Qichao’s widely distributed political newspaper *New People’s Journal* added fuel to propagating the idea of *minquan*.

²⁵ There are several versions of *Zhongguohun* circulating today. The first one was published in 1902, by the Shanghai Guangzhi shuju [Guangzhi publishing house] and has two volumes. The second one was published in 1903, by Shanghai Yunji shuzhuang [Yuji publishing house] and has one volume. The version I use, obtained from <http://www.kongfz.com> [The Confucius website of old books] carries the date of 1905. It contains two volumes. Notably, on the back cover, it states: “printed for the fifth time.” Also, this version is “sold at 30 cents (*san jiao*)” and “can be obtained from all big bookstores in China’s provinces.” All these indicated the great popularity of this pamphlet. In addition, in 1905, when the Qing Grand Council issued the edict in banning the “rebellious books” of more than twenty kinds, *Zhongguohun* was included.

In the impassioned pamphlet *The Chinese Spirit*, the essay “Chastising Bystanders” (*He pangguanzhe wen*) called upon the common people to assume responsibility as masters (*zhuren*) of the nation and to stop being onlookers. Liang wrote, “Who are the masters of the nation? They should be the people of this country. The reason western nations are powerful is nothing other than that their people exert their duty as masters.”²⁶ Liang then chastised those who believed that the officials were the masters of a nation. However, officials only “went for the jobs to show off their status and gain economic advantages, leaving the country of China feeble and weak.” The only way to save China was to transform ordinary people into “masters” (*zhuren*).²⁷

In different essays in *The Chinese Spirit*, Liang defined his concept of the “complete nation-state.” In the most renowned Liang-style essay, “On Young China” (*Shaonian zhongguo shuo*), Liang fervently calls upon young people’s national consciousness and urged them to establish China as “a truly complete nation” (*wanquan zhi guo*). Lamenting the fact that China was repeatedly called “an ancient big empire” (*laoda diguo*) by both western nations and the Japanese, Liang believed that there existed a young China that was “full of hope,” “exuberant with spirit,” “forward-looking,” “fearless,” “progressive,” “risk-taking,” and ultimately, “fresh and young.”²⁸ For Liang, China had only various dynasties but had never established a complete nation. Liang then urged young people to take up the responsibility of building such a nation: a young

²⁶ Liang Qichao, “He pangguanzhe wen” [Chastising bystanders], (February 20, 1900). Viewed from <http://www.bwsk.net/mj/l/liangqichao/000/015.htm> (August 2008).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Liang Qichao, “Shaonian Zhongguo shuo” [On a young China], (February 20, 1900). Viewed from <http://www.bwsk.net/mj/l/liangqichao/000/014.htm> (August 2008).

and complete nation, a real “entity where there is land and people, and *the people* on the land determine political affairs, drafting laws and preserving them.”²⁹

In another essay, “On the Modern Competition among National Citizens and the Future of China,” Liang Qichao defined nation and elaborated the relation between the nation and the people. “The nation (*guo*) belongs to the people (*min*); this is why we say the nation is a public asset of the people. A nation comes into existence only when the people come together to compose it.”³⁰

In the process of calling for China to become a “complete nation-state,” Liang Qichao also interrogated the relationship among state, monarch, and people, and the legitimacy and morality of the state, after systematically reading French philosophers like Baron de Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and German political theorist Johann Kaspar Bluntschli. In “Similarities and Dissimilarities in Changes of Ideas on the State (*guojia*),” Liang compared and contrasted old European, old Chinese, and new European ideas of state (*guojia*). In old Europe, “state (*guojia*), monarch (*junzhu*), and the people (*renmin*) all existed for God. God was the governing body (*zhuti*) of the country.” In old China, “the state (*guojia*) and the people (*renmin*) all existed for the monarch (*junzhu*). The monarch (*junzhu*) was the governing body of the state (*guojia*).” In Europe after the nineteenth century, “the state was established for the people. The monarch (*junzhu*) was only a small branch of the state and he existed for the people (*renmin*). The people were the main body of the state (*guojia*).” The old European rulers’ authority derived from

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Liang Qichao, “Lun zhengfu yu renmin zhi quan xian,” (March 10, 1903).

God and the Chinese emperor's power came from Heaven; the modern European rulers, in contrast, were appointed by the people and responsible to the people.

For Liang, only this third kind of state could be called a “complete nation-state,” for its people have a real stake in the polity and exercise their political rights.³¹ He pointed out that the “complete nation-state” had its philosophical origin in Rousseau's ideas of “equal rights” (*pingquan*). He stated, “The rights of people are naturally given; every one of them has the right to be self-determining, and they are all equal to each other. The state is founded under a contract by the people; then, the people have unlimited power and the government must listen to the opinions of the people.”³² This is the origin of modern nationalism. And this modern nationalism was “the brightest, the grandest, the most just ‘ism’ in the world.” It “guaranteed the preservation of freedom for the people in their own nation, yet also made sure that one country's people did not impair the freedom of other people.”³³

Liang Qichao noticed the rapid expansion of imperialism in the 1900s and realized that imperialism was in vogue in the world, along with statism, which “gave state the precedence over its people, and emphasized the government over the people.” Statism even brought back the notion that autocracy could be potent and useful. Still, Liang did not give up on Rousseau's ideas of the “social contract” and “human rights.”

³¹ Liang Qichao, “Guojia sixiang bianqian yitong lun” [On differences and similarities of the developments of nationalistic thoughts], (October 12 and 22, 1901). Viewed from <http://www.bwsk.net/mj/l/liangqichao/000/021.htm> (August 2008).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

He maintained that one should not argue for statism in China, because if China did not go through the phase of nationalism “China would never become a complete nation!”³⁴

Always believing that “ideas are the origin of reality,” Liang Qichao was a great propagator. Liang argued that “if we want a certain reality, we need to obtain certain ideas” and he paid great attention to publicizing his ideas. The circulation of *The Chinese Spirit* was extensive. At least two editions of *The Chinese Spirit* were published during the Qing Dynasty, in 1902 and in 1903. The original 1902 edition, published by the famous Guangzhi Publishing House of Shanghai, contained two volumes. At the price of three *jiao* (about thirty cents), it was sold, as the back cover of the book stated, “at big bookstores in all provinces.”³⁵ That same year, there were already at least five reprints of this pamphlet, as well as several pirated versions in numerous provinces.³⁶

The Chinese Spirit's impact cannot be underestimated. Many intellectuals vividly remembered reading this book as students at the end of the Qing. The famous historian Xiao Yishan (1902-78) of Jiangsu province, for example, remembered that “as soon as I started to read books, I read out loud the extremely widely known (*jiayuhuxiao*) *Chinese Spirit*. At that time, I had not yet heard about *Minbao* or the *Revolutionary Army* (*Gemingjun*, another influential revolutionary pamphlet).”³⁷ According to Xiao, Liang Qichao’s essays were “well organized” and “very clear;” in addition, they “had a

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Zhongguohun* [The Chinese spirit], back cover. Viewed from <http://www.kongfz.com> (August 2008).

³⁶ Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 300.

³⁷ Xiao Yishan, *Qingdai tongshi* [The general history of the Qing Dynasty] (Shanghai: Huadong shifan daxue chubanshe, 2006), vol.3, 1869.

captivating power in evoking the readers' emotions." For Xiao Yishan, there was no other book that had influenced him more than this one of Liang Qichao.³⁸ Besides Xiao, the New Culture Movement leader Gao Yihan (1885-1968) of Anhui province remembered the exciting experience of reading Liang Qichao's *Chinese Spirit* and *New People's Journal*. For the first time, he realized that China was weak not because "its people were evil and backward," but because "its government was evil and backward."³⁹ Then, for the first time, Gao thought of overthrowing the government and establishing a new one.

In Sichuan, *The Chinese Spirit's* impact was both long-lasting and penetrating. Huang Jiqing (1904-95) of Sichuan, later a geologist, remembered that *Zhongguohun* filled him with love and responsibility for his nation. Apparently, the impact of this pamphlet went beyond elite circles and major cities. The chief *paoge* leader from Pi county in Chengdu prefecture, Zhang Dasan, had read it and was stirred by its mobilizing ideas. When they heard of this, members of the Chengdu branch of the Revolutionary Alliance contacted Zhang and convinced him to join.⁴⁰ Written with Liang Qichao's magical pen that enlivened and evoked great emotions, *The Chinese Spirit* became one of the most exciting reading memories for a generation of Chinese.

³⁸ Ibid., 1864.

³⁹ Chen Wanxiong, *Wusi xinwenhua de liuyuan* [The origins of the new culture in the May Fourth era] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1997). Chen mentioned the reaction of Gao Yihan after Gao read Liang Qichao's works.

⁴⁰ Wang Yunzi, "Tongmenghui yu Chuanxi Gelaohui" [The Revolutionary Alliance and the sworn brothers in west Sichuan], in *Sichuan wenshi ziliao jicui* [Selected personal histories of Sichuan province], vol.1, 253.

New People's Journal was equally impressive. Despite being published in Yokohama, it circulated all over China, with four circulation stations even in the inland province of Sichuan, and 97 stations in 49 cities all over China.⁴¹ The early editions of *New People's Journal* represented its radical phase. Liang's articles "On Revolution" (*Shige*) and "On the New People" (*Xinmin shuo*) continued his ideas of bracketing the power of the state and expanding the power of the people. He continued to use a great deal of space introducing Rousseau's ideas about the social contract.

The impact of *New People's Journal* was huge. Young students even believed it helped them to succeed in their examinations both before and after the Qing court launched the New Policies reform. Hubei revolutionary Zhu Zhisan (1886-1967) wrote in his diary in 1903 that Liang had influenced the way people wrote in the civil service examination.⁴² Prominent Zhejiang intellectual Wang Lifu recalled that many examinees brought the *Journal* with them as "materials" to prepare for the examination. "Among those who performed outstandingly in the examinations, a great number of them benefited from this newspaper."⁴³ After the new-style schools mushroomed in the country after the New Policies Reform, Liang's impact was even greater. Local Sichuan students called Liang Qichao "Mr. New People" (Mr. Xinmin) and said among themselves that the best way to advance in schools was to emulate Mr. New People's

⁴¹ Zhang Pengyuan 1982, 297.

⁴² Zhu Zhisan, *Zhu Zhisan riji* [Diary of Zhu Zhisan], vol.10, January 8, 1903. In *Xinhai gemingshi congkan* [Journals on the 1911 Revolution] (Wuhan: Hubei renmin chubanshe, 1999), no.10, 337.

⁴³ Wang Lifu, *Wang Lifu ji* [Collected works of Wang Lifu] (Shanghai: Shanghai shehui kexue chubanshe, 2006), 146.

ideas and style.⁴⁴ Clearly, with such popularity, ideas of self-determination and the conviction that “sovereignty lies with the people” permeated the educated class in China, who would gradually absorb and internalize these ideas.

Even though Liang Qichao became more conservative after his return from the United States in November of 1903, these key ideas were already established and would live on for a long time. In this radical line of thinking, the nation belongs to the people, and a nation’s sovereignty is derived from the people (*zhuquan zaimin*). The people should be the *only* masters of a nation. In particular, people’s rights (*minquan*) as a key concept gained tremendous popularity among China’s reading public. These notions would live in the hearts of the educated elite in China, who would then use these notions in their power struggles and their everyday political practice.

III. Mapping out the Means—Constitutionalism

On June 7, 1901, Liang Qichao published his thesis “On Establishing a Constitution” (*Li xianfa yi*). For the first time, he drew the important link between a constitution and the rights of people (*minquan*). Liang maintained that the only way to preserve the rights of people was to promulgate a constitution: “The constitution and the people’s rights, these two things are indispensable to each other. This is both an unchanging truth and an experience learned from various countries in this world.”⁴⁵ It was in this important article that Liang Qichao pointed out concrete steps for China to

⁴⁴ Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian*, 283.

⁴⁵ Liang Qichao, *Li xianfa yi* [On constitutionalism], (June 7, 1901). Viewed from <http://www.bwsk.net/mj/l/liangqichao/000/017.htm> (August 2008).

transform its political system: a constitution was the first step. From this moment on, the focus of Liang's political reform was to establish constitutionalism.

For Liang Qichao, the most important attribute of a government was whether or not it had a constitution, supported by people's rights, rather than who formally held office as head of state. He divided politics into two kinds—constitutional and autocratic—and further defined “country” (*guo*) as “an entity that contains territory and people” and classified them as either headed by a monarch or headed by the people. Combining these categories, Liang wrote that a “political system (*zhengti*) is the system in which certain politics are operating to govern the people in a country.” He believed that there are three kinds of political systems in the world—autocratic polities headed by the monarch, constitutional political system headed by the monarch, and constitutional political system headed by the people.”⁴⁶

In Liang's mind, in all three different political systems, the decisive ingredient is the constitution because only by having a constitution “could the power of the monarch and the officials be limited.” Liang believed no matter who the head of the state is, the people or the monarch, it is the existence of a constitution that determines how power operates, how the monarch, the officials, and the people should act, and what the relations among these three elements are. Liang wrote:

Every member of a country, no matter whether he is the monarch, or an official, or a member of the ordinary people, must obey [the constitution]. A constitution is the origin of all other laws in a nation. All politics, stipulations, and laws must not challenge the basic principles of the constitution.... [In a constitutional system], the monarch has his power

⁴⁶ Ibid.

and the limit of that power; the officials have their power and the limit of that power; and the people have their power and the limit of that power.⁴⁷

Therefore, the constitution is the determining factor that defines the differences between political systems. The basic distinction between autocracy and democracy is not who the head is; rather, it is whether the country has a constitution or not.

Liang emphasized that it is the people's rights that actually make the constitution work: "If there are no people's rights, even if there is a constitution, it can only be a piece of empty paper and will not help at all." The people's power supported the constitution and guaranteed that it did not deteriorate. Why? Because only the people can "supervise the monarch and the officials."⁴⁸ Later, in his article "On Legislative Power," Liang Qichao insisted in the same vein that the legislative power must belong to the majority of the national citizens. He praised the theory of "division of power" by the French legal theorist Montesquieu and insisted that "sovereignty of a state lies with the people," as exemplified in Montesquieu's theory by the people's legislative power.

Given the actual political circumstance, Liang Qichao believed that the only way for the Qing to survive was to draft a constitution promptly. Liang started his line of argument from theory. He stated that an autocratic state is highly dependent on the quality of its rulers: an autocratic state would be governed well under a good ruler, but would decline under a mediocre ruler and be trapped in chaos under a tyrant. However, all these dramas would not happen in a constitutional state.⁴⁹ Why? First, a constitution

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

protects people against evil and incompetent rulers: “The hereditary rule of the monarch and the sovereignty of the state have their respective territories”; thus, “there is no way that evil-minded monarchs could seize the opportunity to do evil.” Second, a constitution protects the populace against evil ministers: “Ministers are elected by the majority in the parliament and the monarch would rely on the will of the people to appoint ministers; then, there would be no wicked ministers amassing power like Cao Cao, Wang Mang, An Lushan, and Shi Siming.” Third, a constitution guarantees that it is the people who decide policies: “The imperial edicts will follow what national citizens want and what the parliament approves.... Only those policies sanctioned by the parliamentary majority are implemented.” Fourth, the ruler is protected from popular complaints: “Commoners can petition their grievances to parliament for change and improvement; thus, how would there be any grievances directly against the ruler?”⁵⁰ Therefore, in theory, a constitutional system will prevent opposition to the court.

Liang Qichao then called for constitutionalism from the practical perspective, stating that constitutionalism was the tide of time. Using histories of western European nations, Liang demonstrated the necessity of constitutionalism, stating that “resisting constitutionalism would be like ‘an ant trying to topple a giant tree.’”⁵¹ The only way that the Qing Dynasty could survive would be to transform itself into a constitutional state.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

The remedy of transforming China into a constitutional country was, maintained Liang, not to include throwing away the monarchy. China should opt for constitutional monarchy. A constitutional republic was too radical to achieve as it required changing the political head. In addition, “the competition of presidential elections would be too cutthroat and that would do no good for the state.” Liang called his ideal transformation a “political revolution,” rather than targeting the ethnically Manchu ruling house of the Qing. Liang firmly believed that a good constitution would protect the rights of the majority of citizens and guarantee their hold on sovereignty. Who acts as head of the state is of secondary importance in the system, because the emperor does not have executive power; it is the cabinet that has the power to carry out decisions made by the legislative branch.

Other Chinese political theorists agreed. From 1901 to 1903, all sorts of political ideas were debated vigorously among Chinese students in Japan, yet, it indeed seemed that constitutional monarchy became one of their better-developed political theories. The famous constitutional expert Yang Du, for example, who greatly contributed to the introduction of constitutionalism at this time, wrote: “Let us first put aside the issue of whether China should be a republic or not. We see that... [in constitutional monarchy,] the people and the monarch negotiate to form a contract that limits the power of the monarch so that it does not harm the power and rights of us masters (*zhuren*).”⁵² The “contract,” of course, is the constitution.

⁵² In *Wang Kangnian shiyou shuzha* [Correspondences between Wang Kangnian and his friends] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), vol.3, 2379-2380.

Again, Liang Qichao was leading the intellectual tide as he pointed out a concrete path to establishing his long-held *minquan* ideal. After 1902, *New People's Journal* systematically published articles on the theories and history of constitutions. In its sixth issue, Liang Qichao wrote: "All great civilized nations in the world today have constitutions. The constitution is the basic energy (*yuanqi*) of a nation. [Acquiring a] constitution is the most urgent problem that China has to solve today."⁵³

Chinese intellectuals in Japan laid out both the principles of what a polity should be and a concrete plan for achieving that goal. In China, support for a constitution was amassing as well. The New Policies reform had gone on for a while, yet it did not actually create the political transformation that was needed.⁵⁴ In response, intellectuals in China had also realized that the key to a political transformation was a constitution. On June 16, 1902, newspaper *Zhongwai ribao* published an editorial, claiming that the most effective way of "transforming the law and strengthening oneself" is to "establish a constitution." It urged the Qing court to "pick the good constitutions of various eastern and western countries, compile them into a book, and carry [the constitutional principle] out."⁵⁵ Also, in the same year, *Zhengyi congbao*, another newspaper owned by Constitutional Reformers in the Jiangsu-Zhejiang region, argued for the advantages a constitutional monarchy would bring: "limit the power and authority of the ruler and

⁵³ Liang Qichao, "Jieshao xinzhu" [Introducing new works] in *Xinmin congbao*, no.6. In Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao: Qingmo lixian yundong shi* [The wave of political reform in early-twentieth-century China: the constitutional movement of the late Qing] (Beijing: renmin chubanshe, 1993), 34.

⁵⁴ Sun Baoxuan, *Wangshanlu Riji* [Diary of Sun Baoxuan] (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1983), vol.2, 556.

⁵⁵ *Zhongwai ribao*, June 16, 1902. In Hou Yijie, 38.

protect the rights of the ruled,” “solidify national security and enhance the happiness of the ordinary people,” and “get rid of public danger and achieve public wealth.” The newspaper concurred with Liang Qichao on the purpose of a constitution. “A constitution would determine the boundaries and limits of the three divisions of political power. It would establish the people’s rights and duties.... The parliament would participate in the political process, representing the people of the entire nation....and would guarantee that the people had entirely independent and unlimited legislative power.” In short, a constitution was to protect not only the nation itself, but also national citizens’ political rights.⁵⁶

Dagongbao was another Chinese newspaper that vigorously propagated constitutionalism (*lixian*), which was its most frequently appearing topic in 1903. On August 18, 1903, on the Guangxu emperor’s birthday, it published a special birthday greeting in a huge font, stating, “One person is having his birthday and we hope that our emperor can live forever; if we establish a constitution soon, then our dynasty will live on and on.”⁵⁷ In the same issue, an editorial pointed out that in order to make politics work, what was needed was to “first establish a constitution and offer people their political rights.” Only by doing so “could China’s future be saved.”⁵⁸

Indeed, campaigning for a constitutional monarchy had become a new intellectual trend. An anonymous manuscript of 1902 argued a serious need for constructing a

⁵⁶ In Hou Yijie, 38-39.

⁵⁷ “Lun neiluan waihuan you xiangyin zhishi” [On the situation that internal and external chaos are combining with each other], in *Dagongbao*, August 18, 1903. In Hou Yijie, 39.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

constitution: a constitution “would avoid the terrible situation in which once the ruler died, good politics died with him.”⁵⁹ In June 1903, when some members of the Shanghai elite were having their “parliament,” they proposed petitioning the Qing court to construct a constitution. From 1903 on, the intellectuals who supported establishing a constitution were gaining momentum. Constitutionalism (*lixian*) actually replaced people’s rights (*minquan*) as the catchword of radical intellectuals. As historian Hou Yijie superbly summarized, “the reformers had now changed their name to the ‘constitutionalists.’”⁶⁰ Reforming equaled going constitutional.

IV. Enlightenment in Sichuan

The passionate writings of Liang Qichao spread widely among the educated men in China. Of course, Sichuan elite were also involved in this late Qing intellectual transition. By means of newspapers such as *Minbao*, *Shenbao*, and *Shenzhou ribao* and by way of elites forming study groups among themselves, the discourse of rights spread in Sichuan’s cities and towns. Sichuan’s educated elite were imbued with new conceptions such as *guo*, *min*, and *minquan*, and they carried out their own political enlightenment.

⁵⁹ Anonymous, *Shang jing wai dangdao wan yan shu* [One thousand word petition for officials both in Beijing and outside Beijing], original manuscript found in the archive at the Institute of Modern Chinese History in Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In Hou Yijie, 39.

⁶⁰ According Hou Yijie, the term “*lixian pai*” [constitutionalists] was first coined in the radical student magazine *Zhejiang chao* [Tide of Zhejiang], no.7, in the article “Si zhengke lun” [On four politicians] in September 1903. In Hou Yijie, 39.

Starting from 1903, after the New Policies reform, new-style schools mushroomed in big cities such as Chengdu, Chongqing, and Luzhou. In Chengdu for example, starting from 1904, by ways of the new-style Eryoushan Bookstore and Huayang Book Market, students in new-style schools started obtaining Mr. Xinmin's (Liang Qichao's) writings and accepting many of his ideas. Some of them went on to open private new-style elementary schools—in novelist Li Jieren's wording, "hoping to enlighten the children of ordinary Chengdu families."⁶¹ Of course, some students, influenced by the radical line of thinking, passionately encouraged their students in turn to "be masters themselves and to drive out the slaves first and then repel the foreigners."⁶² Because of such practices, the notion "we, the people, are the masters of the state" became increasingly popular and evident. Li Jieren wrote that in a new-style school in Chengdu, facing the portrait of the Guangxu emperor, one student refused to kneel before the portrait and claimed that "the emperor does not deserve [the kneeling ritual]."⁶³

Indeed, the authority of the monarchy was diminishing and the concept of popular sovereignty was gaining momentum day after day. Thanks to Li Jieren's detailed and vivid depictions of common people's lives in Chengdu from 1901 to 1910, we now have a sense of how Liang Qichao's seemingly abstract ideas helped the local Chengdu elite see the world in different ways. A new way of doing politics was imagined, and now the educated elite were equipped with the imagination, the language, and the conviction to

⁶¹ Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian*, 353.

⁶² Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian*, 450.

⁶³ Li Jieren, *Baofengyu qian*, 359.

conduct a new politics. The discourse of rights and emphasis on the matter of sovereignty provided local literati a new imagination of their political relationship with the Qing rulers. These ideas gave them the power to be critical of the Qing state and provided them a set of alternative principles in reconstituting China's polity. They now could vent their ideas more articulately. In particular, Pu Dianjun was the most important of them all.

Pu Dianjun's trajectory was an instructive one. At end of September 1898, after witnessing the brutal executions of the six leading reformers in the Hundred Days Reform, including his good friends Yang Rui and Liu Guangdi, Pu Dianjun became a committed Kang-Liang follower. Back in his hometown in Guang'an county, Pu Dianjun launched his campaign for a new education system, merging three old Confucian academies into one new-style institute, the Zijin School. Teaching students not only the Confucian classics, Pu also taught current political events (*shiwu zhixue*) and invited scholars of new studies to be the instructors. The political setting changed rapidly at the end of the Qing. In 1905, despite having brutally crushed the Constitutional Reformers in 1898, the Qing ruling house started to resort to a constitution as a means of saving the dynasty. Pu Dianjun was then sent to Japan to study constitutional matters after passing the *jinshi* examination in 1904.⁶⁴ Tokyo in the early 1900s was full of various exciting new ideas.⁶⁵ It was during his three years in Japan that Pu Dianjun developed systematic

⁶⁴ Xiao Xiang, "Guang'an Pu Dianjun Xingzhuang," 611-612.

⁶⁵ Pu Yaoqiong interview, in Yi Dan, *Zuoyuo yu luoxuan* [Left, Right and Spiral] (Shanghai: Shanghai wenyi chubanshe, 1999), 53. Pu Yaoqiong is the daughter of Pu Dianjun. An intellectual as well, Yaoqiong had been hearing Pu Dianjun telling his stories when she was young.

knowledge of constitutions and determined his mode of participating in politics; he entered the University of Law and Politics in 1905. In 1908, after studying law and constitutional affairs in Japan for three years, Pu Dianjun was appointed secretary of the Ministry of Law (Fabu zhushi) under the Qing, and served as an adjunct of the Institute of Constitution Compilation (Xianzheng bianchaguan xingzou). In 1909, at age 34, Pu was elected president of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly.⁶⁶

In 1909, in the first assembly meeting, Pu forcefully defended the independent power of the assembly from the central government and openly challenged Sichuan governor-general Zhao Erxun. To advance his conviction on constitutional and parliamentary politics, in 1910, Pu and his fellow Sichuan assemblymen initiated a third petition to open a National Assembly and urged the Qing government to draft a solid constitution. Once again, the media became Pu's indispensable mechanism for political action. Using the provincial assembly's official newspaper *Shubao*, he initiated a major follow-up petition in Chengdu.

Guo Moruo, the later famous revolutionary poet and then a Chengdu High School student, recalled his first meeting with Pu in 1910:

We [Chengdu High School students] had been anxious, disturbed, scared.... When Pu Dianjun came to our school, it was already late. Pu was, of course, the leader of this movement and he was just back from Beijing. But Assembly Chair Pu also wanted us to be peaceful and patient. He said that if we continued our strike, it would lead to bloodshed..... Then, he talked about the relation between revolution and the constitution. He said that there was a contradiction between the two. The first involved a resort to illegal violence to seize power; in contrast, the other turned to lawful methods to establish a constitution. The ultimate success for us was to

⁶⁶ Xiao Xiang, "Guang'an Pu Dianjun Xingzhuang," 612.

establish a constitution, and we could construct a constitution only by abiding by the law. It is like entering a city hall—one has to go through the gate, instead of breaking in through the window.⁶⁷

Pu Dianjun, well respected because of his prestigious position, became a leader whom educated Sichuanese would look up to. At the same time, the ideas of popular sovereignty and constitutionalism were gradually gaining ground among educated elite in Sichuan.

Conclusion

“Sovereignty lies with the People” was the key idea that Liang Qichao raised in his 1900s’ writings. It was disseminated in important pamphlets and writings and conveyed in numerous newspapers to the minds of the Sichuan elite.⁶⁸ With the believers in the idea growing in numbers in Sichuan, the idea also became increasingly popular in the province. It became a real force. As we will see, in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement, it also became one of the most important rallying cries that enabled the Sichuan movement leaders to mobilize thousands of followers.

⁶⁷ Guo Moruo, *Fanzheng qianhou* [Life around the 1911 Revolution]. Viewed from <http://www.guomoruo.net/guo/jsz-cpjax.htm> (April 2005).

⁶⁸ According to Fu Chongju’s *Chengdu tonglan*, 178-180: *Shibao*, *Zhongwai ribao*, *Shenzhou ribao*, *Shuntian shibao*, *Guangyi congbao*, *Tongsu ribao*, *Tongsu huabao* and many others, were officially circulating in Chengdu in the late Qing period. *Shibao* had definitely been popular among local elites. In addition, according to Zhang Pengyuan’s *Liang Qichao yu Qingji geming*, 297: *Xinmin congbao* had three circulation stations in Chengdu and one in Luzhou of Sichuan. According to Huang Shou, unpublished memoir, *Minbao* were mostly smuggled in from Japan and Luo Lun, the railway movement leader and the vice chairman of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly, was precisely identified as the key person who publicized ideas from *Minbao* to the students in Chengdu. Li Jieren in *Baofengyu qian* vividly described the impact of newspapers on the Sichuan elite.

Nevertheless, when Liang Qichao proclaimed that everything depends fundamentally on the people, he was making a provocative and ambiguous statement. In his view, the rights of the people (*minquan*) were the root of a new political life. But who were the people? How could a government or an institution implement and bring about those rights? The Sichuan Railway Movement leaders of 1911 took Liang Qichao as their spiritual guide, but Liang was vaguest at precisely the place where they faced the most momentous decisions, namely: how such a future could be achieved in a pragmatic manner?

If Liang Qichao was the inspiration for the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement leaders, his philosophy was unclear in part because he had formed his ideas in exile in Japan, at a considerable remove from actual politics. This was not the case with the Sichuan movement leaders, whose convictions had been shaped by participating in the experimental New Policies Reform from 1903. The Sichuan elite gave a realistic touch to the discourse of rights (*quan*) and combined political principles with their political practice, which is the story of our next chapter.

Chapter Three. The Project. The Chuan-Han Railway Company and the New Policies Reform

In 1906, when Sir John Jordan after an eight-year absence returned to China to serve as the British minister in Beijing, he found a “new generation” [of elite] had grown up. These elite, having realized that “a new arena outside the traditional dynastic order had opened,” vigorously participated in this public politics that concerned both “national and provincial interests.”¹ Notably, our overseas students of Sichuan belonged to this generation. Upon returning to China from Japan, they quickly joined the New Policies Reform (1901-11), tasted the real experience of political struggles, and became part of the rapidly changing late-Qing political scene.

The Qing government’s last-gasp reform opened the political system and led to the beginning of public politics. The reform provided the chance for the new-style educated elite to perform and develop their power. In this chapter, I will tell the story of the Sichuan overseas students and their interaction with the Qing state—the provincial governor-general—regarding the Chuan-Han Railway Company.

In the initial stage of the New Politics Reform, students collaborated with the state. Nevertheless, with their new ideas such as “*quan*” (rights), and particularly in this case the shareholders’ rights, Sichuan students engaged in struggles with the Qing officials. Ultimately, they directly challenged the legitimacy of the Qing monarchy. Open struggle between the elite and the state emerged and soon gained sharp articulation as a clash over their political principles.

¹ Tu-Ki Min, *National Polity and Local Power: the Transformation of Late Imperial China* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 208.

I. The Imperial Policy: Building a Strong State (1901-1906)

The allied pillage of Beijing in 1900 shook the ruling house of the Qing as well. After the Boxer Debacle in 1900, not only Chinese educated elites but also the Manchu rulers realized that they had to launch a systematic reform to preserve themselves. In both the central and provincial governments, Qing bureaucrats vowed to build new armies, new schools and factories, and new political institutions.

The Boxer Uprising set in motion the political dynamics for reform. The Boxers had been encouraged by Manchu officials and princes, while the southern part of China, ruled by Han Chinese, was relatively peaceful. There was indeed the notion that the Manchus were the ones who had wrecked the situation, and there was a new degree of Manchu-Han conflict. In the Qing government, the conservative faction was discredited and most anti-foreign groups of the imperial court were crushed. Furthermore, the Boxer Uprising demonstrated the power of a popular movement and the damage popular unrest could entail. For foreigners, the widespread nature of the anti-foreign resistance made them realize that partition was impossible. Under this context, even the Qing ruling house started to talk about reorganizing the state and giving the people a certain participatory political role.

On January 29, 1901, on the way back to Beijing after fleeing the Allied Expedition, Empress Dowager Cixi issued an imperial edict in the name of the Guangxu emperor, stating: “There are everlasting classic canons; yet there are no permanent laws.... In the past ten years, wrongs and evils accumulated, but officials followed the old rut and tried to cover those up. All this led to the huge catastrophe. Now that negotiation is

going on, all political affairs should be reorganized and reshaped, so that our country can be rich and powerful again.”² The edict then called for all high-level Qing officials to submit detailed plans for the reform of the institutions of government. Finally, the court had decided to absorb the strengths of the foreigners and to eradicate the weaknesses of China.

This edict marked the beginning of the New Policies Reform. The first steps were taken immediately after the government resumed power following the allied occupation of Beijing in 1901. On April 21, the bureau that led the New Policies Reform, the Office of Governmental Affairs (*Zhengwuchu*) was established, with key Manchu and Han ministers as members. On October 2, Cixi issued an edict in her own name, reasserting her determination to “change the laws to strengthen China,” and ordered that all officials should “carry those out with all that they could.” Moreover, on November 7, Cixi removed her great-nephew Pujun from his position as designated successor to the reform-minded Guangxu, as a resolute gesture to demonstrate her reform determination. Indeed, the desire for reform on the part of Cixi and many court officials was serious. The conservative faction in the court was crushed, the determination for reform was resolute, and reform became the tide of the day. Still, Cixi made a distinction between her reform and that of Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao: “The new laws (*xinfa*) pronounced by the rebel Kang were mutinous laws (*luanfa*), not true reforms (*bianfa*).”³ As the regulation

² Imperial Edict of the 10th day of the 12th month of Guangxu 26th Year, in *Guangxu chao donghua lu* [The Donghua record of the Guangxu reign], 4601-4602. In Hou Yijie, 26.

³ Imperial Edict of the 10th day of the 12th month of Guangxu 26th Year, in *Guangxu chao donghua lu* [The Donghua record of the Guangxu reign], 4601. In Hou Yijie, 27.

of the Office of Governmental Affairs stated, to reform was to first restore old good laws, and then to absorb the good part of western laws.

After the 1901 edict asking officials to submit their ideas for reform, suggestions flooded the court. According to historian Hou Yijie, there were three types of memorials. The first, represented by Zhang Zhidong, Liu Kunyi, and Yuan Shikai, were like a continuation of the previous Self-Strengtheners in attempting to lead China to wealth and power. Zhili Governor-general Yuan Shikai proposed ten methods to carry out the reform: “To issue orders meticulously, to educate officials, to promote practical learning, to add new practical learning to civil service examinations, to enlighten the masses, to encourage traveling abroad, to settle foreign policies, to discern the practical from empty names, to enhance the national treasury, and to extend new armies.”⁴ Yet the most important proposal among these was that of Governors-general Liu Kunyi and Zhang Zhidong of Liangjiang and Huguang. In their three jointly-written memorials, Zhang and Liu suggested four policies to construct a new education system, twelve to adjust the old ways of governing, and eleven to learn from the west. In particular, they encouraged the adoption of new laws and regulations, promoted a new transportation system, and recommended abandoning the old examination system. They proposed to manufacture more copper coins (to curb the crisis of silver deficiency and the subsequent skyrocketing prices), to train new armies, to establish new-style schools, and to develop commerce and

⁴ Yuan Shikai, *Yangshouyuan zouyi jiyao* [Abstracts of memorials of Yuan Shikai] (1938), vol.9, 1-12. In Hou Yijie, 27.

industries. These three memorials became the blueprint for the New Policies Reform in its first stage (1901-1904).⁵

Memorials of a second type promoted constitutional monarchy, with Ambassador to Japan Li Shengduo leading the trend. In June 1901, Li wrote:

The key to carrying out the reform is to set up a principle. Without a principle, the myriad of concrete regulations will only lead to disaster for the reform. All reforms in various nations take the constitution as the foundation for building a strong country (*liguo jichu*). Even though political systems are divided into the monarchical system and republicanism ... all follow constitutionalism as the basis. When looking at the world, I have not seen a country that can be strong and wealthy without a constitution. The situation in Russia—namely, the shaky foundation of the country and its suppressed commerce and industry—all derives from the fact that the country has no constitution.⁶

In the same vein, in early February of 1902, Minister Sheng Xuanhuai suggested following the laws of Germany and Japan, hinting indirectly at launching a Constitutional Reform. In August 1902, Censor Zhao Binglin proposed to the court that the only way to prevent and quell rebellions was to construct a constitution: “To strengthen the basis of our nation, we have to make sure that the sentiment of the people reaches to the court, and to do so, we have to draft a constitution.... With a constitution, all military, legal, and financial matters will be carried out according to the public regulation. Therefore, the emperor and the commoners share the same concerns—the emperor puts commoners in

⁵ Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi, *Jiang-Chu huizou bianfa zhe* [Jointly-written memorials of Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi], in *Zhang wenxiang gong quanji* [The complete collection of Zhang Zhidong] (Beiping: Wenhuaizhai, 1928), vol.52, 9-29; vol.53, 1-33, and vol.54, 1-36.

⁶ “Zhuilu Li Muzhai xing shi tiaochen bianfa zhe” [Recording the memorial of Ambassador Li Shengduo on reforms], in *Shibao* (November 28, 1905).

his heart and the commoners put the emperor in theirs and the agitating matters of revolution will become meaningless and ineffective.”⁷

The third type, again according to historian Hou Yijie, was a middle ground between the first and the second types of memorials, which suggested establishing assemblies (*yihui*) as a means to reform, and was represented by Governor-general Tao Mo of Liangguang. Tao wrote that the failures of politics derived from the fact that the top and the bottom were not in communication with one another. In order to eliminate the obstacle existing between the top and the bottom in society, an assembly was a must:

The assembly is the place where politics are talked about, and the executive power still lies within the hands of the government. Thus, neither side interferes with the other's business. As a result, the government, via the assemblymen, will understand the likes and dislikes of the people. In doing so, the obstacle between the two is eliminated.⁸

Empress Dowager Cixi took the advice of the first group of officials, especially that of Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi. For Cixi, a constitutional system would result in too much of a loss of political power for the court, despite the fact that the constitutional proposals at this time advocated only “channeling the energies of the people to help build a strong state” and provided that the activities of the people would stay only in the realm of discussion. From 1901 to 1904, the early stage of the New Policies Reform followed

⁷ Zhao Binglin, “Fang luan lun” [On preventing chaos], in *Zhao Boyan ji* [Collected works of Zhao Binglin] (1922). In Hou Yijie, 29.

⁸ Tao Mo, “Biantong zhengzhi yi wu benyuan zhe” [Memorial of Tao Mo on reforming the most essential issues] in *Tao qinsu gong zouyi yigao* [The posthumous manuscripts and draft memorials of Tao Mo] (1924). In Hou Yijie, 29.

the advice of the first group of officials, with influential provincial governors-general like Zhang Zhidong, Liu Kunyi, and Yuan Shikai as its major promoters.

Three main policies were effectively implemented in the New Policies Reform from 1901 to 1906. The first was to promote and encourage privately owned companies and industries. In September 1903, a Ministry of Commerce was established, led by the son of Prince Yikuang, Zaizhen. All the new railways and new mineral industries came under the authority of this new ministry. Importantly, the Commercial Law (*Shanglü*) was drafted, which explicitly preserved the property rights of industrialists and merchants. The imperial edict of 1903 ordering the establishment of a Ministry of Commerce declared: “Commerce and encouragement of industries have ever been from ancient times to the present matters of real importance to governments, but according to an old tradition we have looked upon matters of industries and commerce as matters of the last importance. That the policy of the Government and the labor of the people result in daily increasing poverty can have no other reason than this.”⁹

The second issue that the court dealt with was the creation of an educational system new in both form and substance. In 1901, the Qing court issued an edict ordering the transformation of old-style *sishu* (private academies) to new-style schools. In 1904, with Zhang Zhidong in the lead, the Ministry of Education laid out the foundation of China’s modern education system, dividing it into elementary, intermediate, and higher

⁹ *Zhengzhi guanbao* [Beijing Gazette] (April 22, 1903). In Mary Wright, *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 28.

education. Finally, on September 2, 1905, the civil service examination was abandoned, marking the end of the old educational system.¹⁰

The third emphasis of the New Policies was the reform of the new state security system, including both the new military system and the new police system. In December 1903, the Qing established a new center for training soldiers, starting to build the New Armies and laying out the future blueprint for the new military system.¹¹

In Sichuan, provincial officials were also trying their best to follow these imperial edicts, determined to modernize their province and reform the provincial government's apparatus. Even though Sichuan was slow compared to other places such as Liangjiang, Huguang, and Zhili, Sichuan also had its own reforms, profoundly affected by the New Policies. For better or for worse, Sichuan was transforming. According to the *Sichuan Gazette* (*Sichuan guanbao*), which was the newsletter for the reform activities, key changes were taking place year by year.

The first reform Sichuan took up in building its modern provincial state was to establish a new police system, starting in 1901. Under the effective leadership of a

¹⁰ Historian Mary Wright gave a positive appraisal of the reforms' effects: The education reform was a success, where "the majority of towns and villages the new schools were welcomed" and the campaigns to raise funds for education met with surprising success. "High officials, wealthy merchants, and the prominent gentry seemed to respond to such appeals willingly. People of modest means also contributed, and patriotic suicides left notes asking that contributions in their memory be made to education. The total sum raised was inadequate, but the general public concern with modern education for a widening sector of society was manifest." In Wright, 26.

¹¹ Mary Wright also reviewed the military reforms and claimed that the military reforms were, like its educational reforms, double-edged. "The modern armies made possible the Chinese Empire's resistance to foreign encroachment on her frontiers, but this very role, coupled with their modern training, made them highly receptive to ideas of revolution in the name of nationalism." In Wright, 27.

Japan-trained official, Zhou Shanpei, a new police system was successfully established in Chengdu and gradually in outlying counties. As I shall explain later, the conflict between this new state control organ and the old local militia system was so intense that it became a key reason for the hatred against the provincial government. As a modern state organ, the new police system bitterly clashed with and transformed existing local practices, especially with regard to tax collection, and was widely accused of oppressive behavior. Another project for strengthening the state that Sichuan took up was to reform its armed forces. Governor-general Cen Chunxuan started the campaign to modernize the military in 1903. By 1911, a new regiment (*zhen*), called the Seventeenth Regiment, was established, where ambitious men like Yin Changheng would flourish and amass more power for their own purposes by using the trope of nationalism.¹²

The second aspect of Sichuan's New Policies Reform was the establishment of the new-style schools. In June 1902 in Chengdu, the first higher-education academy was established, where new studies were introduced systematically. Besides Chengdu, by October 5, 1905, according to Xiliang's memorials, various counties in Sichuan also had established other schools in wide-ranging locales: "There are 2 teachers' normal colleges, one in Chengdu and the other in Luzhou. There are also 110 preparatory teachers' normal schools. High schools numbered 8, higher elementary schools 18, first-level elementary schools 4,017, combined elementary schools 38, and part-time elementary schools 34."¹³ These schools, some of which were officially established although more

¹² Zhang Dafu, "Weixin bianfa zai Chengdu" [The New Policies Reform in Chengdu], in *Sichuan wenshi ziliao jicui* [Selected personal histories of Sichuan province], vol.1, 48-69.

¹³ Xiliang, *Xiliang yigao zougao*, vol.1, 520-21.

were privately endowed, became places where a group of young intellectuals could absorb new knowledge and new teachings (*xinxue*).¹⁴ In addition, in 1903, Xiliang started sending students from Sichuan to study in Japan. The majority of these students, more than four hundred, returned to Sichuan, where they would establish various professional and legal schools. They set up “medical schools, military schools, schools of commerce, political and law schools, railway schools, mining schools, and also specialized schools for planting mulberry trees (*sancan xuexiao*) [for the silk industry].”¹⁵ All these acts introduced new conceptions and ideas to a wide range and great number of young students, paving the way for the later Railway Movement. Even though the quality of these schools was dubious and the teachers were not of the first rate, still, it was in these schools that western knowledge was first encountered by the young Sichuan students who were to become the major messengers who later propagated the movement in Sichuan.

Of course, the third aspect of the reform, and the most relevant to our story, was the building of new industry and transport, wherein the Chuan-Han Railway Company became the keen focus. In this earlier part of the New Policies Reform, the state was trying to form a new environment for promoting the new economics. The promotion of

¹⁴ In his novel *Baofengyu qian*, Li Jieren gives a wonderful description of how gentrymen actively donated money to set up the new schools. Their motivation, according to Li, was partially to strengthen China via education, but also partially to fish for compliments from their peers.

¹⁵ *Chongqing Haiguan 1902-1911 Shinian Baogao*, no page number. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 290.

new industries encouraged the rise of a new type of elite, derived from the empowered gentry, merchants, and other.¹⁶

In essence, in this first stage of the New Policies Reform, the major emphasis was on reform to increase the effectiveness of the state and the development of the economy. Most of the imperial government and bureaucracy shared the anti-imperialist nationalism and the centralizing nationalism that were agitating the country as a whole. The government hoped to combat the anti-Manchu element in the new nationalism by demonstrating that it could provide the ideas, plans, and leadership for a united national effort. Nationalism was the key motive that propelled the imperial government into a series of reforms, and reforms became one of the main revolutionary forces of the period both directly and indirectly. The demise of the country, prophesied by many politically engaged Chinese in the years after the loss to Japan in the First Sino-Japanese War in 1895, was the frightful alternative to national strengthening in the age of the imperialistic nation-state. In order to secure national survival against the encroaching European and Pacific powers, reform proposals were carried out to bring about a strong, centralized state, capable of funding a respectable army and commanding the active loyalty and obedience of the inhabitants of its territory. Most proposals had been first mentioned by the self-strengtheners of an earlier generation, but the New Policies put these old proposals into effect.

¹⁶ Sichuan Overseas Students Association, “Wei Chuan-Han tielu shi jinggao quan shu fulao shu” [An Open Letter to all Sichuan Fathers and Elders on the Chuan-Han Railway Matter by Sichuan Students Studying in Japan], in Dai Zhili 1994, 279-308.

II. The Project: the Chuan-Han Railway Company in the Sichuan New Policies Reform

In Sichuan, the key project that emerged during the New Policies Reform was the Chuan-Han (Sichuan-Hankow) Railway Company. This project, initiated by the state, had gained attention and support from Sichuanese, who invested money in the railway company to strengthen their province and to prevent foreign powers from encroaching into their home.

Of all the land-based technologies that linked countries together in the nineteenth century, the most important was the railroad. Railways represented a potent new technology, promising a substantial increase in the productivity of transportation. Throughout the globe, railway building was a key element of a modern industry, a national market system, and a modern state. In China, the first great age of railway development was between 1895 and 1911, a time in which railways were at the center of China's problems and a time when the Chinese rail network expanded rapidly, from 410 kilometers in 1895 to 9,300 kilometers in 1911. As historian Ralph Huenemann points out, colonial and financial concessions were predominant in railway building at this stage: altogether foreign investors accounted for nearly 90 percent of the mileage built, while the state-owned and privately-owned "self-reliant" (*ziban*) railroads each accounted for only about 5 percent of the lines built.¹⁷

After the Boxer Uprising, foreign powers quickly resumed building railways in their colonial spheres of influence. Meanwhile, the Qing court showed a welcoming

¹⁷ Ralph William Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse: The Economics of Railroads in China 1876-1937* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 75.

attitude toward railway building and toward foreign investment. A regulation on railway construction was drafted, the “Concise Regulation on Railway Issues,” which stated: “No matter whether it is Chinese or foreigners, no matter officials or private merchants, all are allowed to propose to build railways.”¹⁸ In addition, “whether it is a Chinese company obtaining foreign investment or the foreign company having Chinese investment, all of these companies have to be protected by the local yamen.”¹⁹ These regulations guaranteed legal and economic protection for the foreign investors who would be more aggressive in building railways in China. German railroads in Shandong were quickly resumed where they had been interrupted in 1900, and the line from Jiaozhou to Jinan was opened to traffic by 1904. Meanwhile, in Yunnan, the French railway projects linking the southwest to their Indo-Chinese colony continued, despite the severe technical problems they encountered. The British group, feeling the impact of the Boer War, remained quiescent in the years after 1900, with the exception of the line from Beijing to Shanhaiguan. The Americans and the American China Development Company resumed their construction of the Canton-Hankow line. Simultaneously, the construction of the Belgian-owned Beijing-Hankow line was moving rapidly ahead. During this period, railways became a major way for foreign powers to penetrate into China. And many Chinese literati viewed railways as the most visible manifestation of the imperialist presence in the Middle Kingdom. Governor-general Zhang Zhidong once commented

¹⁸ Mi Rucheng, *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliao* [Historical materials on the history of Chinese railways in the modern era] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1963), vol.2, 423.

¹⁹ Ibid.

that “railways were like a pair of scissors: wherever the railways arrived, the territory would be lost [to foreigners].”²⁰

In the early years of the first decade of the twentieth century, Sichuan became a focal point of competition among imperialist powers. Sichuan was rich and resourceful. Always called a “heavenly land” (*tianfu zhiguo*), Sichuan was rich in mineral sources, natural resources, and manpower. All these made Sichuan an attractive locale for aggressive foreign investors as they fought for their interests in China. The British and the French were chief competitors in getting railway concessions in Sichuan province.

The British plan went back a long way, to 1863, when they first proposed a rail network in China.²¹ In this plan, the British hoped to link Sichuan south to the Yunnan-Burma region and north to Hubei and Hankow. In 1897, the British obtained the railway concession along the Yunnan-Burma line. Nevertheless, this was not enough for the British investors, who proposed to link Sichuan with the Yunnan-Burma line. A British officer wrote overtly that the ultimate goal for railway building in Burma was not confined to trade and commerce along the Burma border, but rather, the British should always think about linking to Sichuan province and east China.²² The British were determined to construct such a railroad, both to prevent the French from interfering with commerce and trade in west Yunnan and to make sure that, via Sichuan and Hankow, the trunk line between India and Shanghai would be completed. To achieve these two goals,

²⁰ Sheng Xuanhuai, *Yuzhai cungao* [Materials preserved in Yu House], vol.31, 31.

²¹ Kende, *Zhongguo tielu fazhan shi* [Development of Chinese railroads], 7. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 428.

²² Mi Rucheng, *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliao*, vol.2, 466.

the British established a company called “Yunnan” in 1899. In a letter addressed to the British Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the company appealed that the Ministry be fully supportive of the plan of obtaining the railway concession from Burma to Sichuan and then to the Yangzi River. Meanwhile, the British dispatched three investigative teams to measure the possible railway lines: the first was from Burma to Yunnan, the second from Yunnan to Sichuan, and the third from Chongqing to Chengdu.²³

The French were equally aggressive in pursuing their interests in Yunnan and Sichuan. The French were trying their very best to “make sure that the British attempt in colonizing Burma would crash and burn,” and to ensure that “before the Brits get their way in Yunnan and establish their influence there, [we] penetrate our power in those provinces.”²⁴ In 1898, as France won the privilege of building railways from Vietnam to Yunnan, a Japanese diplomat commented, “The true intention of the French is not confined within Yunnan; rather, their chief goal is to gain Sichuan.”²⁵

In the ensuing competition between the British and the French, the French and Russians made a deal to collaboratively prevent British influence. The French seemed to be winning and at the beginning of the twentieth century their investors started to build the Yunnan-Vietnam Railways. Under this pressure, the British investors consistently wrote to the Sichuan Governor-general, Cen Chunxuan, asking for permission to build railways in Chengdu, Guan county, Ziyang county, and Jiangkou department. They also

²³ *Dang'an xuanbian*, 122.

²⁴ Mi Rucheng, *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliao*, vol.2, 426.

²⁵ *Waijiao bao* [Newspapers of foreign affairs], Guangxu 29 year, no.35 and 24. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 430.

proposed the idea of building railways linking Sichuan to Tibet. To realize these ambitions, the British sent emissaries to the provincial yamen. In short, in the fight over railway concessions, Sichuan was a key battlefield.

These aggressive demands alerted the Qing officials. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote in a memorial to the court:

Sichuan is full of resources. By only linking Sichuan to Hankow, the goods of Sichuan could be sold to other provinces and Sichuan would profit. Yet, Sichuan is very hard to enter, its land is covered with mountainous and rugged terrain, and the Yangzi River [that connects to Sichuan] is full of rapid currents. Thus, communication and trade with Sichuan was never easy. Moreover, the ministers of Britain and the United States have always been asking for permission to build railways.²⁶

In the face of a series of events of foreign powers winning control over building railways in China, the year 1903 was an important turning point—it was the time when China began to respond more vigorously to these western incursions. Qing officials started to take a stand to preserve national sovereignty, and railways became a major factor in the initial development of nationalism. It was also at this time phrases like “to recover sovereign rights,” “to protect railways,” and “to have self-built railways” echoed through the entire country. The court shared the anti-imperialist sentiment, and a fateful step was taken under this circumstance.²⁷

On July 11, 1903, on his way to assume the post as the Sichuan Governor-general, Xiliang wrote earnestly to the court at Beijing, begging for permission to institute a

²⁶ Mi Rucheng, *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliao*, vol.3, 1058.

²⁷ Mi Rucheng, *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliao*, vol.3, 1066.

Chuan-Han Railway Company to “exploit resources (*kaipi liyuan*) and preserve the national sovereignty (*bao zhuquan*).” Carefully, Xiliang enumerated his reasons:

Among all fights and competitions of the strong nations, the influence and power [of a nation] always follows where its railway reaches. I have never heard about any strong nation allowing others to build its own railways, which would surely lead to losing benefits, power, and sovereignty. China, at this moment in time of reform and of self-strengthening, indeed has an abundance of things to do, but still, it should never slow down in building railways! In particular, Sichuan, a heavenly land and a resourceful province, is filled with goods and products. However, all these goods and products cannot be circulated because of Sichuan’s impossible accessibility. Foreigners have “drooled with envy” for a long time over Sichuan and have all been conniving about taking up Sichuan’s railway-building on their own. Meanwhile, some Chinese have also secretly ganged up with foreigners.... If we still do not have an officially established provincial railway company and still do not call upon all-Chinese capital to build the road and preserve sovereignty, then the situation will be indeed perilous!²⁸

The soon-to-be governor-general further demonstrated Sichuan’s strategic location: “On the west, Sichuan is adjacent to Tibet; on the south, Sichuan links to Guizhou and Yunnan. And Sichuan is at the upper reaches of the Yangzi River.” Therefore, if the railway concession in Sichuan is lost to foreign investors, then “all provinces along the Yangzi River would lose their buffer zone!” Sichuan’s railways were relevant to the geopolitics of the entire Qing Empire.²⁹

Xiliang’s proposal met with strong support from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Yet the ministry suggested that concrete regulations should wait for the Ministry of

²⁸ “Sichuan zongdu butang xi zouqing zishe Chuan-Han tielu gongsi zhe gao” [Memorial sent by Sichuan Governor-general Xiliang about establishing the Chuan-Han Railway Company], July 11, 1903, in *Chuanlu yuebao* [Monthly report of the Sichuan railways] vol.1, (1911 May). Original document found by the author at Sichuan Provincial Library.

²⁹ Ibid.

Commerce to deliberate after its establishment.³⁰ Quickly after the organization of the Ministry of Commerce, with Prince Zaizhen as minister, in September 1903, Xiliang followed up to the court with another memorial:

After I entered Sichuan and observed the ethos of the Sichuan people, I realized that Sichuanese are easily agitated and even Sichuan gentrymen are impetuous. Albeit the Boxer Uprising of Sichuan is exterminated, bandits are widespread and they may rise up readily. Thus, establishing a self-reliant railway is also important to keeping local order.... As soon as I received the “Concise Regulation of Railways” from the Ministry of Commerce, which focuses on enhancing the power of the state and the interests of all people in China, ... I soon consulted with the new ministry on [the Chuan-Han road.]³¹

Tirelessly, Xiliang pressed the court to offer the green light. In terms of the capital of the company, Xiliang confidently said that “all people will know that the matter shall be successful” and “no one would hesitate to offer their support of donations any more!”³²

Xiliang’s hard work finally paid off. In January 1904, the Chuan-Han Railway Company was established in Chengdu, over which the provincial government held decisive power. The building of the Chuan-Han Railway Company was the first gesture of response of this kind, and the Chuan-Han became the first provincially owned railway company in China. As a wave of nationalistic sentiment swept the country, similar ventures were enthusiastically organized in many provinces. By the end of 1907, at least

³⁰ “Waiwu bu ju zou yifu Sichuan zongdu Xiliang zou zishe Chuan-Han tielu gongsi zhengao” [Reply by the Ministry of foreign affairs on Xiliang’s memorial], in *Chuanlu yuebao*, vol.1 (1911 May).

³¹ “Sichuan zongdu Xiliang zou sheli Chuan-Han tielu gongsi zhe” [Memorial sent by Sichuan Governor-general Xiliang about establishing the Chuan-Han Railway Company], in *Sichuan guanbao* [Sichuan Gazette] (1905 March).

³² Ibid.

nineteen of these provincial railroads had been chartered.³³ Indeed, from the very beginning, the Chuan-Han Railway Company was closely related to the issue of rights recovery and national sovereignty. The company had been established as an anti-imperialist effort to prevent foreign investors from building railways in Sichuan. This strong connection between nationalism and the building of railways would, later, enable the Railway Protection Movement to become an important site of revolutionary activity based on nationalistic rhetoric.

III. The Chuan-Han Railway Company: A Company of Sichuanese (“We” Want to Pay a Railway Tax)

With the company established, however, Governor-general Xiliang had a hard time attracting sufficient investment. First of all, the company’s need for money, fifty million taels of silver, was massive. It turned out that Governor-general Xiliang had been overconfident in Sichuanese willingness to invest money in railways. Months after the establishment of the company, Xiliang wrote: “Sichuan being far away from the center, its people have limited vision.” Also, “in the past, Sichuanese have donated and supported their neighbors in building up their industries and did not receive any benefit. After this bad experience, Sichuanese are wary.”³⁴ Now that the Chuan-Han Railway Company needed millions—the projected railway was 1,980 kilometers, passing through the most rugged terrain in China proper—“it [was] impossible to gather that amount.”³⁵

³³ Ralph William Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse*, 65.

³⁴ Xiliang, *Xiliang yigao zougao*, vol.1, 455.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Xiliang was stuck in a financial quandary. Throughout the entire nine months (January to October) after the company was established, the company failed to function at all. It was under these circumstances that Sichuan students in Japan stepped in.

In 1904, in Tokyo, a group of patriotic students from Sichuan was feeling apprehensive about the railway company back in their home province. In October 1904, three hundred Sichuan students studying in Tokyo held a mass meeting. They decided to stop “empty talking” and to actually “start contributing.” Collectively, they issued a statement:

The railway matter is truly urgent now. To alleviate the danger of this railway being owned by foreign powers, the company has to have real influence. Real influence comes from strong financial support.... If this railway were lost to the foreigners, then all China would be in trouble.³⁶

The students were fully aware of the reality they faced: if they could not raise enough funds for the Chuan-Han Railway Company, it would surely be lost to foreign bankers. Even though half of the Sichuan students were “shabby and miserable” (*ban shu hansuan*) and all of them “remained abroad” (*qie ju yuwai*), they decided to “be the first group of people who will not only talk but also take action.”³⁷ The Sichuan Overseas Students Association (*Sichuan tongxianghui*) gathered sixty thousand taels of silver and pledged to gather another three hundred thousand.³⁸

³⁶ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji* [Diary of Jingguan Hall], vol.9.4. October 2, 1904. In Dai Zhili 1994, 289.

³⁷ In Dai Zhili 1959, 10.

³⁸ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, October 2, 1904. In Dai Zhili 1994, 289.

Proactively, the students also proposed specific methods that would guarantee the raising of the railway capital from Sichuan's people. The overseas students wrote to Governor-general Xiliang with these proposals: First, the government should impose a tax on opium, salt, tea, and wine merchants. Second, it should gather funds from various levels of copper coin bureaus throughout Sichuan and from local yamens. Third and most important, Sichuan landowners and peasants should be taxed a surcharge based on their produce of grain. This was, in fact, the first proposal for levying a coercive land-tax-based surcharge for building the railways in Sichuan.

Indeed, it was the urgent international competition over the Sichuan railroads that urged the overseas students to act. Chen Changqi, a young student who originally came from Qianjiang county of Sichuan, carefully chronicled in his diary the acts and the reactions of these students over the railway issue from September 24, 1904, to January 22, 1905.

September 24, Wu Daquan received a letter from his friend in Chengdu, who wrote: "The British have sent someone to investigate and survey the roads in Sichuan, and the French have seized permission to excavate coal and gasoline in Ba and Wan counties..." If our railways are lost to others, then our Sichuan will follow the old rut of Manchuria and all Sichuan people shall become British slaves! One of our fellow students suggested that we students from Sichuan should gather to discuss the means to deal with this issue. Mr. Zhou [Zhou Ziting, the supervisor of students in Japan] said that the only way for us to make this thing happen is to first collect fifty thousand in silver in Japan, buy machines, and hire engineers and send them back to start building the railroads; meanwhile, we should plead with Governor-general Xiliang to resolutely resist the foreigners. September 25, noon, we went to the Kinki Hall [a popular meeting place for Chinese students in Tokyo] to discuss railway issues. Altogether more than a hundred students came. We all agreed to donate money and urge General Xiliang to resist decisively.³⁹

³⁹ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, September 24 and 25, 1904. In Dai Zhili 1994, 287.

As much as the setting up of the Chuan-Han Railway Company was an act both justified and urgent, still, the crucial issue determining its success was the sufficiency of its capital. These overseas students took a proactive step:

October 2, raining, at seven in the morning, I went to the Kinki Hall, and around nine, people gradually gathered. Altogether 230 people came. We elected an executive committee of the Sichuan Overseas Students Association. After that, we discussed the railway issues. Deng Xiaoke showed us the draft of the telegram that was about to be sent to Governor-general Xiliang: "Having heard that the British and the French are being extremely aggressive in demanding railway concessions, we Sichuan students will exert ourselves all that we can, will donate our money, and are determined to gather more for this public work in our province. We swear to sacrifice all of our interests, hoping that we can reach the expectation of your, the Governor-general's, demand. We hope that you can do the following: First, to imitate the Japanese Railway Regulation to guarantee a 4 percent dividend to investors. Second, to utilize all the public funds in the province to build up the railways. Third, to quickly send people to investigate, evaluate, and map out the railroad line so that gentrymen and merchants shall make their investment." After we agreed upon the telegram, we donated individually. In the end, 20,000 taels of silver were collected.... Altogether we decided to take up the responsibility of gathering more than 320,000 taels of silver for the railway company.

October 5, raining, at nine, Deng Xiaoke sent a quick letter, saying that "Shanghai's *Shibao* today reported that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, because of the foreign pressing of demands on the Sichuan railways, ordered the Sichuan Governor-general to hurry up in building railways. Our action has perfect timing, which is great!"⁴⁰

The 320,000 taels of silver were far less than the company needed: the Sichuan students had to invent other ways to solve the difficult problem and they proposed this idea to Governor-general Xiliang in a petition:

⁴⁰ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, October 2 and 5, 1904. In Dai Zhili 1994, 287.

October 8, sunny, thirty-one people (the executive committee of the Sichuan Overseas Students Association) discussed the railway matters once more. Deng Xiaoke said, when Japan was trying to build their railways, they utilized two methods: one was stocks, the other was bonds. We should use the method of “voluntary surcharge taxes” (*juanshu*) [which was first devised for fundraising in suppressing the Taiping Rebellion, and was originally truly “voluntary” but later became a fixed surcharge and was coercively levied] and issue railway bonds (*zhaipiao*). We all agreed. Soon, some proposed the idea of taxing opium planters, and some proposed the idea of using extra public funds to buy bonds. We decided to base our advice on these ideas and wrote a formal petition (*tiaochen*) to General Xiliang. We all agree that railway bonds are the best idea, so that the ownership rights to the railways will belong to the commoners (*min*) and so that the government shall offer its protection too.

October 22, light rain, I went to the meeting of the executive committee, which was held at the Guesthouse of Qing Students. Deng Xiaoke and Gu Bie came first, holding the “Letter of General Xi” and their petition to Xiliang on building railways. All these were written passionately, with genuine feeling, and were engaged with the global situation. Deng Xiaoke said that the letter was actually by Zheng and Jiang from other provinces. On the matter of universally adding *juanshu*, we voted to delete the item. Altogether twenty people came.⁴¹

It should be noted that this idea on issuing railway bonds (*zhaipiao*) to be financed via a universal surcharge met with opposition from Sichuan students themselves: the oppositionists actually comprised “80 to 90 percent of the entire student body, and they argued that commoners in China were already poor and distressed. If we imposed another surcharge on them, they could no longer survive.”⁴² The rift among the students was deep, even to the level of physical confrontation.⁴³ Despite the differences, the executive committee nevertheless decided to reject the opinions of the “dissidents” and went ahead with their original proposal on railway bonds.

⁴¹ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, October 8 and 22, 1904. In Dai Zhili 1994, 287-288.

⁴² Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, October 4, 1904. In Dai Zhili 1994, 288.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

The year 1904, as we shall see from later chapters, proved to be a critical year for these students from Sichuan, who later became important activists in the late-Qing Constitutional Reform, leaders of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly, and advocates of the Railway Protection Movement. In fact, these actions started the students' active role in provincial affairs, and from this moment on, they were able to have a say in political matters. After 1904, a new type of collaboration between elites and the government arose: as the government had trouble solving its financial needs for the new railway-building project, Sichuan elite took action. Gradually, the elites expanded their influence; they bargained and negotiated with the government for more power. Meanwhile, having gained widespread recognition because of their fund-raising for the railway, the students became natural leaders for "the people of Sichuan" when the Sichuan Provincial Assembly was set up later. By the spring of 1911, they had gathered a strong force of followers and in the summer of 1911, it was these former Sichuan students in Japan who masterminded and orchestrated the entire Railway Protection Movement.

The students in Tokyo were sincere in preserving the integrity of their homeland: some, after hearing that the British had entered Sichuan's river territory, could not continue studying in Japan but asking the supervisor of the overseas students, Zhou Ziting, for permission to go back to Sichuan.⁴⁴ They continued treating the railway rights and the sovereignty of Sichuan as their top issue and constantly discussed methods for solving the crises.⁴⁵ At the same time, these students kept a close eye on the unfolding of

⁴⁴ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, January 20, 1905. In Dai Zhili 1994, 299-289.

⁴⁵ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, January 22, 1905. In Dai Zhili 1994, 289.

the railway issues back home. Zhou Ziting served as an important connection between the provincial officials and the students.⁴⁶ Also via personal correspondence, these students were well connected with important Chengdu elites such as Hu Jun, who again consulted regularly with these Sichuan students for new ideas in carrying out this new project.⁴⁷

Finally on October 22, 1904, students found a way to solve the difficulty in collecting capital for the railway company. In their petition to Xiliang, “Our Opinions on Starting the Chuan-Han Railway Company,” they wrote:

The world of today is a world of reality and not a place of empty talking. Procrastination can never lead to any accomplishments.... To make sure that this huge enterprise [the Chuan-Han Railway Company] succeeds, we must devise other means to collect capital than solely relying upon private stock.

Concretely, in this petition, students proposed three kinds of railway capital. The first was the private capital (*minkuan*), referring to the stock willingly bought by Sichuan people. For *minkuan*, the students devised means to make sure more people were willing to invest in the stock—first, to pay a 5 percent dividend to the investors; second, to guarantee to all *minkuan* holders their rights (*quanli*) and responsibilities (*yiwu*) as shareholders; and third, to encourage all professional associations (*tuanti*) to take up the responsibility of buying stock. The second kind of capital was the official capital (*guankuan*), referring to the provincial revenues stored in the provincial treasury (*fanku*). Last and the most crucial was the public capital (*gongkuan*), referring to the surcharges

⁴⁶ Cheng Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji*, January 7, 1905. In Dai Zhili 1994, 288.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

levied via various local yamens (*fu-zhou-xian*). In particular, under this item, the great majority of people would be liable to pay into the railway's *gongkuan*:

We should divide all prefectures and counties into three levels: rich, intermediate, and poor. Then, according to the quality of the land and the production of grain of each taxpayer, we should add a surcharge to the land tax, starting with those whose land tax is higher than one tael of silver, so that no small farmers are charged with it.⁴⁸

This *gongkuan* surcharge was considered “stock collectively bought by various prefectures and counties.” Even the dividends based on *gongkuan* would not be returned to taxpayers, but were to be used “for public ends in counties and prefectures.”⁴⁹

Disregarding the fact that this surcharge would add more burdens to Sichuan's land-tax payers, these overseas students insisted on levying it, emphasizing the urgent need for it.⁵⁰ In addition, they claimed that because that Sichuanese had become more “open-minded recently,” so that “all fathers and elders (*fulao*) must know the important relation between the railway rights and national sovereignty... [They] should only feel grateful about the tax, rather than resisting it.”⁵¹

This rather bold idea of *gongkuan* later became “*zugu*” and it became the key device that solved the financial crisis of the railway company. Xiliang took the advice of the students and moderated it. In Xiliang memorial “Regulation on the Capital

⁴⁸ Sichuan tongxianghui [The Sichuan Overseas Students Association], “Shang Chuandu Xiliang kaiban Chuan-Han tielu gongsi yijian shu” [Our Opinions on Starting the Chuan-Han Railway Company], in Dai Zhili 1994, 292.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

Recruitment of Chuan-Han Railway Company,” he wrote that “all the qualified farmers who produced a grain output over ten *dan* (592 kilograms) of grain have to turn in an extra amount of 3 percent of that output of grain for railway stock, on top of standard tax.”⁵² After consultations with more elites, in January 1905, *zugu* was levied and its regulations finalized. According to “Regulation on Capital Recruitment for the Chuan-Han Railway Company” (*Chuan-Han tielu zong gongsi jigu zhangcheng*), which was formally reported to the court by Xiliang in January 1905:

All the qualified farmers who pay a standard tax (*yetian zhi jia*)—no matter whether the land was inherited (*zuyi*), purchased by oneself (*zimai*), given by others (*dangshou*), subleased to others (*daxie*), worked by oneself (*zigeng*), or worked by tenants (*zhaodian*)—if the landowner produces more than ten *dan* of grain, he has to turn in an extra amount of three *dou* (that is, 3 percent) of his grain in exchange for railway stock. Those who produce more shall be levied more accordingly. No matter whether the land is public property (*gongchan*) or temple property (*miaochan*), both should turn in the *zugu* (railway stock). Only those who produce less than ten *dan* of grain will be exempted.⁵³

Thus, *zugu* was to be a surcharge based on grain output to gather capital for building a Chinese railway in Sichuan.⁵⁴ The standard tax under the Qing was land tax; therefore, all landlords, independent peasants, and whoever was regarded as a land-tax payer (*lianghu*) had to pay *zugu*. Immediately, another regulation, “Detailed Plan on Levying *Zugu* According to Grain Output” (*Chuan-Han tielu an’zu chougu xiangxi zhangcheng*), was issued, which significantly extended the category of the *zugu* payers.

⁵² *Chuan-Han tielu zong gongsi jigu zhangcheng* [Regulations on levying railway taxes of the Chuan-Han Railway Company], “Disanzhang” [chapter three] “Choushou zhigu” [the levied stock]. In Dai Zhili 1994, 272.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ In Dai Zhili 1959, 11-12.

According to the second regulation, besides standard-tax payers (*lianghu*), tenants “when their deposit may be heavy but rent is light” and debtors “when they used rent to pay for their debt,” if they “produced more than ten *dan* of grain on their rented land, had to hand in the *zugu* as well.”⁵⁵ In short, *zugu* was now levied from a much wider range of people in Sichuan: not only landlords but also well-off tenants had to pay the *zugu*. As a result, from as early as 1905, a large number of Sichuanese were subject to the railway tax and became shareholders in the railway company. Moreover, besides *zugu*, the Sichuan government also recruited capital from opium, salt, and tea merchants.⁵⁶

It should be noted that, unlike other taxation, *zugu* entitled holders of the related stock to a 4 percent dividend, to be paid to the taxpayers annually in December.⁵⁷ From 1905, *zugu* was levied at the same time as the land tax. From now on, all 150 prefectures and counties (except for E’bian, Maogong, Dajianlu, and Lipan, classified as poor counties) were subject to the *zugu* tax. From then onward, *zugu* became a constant in the lives of the Sichuanese people. Besides this most important revenue, *zugu*, the Chuan-Han Railway Company’s capital also included the private stock, the official stock, the

⁵⁵ The additional regulation is: “If it is the tenants, then use their rent as the tax; if they pay more than ten *dan* in rent, they should be taxed the *zugu* according to the regulated amount.” In Dai Zhili 1994, 279.

⁵⁶ *Shang-Hu-Waiwu bu huizou yifu Chuan-Han tielu zong gongsi jigou zhangcheng* [Jointly-issued edict by ministries of Commerce, Finance and Foreign Affairs after discussion on the Chart on levying railway taxes of the Chuan-Han Railway Company]. In Dai Zhili 1994, 267, 276-277.

⁵⁷ In fact, it was Xiliang’s final methods that gave the last type of stockholders more rights. Xiliang rejected one of the suggestions in the students’ proposal – the suggestion that the dividends should be paid, not to the individual taxpayers, but instead to the county/prefectural treasury, for use in public works.

public stock (which then only referred to revenue gained via local public offices) and the special surcharge on opium taxation.

Once the regulation on the railway taxation had been issued, it was now up to the government to make sure that the *zugu* was levied effectively. Soon after the announcements of the two regulations, *zugu* bureaus were established in prefectures and counties of Sichuan, under Xiliang's supervision. The government applied coercive methods in guaranteeing the levying of the tax: no matter whether a taxpayer wanted to be a stockholder of the company or not, no matter whether he wanted to continue to own the stock or to sell it, all had to follow the rules and pay for the railway stock.

Xiliang first ordered the establishment of the *zugu* bureau as the organ that carried out this difficult task: "All prefectures and counties need to establish a *zugu* bureau in the county or prefectural seat. The government shall select two or three gentrymen to manage the levy of *zugu*. These people shall be given salary.... The amount of *zugu* should be handed to the local *zugu* bureau, rather than the county or the prefecture yamen, to avoid the clerks meddling with the matter." *Zugu* was levied based on the amount of grain that one household produced; thus, the amount of grain each household produced should be "investigated by local *baojia* leaders, who, under the management of the gentrymen, shall calculate and turn in the number." Moreover, "the dividends that the *zugu* generates will be paid in the twelfth month every year, at which time, *zugu* payers will receive their 4 percent dividend."⁵⁸ Indeed, a new interest group was formed through levying *zugu*: that is, those local gentrymen and *baojia* leaders who oversaw the operation of the *zugu*

⁵⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 278.

taxation. And the *zugu* bureau would exert great energy and power once the Railway Protection Movement started.

With all the methods implemented, the levying of *zugu* was successful. The amount of *zugu* was huge compared to that of the land tax.⁵⁹ Unlike in Guangdong and Hubei provinces, where the stockholders of the railways were the several major rich merchants who bought the stock voluntarily, in Sichuan, the Chuan-Han Railway Company's shareholders included a large number of peasants and tenants. According to the research of Masao Nishikawa, in a typical county of south Sichuan, 78 percent of the peasantry had to hand in this *zugu*.⁶⁰ *Zugu* thus unsurprisingly accounted for the largest percentage of the capital of the Chuan-Han Railway Company. As of 1910, these peasants and tenants, plus the landlords, were able to give the company a huge capital investment of as much as 9,280,000 taels of silver, amounting to almost 80 percent of the company's capital.⁶¹ In addition, besides the small peasants and the tenants, most of the bureaucrats from Sichuan, whether high-ranking or low-ranking, were Sichuan landlords and were *zugu*-tax payers.

Interestingly, despite the fact that the *zugu* was a huge burden for Sichuan peasants, it did not turn out to be the most "hated" tax, possibly because of the lavish propaganda that Sichuan overseas students invented. They did a good job in making

⁵⁹ Masao Nishikawa, "Sichuan Baolu Yundong Qianye de Shehui Zhuangkuang" (The Situation of Society before Railway Protection Movement), Wang Weiru, trans., in Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing, vol.2, 629.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Li Xin, *Zhonghua minguo shi*, 193.

zugu appear rather hopeful. Coming from these members of wealthy and influential families in Sichuan province, their views carried important weight.

A compelling cry that students made for the Chuan-Han Railway Company was crafted by the Sichuan Overseas Students Association on November 27, 1904, in a letter titled “The Open Letter to all Sichuan Fathers and Elders on the Chuan-Han Railway Matter by Sichuan Students Studying in Japan.” This letter was written in an educative tone: “Among all devices used to carve up China, the most cruel and effective one is railways.”⁶² The letter continued with plentiful examples from Korea, India, and Manchuria to demonstrate the chilling fact that once the railway rights were lost, national sovereignty would not be preserved. Using these examples, the students repetitively demonstrated their point that “the day when the railways of Sichuan are lost into the hands of other nations would be the beginning of the subjugation of all land and people in Sichuan under other countries!”

The letter was filled with emotion. In particular, it tried to mobilize the strong provincial pride to stimulate people to pay the railway tax:

The people of Sichuan are the most righteous and responsible people among the Chinese (*Zhongguo ren zui you xuexing er neng renshi zhe moru shu*).... A sage once said that “if only Sichuanese were left, then, even though all China were to be devastated, it would still have the hope of rejuvenation.”⁶³

Therefore, “fathers and elders of Sichuan” should never think of the railroad as “a matter for the government or a problem for the state” (*zhengfu zhi you guojia zhi huan*) or think

⁶² In Dai Zhili 1994, 297.

⁶³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 298.

that “the road had nothing to do with our small people’s livings and lives.” Rather, every Sichuanese should contribute money to the railway company. All “should consider the big picture” (*guquan daju*) and “not run away from the call [to build railways]” (*qiewu fandui guzao*).⁶⁴

The letter then pointed out that the key to western nations’ dominance lay in their economic institutions: “They combine their capital and organize big corporations so that the small shops and small capital cannot compete with the combined capital and are defeated.... If we Sichuanese do not combine what we have and organize our capital in a big enterprise, then the western monopolistic capitalists will come in and seize all our resources. The middle class (*zhongchan*) of Sichuan would go bankrupt and degenerate into beggars!”⁶⁵ The situation was urgent: “With half of the mineral property owned by the foreign investors now, if we also lose the railway to the foreigners, then the railways, namely, ‘blood vessels’ of our nation, are going to be controlled by others and there will be no way we can escape the control of the foreign investors and be self-reliant again!”⁶⁶

In addition, the Sichuan overseas students tried their best to convince their fellow Sichuanese that railways were going to make significant profits: “All railway companies in the world today are making profits that are ten times or even hundreds of times the original investment.”⁶⁷ They used Japan as the example: “Japan Railway Stock, first priced at 50 yen per share, now has risen to 750 yen per share; and Shanyang Railway

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 300.

⁶⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 301.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

Stock, first priced at 50 yen, has now risen to 600 yen per share.” Railroads in Britain and in the United States “were all making money.” All these were profitable because “railways indeed increase the circulation of goods ... and if exports of goods are accelerated, then the country shall be rich and powerful.” In short, “we have never heard of a case in which building railways did not yield profits!”⁶⁸

At the end of the lengthy petition letter, these elite students again called upon Sichuanese to “combine their wealth” and “invest in the railways.” Furthermore, to assuage commoners’ doubts about investing in the company, the students promised to “learn good management practices from foreign companies, to run the company according to the new Commercial Law so that no officials would extort the capital of the company, and to make sure that it is investors who have the right to define the charter of the railway company, to supervise the matters of the company!”⁶⁹ In essence, the overseas students urged that “all people, from rich landlords (*sifeng zhijia*), to local bankers, to small shop owners, to workers, to people in temples, to women, to children, to sojourning merchants in Sichuan, should buy railway stock!”⁷⁰

Besides petition letters like the above, which targeted at the educated elite, the elite students also published vernacular advertisements, aimed at mobilizing a wider populace. One such advertisement stated:

All we Sichuan people, every one, knows the disaster of being eliminated as a race. The life and death of us Sichuanese is right in front of us. The

⁶⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 303-304.

⁶⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 305.

⁷⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 306-307.

rich and the poor, the old and the young, male or female, the upper class or the lower class, the smart or the dull, the strong or the weak, we Sichuanese, all 79,493,058 people have to wake up! Wake up!⁷¹

Finally, the writer encouraged all who wished to reprint the pamphlet to do so freely, hoping that more pamphlets could be sent to more counties and prefectures throughout Sichuan.⁷²

Pamphlets like this were plentiful in Sichuan. Another one, “Detailed Explanation (*xianggao*) by Sichuan Overseas Students on the Importance of Railways” has also survived until today. There were indeed patriotic “righteous men” (*junzi*) who reprinted and circulated these pamphlets. The above two pamphlets, for example, were collected for publication by an official at the Xuzhou Prefecture Post Office by the name of Zhao Xi’en. He collected documents related to railway matters and wrote:

All these matters (referring to the content of the pamphlets) are directly related to the life and death of the Sichuanese. Thus, I, who serve in the Southern Sichuan Post Office system and have the job of transferring information promptly, am afraid that those who live far away are unable to learn about this. Therefore, I gathered some capital, made this reprint, and mailed it around, hoping that more people will understand [the importance of the railway matter].⁷³

An important patriotic discourse surrounding the railways was indeed taking shape in Sichuan. However, despite all the lavish propaganda, the burden that *zugu* put on the Sichuanese was hard to conceal. A memorial sent by a Sichuan metropolitan official in November 1910 stated: “The capital of the railway is gathered from the people

⁷¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 311.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 325.

of Sichuan. That money is the sweat and blood of the little peasants.... This is a huge burden for peasants: for the small household, it takes them more than ten years to get one share. The profit is hard to see, while the burden is hard to get rid of and they suffer from this exploitation.”⁷⁴ Thus, even though *zugu* was not the most hated extra tax among Sichuanese, and the elites might have a strong profit-making motive in paying the *zugu*, still, *zugu* was a burden for small peasants.

Still, the project of the Chuan-Han Railway Company was able to take off because of the collaboration between the Sichuan overseas students and the provincial Governor-general Xiliang. The students from Sichuan in Japan offered their thoughts on solving the financial crisis of the railway company. Via the managerial and organizational power of the government, the *zugu* could be levied. In addition, the Sichuan overseas students invented an elaborate patriotic propaganda campaign surrounding the *zugu*, and as a result, from the very beginning, the issue of *zugu* was connected to nationalistic actions. The Sichuan overseas students started their involvement in the Chuan-Han Railway Company by supporting the provincial officials; however, as time passed by, their disagreement with the government in how the railway company should be managed became obvious. They wanted more.

IV. Commercialization of the Chuan-Han Railway Company: Concrete Employment of the Rights Discourse—the Shareholders’ Rights

⁷⁴ “Gan Dazhang zou” [Gan Dazhang memorial], in *Sheng Xuanhuai dang’an ziliao xuanji* [The Archival documents on Sheng Xuanhuai] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1979), vol.1: 80-81.

Even though the overseas students and the state collaborated with each other in levying *zugu* for the Chuan-Han Railway Company from Sichuan's commoners, they soon were in competition with each other over the leadership of the railway company. Such a fight was not simply a power struggle. Rather, the Sichuan elite linked this struggle with their logic in the discourse of "rights," meaning that those who contributed financially to the railway company, among whom were many ordinary Sichuan taxpayers, deserved the right to manage it. If taxpayers were not given the rights they themselves deserved, then there was no reason that the taxpayers should continue paying taxes. Notably, the logic of "No private railway, no buying railway stock or paying the railway tax" would easily develop into the logic of "No taxation without representation." And this powerful line of argument was first developed via the concrete political and economic struggle over the ownership of the railway company.

In fact, as early as in 1904, when students issued "The Open Letter to all Sichuan Fathers and Elders on the Chuan-Han Railway Matter by Sichuan Students Studying in Japan," they already hinted at the problem of the ownership of the company. They believed that the lack of enthusiasm of the Sichuanese people for building the railways lay in the fact that "the railways were managed by the old-style bureaucrats, who ... were not trustworthy."⁷⁵ They also hinted at the matter of supervision (*jiandu*) of managers and pointed out that "if the company continued to be controlled by the officials in the government," then gentrymen and merchants "will not dare to trust [the management]

⁷⁵ "Wei Chuan-Han tielu shi jinggao quan shu fulao shu" [An Open Letter to all Sichuan Fathers and Elders on the Chuan-Han Railway Matter by Sichuan Students Studying in Japan], in Dai Zhili 1994, 304-305.

and will feel afraid that the officials in charge engage in corrupt activities.”⁷⁶ Notably, this was a big contrast to the old-style Chinese merchants, who had often relied upon officials and sought help from officials.

To fundamentally solve the crisis of trust in the management of the company, students argued that the only way was to run it according to the Commercial Law. For this to happen, the management of the railway company needed to be overhauled:

All the capital for the railway company came from the people; so all regulations of the railway company should be collectively decided by the people. All those who have invested in the company should obtain their rights in drafting the charter of the company and in supervising its affairs. If we could make the company entirely supported by private capital, then we would not have to reply upon the governmental officials, which would be the best for all concerned.⁷⁷

Besides these students who were actively promoting the commercialization of the company from overseas, in Beijing, some officials from Sichuan were doing the same thing. Most of the bureaucrats from Sichuan were landlords and *zugu*-tax payers. Beginning with these powerful Sichuan-born bureaucrats in the capital, large shareholders asked for authority over the Company. In particular, *juren* Zhang Luocheng proposed to transform the Chuan-Han Railway Company into one that was entirely owned by the shareholders (*minyou*).⁷⁸

In order to appease the dissatisfied and powerful Sichuan bureaucrats, Sichuan Governor-general Xiliang adopted a formula of “shared management by the government

⁷⁶ Ibid., 305.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Mi Rucheng, *Zhongguo jindai tielu shi ziliao*, vol.3, 1072.

and merchants (*guanshang heban*)” in July of 1905. On July 25, he proposed to offer more posts in the railway company to Sichuan gentrymen. Also, he swore that the company would do its best “to rid itself of its bureaucratic style of management,” “to combine the investment of the officials with that of the people,” and to “make sure that the company is managed by the officials and the gentrymen together.”⁷⁹ Xiliang then added more posts under the officially appointed chief supervisor (*duban*): one official manager and one gentryman manager were added to every branch of the Chuan-Han Railway Company. Important figures like Shen Bingkun, Qiao Shunan, and Shi Dianzhang were appointed to their posts in 1905. Shen was the official manager, Qiao the gentryman manager, and Shi the chief auditor.

At the same time when Sichuan merchants and elites were trying to recover railway power from the provincial bureaucracy, the wide-ranging Rights Recovery Movement was active throughout the entire empire. Movements in Hunan, Hubei, and Guangdong in recovering railway rights from the foreign investors (1904-1905), and the “Suzhou-Hangzhou-Ningbo” Railway Movement in Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces (1905-1911), were highly influential.

In 1906, Sichuan overseas students Pu Dianjun, Hu Jun, Xiao Xiang, Deng Rong, Zhang Zhiyuan, and Li Dajun and almost three hundred other people formed an association, the Chuan-Han Railway Improvement Society (*Chuan-Han tielu gaijinhui*). In order to protect the economic rights of Sichuan people and avoid theft of railway funds by the government, Pu Dianjun and his colleagues suggested that the railway company be

⁷⁹ Xiliang, *Xiliang yigao zougao*, vol.1, 497-498.

privately managed. To make their voice heard, the Chuan-Han Railway Improvement Society published a monthly journal, *Report on Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company*.⁸⁰ Using first-hand evidence and journalistic investigation, they carefully documented their case for commercializing the railways. Moreover, by quoting Qing law, the report claimed that the railways had a right to be a private enterprise. In one of Pu's influential polemics, "On Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company," he quoted the newly approved Commercial Law and attacked the Qing government for ignoring its own decrees.⁸¹ Every month, the *Report* was mailed to the central government in Beijing, the county governments in Sichuan, and various professional associations in Sichuan. In essence, they urged that the company be managed according to the Commercial Law because "all those who have invested were shareholders of the company, who have rights!" To make this happen, they proposed that the company be changed to a privately managed one. The company should hold shareholder meetings according to the Company Law (*Gongsi li*), elect a board of directors, and elect auditors and managers at all levels.⁸²

The students' struggle over the control of the railway company was a matter of great importance: it was a struggle between the old way and the new way in looking at the issue of "self-interest" (*li*). Traditionally, "self-interest" was to be sacrificed when it

⁸⁰ Chuan-Han tielu gaijinhui [Association in improving the Chuan-Han Railway], ed., *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu* [Report on improving the Chuan-Han railway company], (Tokyo: 1904-1907), 1-5 volumes. Found by the author in Sichuan Provincial Library.

⁸¹ Pu Dianjun, *Gailiang Chuan-Han gongsi yi* [On Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company]. Original pamphlet found by the author in Sichuan Provincial Library.

⁸² Xiao Xiang, "Guang'an Pu Dianjun Xingzhuang," 612.

got into conflict with “righteousness” (*yi*). The gentrymen should not talk about “interest” and the notion of “interest” was associated only with the petty people (*xiaoren yuyu li*). Rather, they should all be thinking about and serving the people under Heaven (*Tianxia wei gong*). Here, however, the students were overtly promoting the *li* of the railway investors and argued that this *li* was well protected by the Qing law. Students quoted the Commercial Law to overtly promote the notion of private interests, which was subversive if we consider the orthodox traditional Confucian mode of thinking, which tended to deny the legitimacy of self-interest.

One document, “On Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company” (*Gailiang Chuan-Han gongsi yi*), written and signed by forty students, elaborated their stand and persistently promoted the justice and the legality of shareholders’ rights:

The establishment of the company was not organized by the people; rather, the people were coerced to comply with the company. In this way, the company totally lost its status as the legal representative of the people. Two years after the opening of the railway company, still there were only provincial commissioners serving as the managers, but no board of directors or auditors. None of the rights of the shareholders were guaranteed.⁸³

The article continued: “Now the major source of income of the railway company is *zugu*, which comes from the people and not officials. Then, in principle, the railway company belongs to the people, not officials. It cannot be right that the railway is controlled by officials.”⁸⁴ Shrewdly, students counted the exact number of taels of silver contributed to the railway company by officials: altogether the government contributed

⁸³ Pu Dianjun, *Gailiang Chuan-Han gongsi yi*, 4-5.

⁸⁴ Pu Dianjun, *Gailiang Chuan-Han gongsi yi*, original pamphlet, 4.

only 280,000 taels of silver and the total amount of capital was 5,000,000 taels. In the students' minds, this number, compared to the total amount of *zugu*, was indeed so insignificant that "to even call the company co-managed by merchants and the officials is not right!"⁸⁵

Essentially, the article maintained that the blurred ownership further led to four practical problems of the company: the stagnation in selling the railway stocks, the unlimited exaction of *zugu* by officials, the appropriation of the *zugu*, and the unclear boundary of power between the officials and gentry-merchants.⁸⁶ The students then proposed several means to improve the situation: First, because all the capital of the railway company came from the people, the company's name should be changed accordingly; it should be clearly called the "Private Chuan-Han Railway Company" (*Shangban Chuan-Han tielu gongsi*). Then, the total amount of money needed to build the railways of Sichuan had to be announced to the public as soon as possible. In addition, the means of how *zugu* was levied needed to be improved. The starting point for levying *zugu* should be those who produced more than fifty *dan* (2,960 kilograms) of grain; thus, *zugu* would not disturb the poor peasants.⁸⁷

If "On Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company" only carried a mild tone, then a simultaneous 1906 poster was a violent rendering of the same message. The poster, titled "Proposing a Private Chuan-Han Railway Company," attacked the bureaucrats in the company vehemently. It said:

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Pu Dianjun, *Gailiang Chuan-Han gongsi yi*, 5-10.

⁸⁷ Pu Dianjun, *Gailiang Chuan-Han gongsi yi*, 15.

The Chuan-Han Railway Company of today benefits only a small number of wolf-like officials. It also benefits only a few gentrymen, who are like oxen and horses. It is the common people who suffer most from the company. Therefore, the biggest goal of the current Chuan-Han Railway Company is to exhaust the blood of seventy million people to satisfy the desires of the few wolves and oxen and horses. There is no other purpose!⁸⁸

The heated poster was most likely written by the same group of people who wrote the mild letter because the two documents shared a number of same metaphors. Apparently having insider information about the railway company, the anonymous author revealed that “even before the construction of the railways started, the abuse of the capital was apparent: six-sevenths of the investment had been wasted already.”⁸⁹

Indeed, in 1906, the Chuan-Han Railway Company, controlled by both the government and bureaucratic elites, was highly corrupt—the Sichuan government and Sichuan bureaucrats, using their special positions in the company, embezzled the railway capital for their own use:

In the fifth month of the year 1906, the capital collected was almost 5,000,000 taels of silver; however, at the end of that month, the account showed that the deposit was only 1,430,000 taels of silver. Out of these missing almost 4,000,000 taels of silver, except for that used by the government for the military fees, the majority was appropriated and wasted by the official elites in the Chuan-Han Railway Company: for example, more than 3,000 taels were utilized just for *one* entertainment banquet by the officials.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ *Jianshe Chuan-Han tielu shangban gongsi quangao shu* [Proposing a Private Chuan-Han Railway Company]. Original poster found by the author at Sichuan Provincial Library, no page number.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

The key problem, as the letter pointed out, was that there was no supervision system operating in the company to make sure that the money coming from the Sichuan farmers was actually used for railway construction. Besides the subject of supervision, there was the problem of professionalism: “The Company is controlled by laymen who have no expert knowledge of railways. These people used the provincial yamen as their working place.... They applied the ways that magistrates used to govern, namely, beating up people and slapping them with a bamboo stick, as methods of managing the company. Those who are in charge are the governor-general and the provincial commissioners, and those who carry out the work are academicians and *jinshi* degree holders.”⁹¹ In short, no railway specialists were taking charge of the company.

The poster pointed out that the only way to fix the problem of the railway company was to “destroy the barbarian official (*yeman guanban*) company and construct a civilized private (*wenming shangban*) company!”⁹² Notably, the official management of a modern enterprise was equated to barbarianism and the private management was equated to being civilized, which was a huge gibe at the authority of the bureaucracy. Even more radically, the poster proposed that all Sichuanese should declare: “No private railway, no buying railway stock or paying the railway tax” (*Wu shangban gongsi, bumai gupiao, buna zujuan*)! If everyone in Sichuan held this belief strongly, “then the railway

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

company would be left with no capital, and the barbarian official company would collapse and the civilized private company would rise!”⁹³

Pu Dianjun and others, using the Commercial Law as their weapon, elaborated their legitimacy, stating that taxpayers were citizens who deserved to have rights in the railway company and that they should be in charge of the management. As we shall see from later chapters, this was the argument that would come up over and over in the Sichuan people’s struggles against the government. Commoners in Sichuan who paid the railway tax were told repetitively by the agitating students that they had rights and power to determine things. They were, for the first time, educated to have the notion that they were true stakeholders. In 1906, this line of argument had already been powerfully developed.

Besides hammering home the issue of taxpayers’ rights and the very notion of rights, Sichuan students in Japan on the other hand never forgot the urgent national crisis that Sichuan and the Qing Empire faced at the moment. They then linked the issue of commercializing the railway company to saving China in general. Because the government had no major source of savings to build the railway, if the railways were not privately owned, there would be a serious lack of capital because no one would want to invest in the company. The construction of the railway would be severely delayed, which would in turn endanger the attempt to fend off the foreign investors. In addition, the overseas students also connected the problem of maintaining order to railway-building: without commercializing the railway company, people in Sichuan would feel so

⁹³ Ibid.

“oppressed and exploited” that they would become bandits and thieves, thus causing great trouble to the stability and order of society.

If such persuasion, that is, urging the government to give the Sichuan railway taxpayers their rights, was the “soft way” to make the provincial government give control of the company to the shareholders, the overseas students also conducted investigations, harshly exposing the corruption of officials in handling railway issues. In the first issue of the *Report on Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company*, Pu Dianjun published a disturbing investigation of the amount of money used and usurped by the current managing organs of the railway company, “Report on the Copper Bureau in Appropriating the Railway Capital of the Chuan-Han Railway Company.” The Copper Bureau was an agency owned by the Sichuan provincial government for producing copper coins and Sichuan officials took some railway capital as start-up fund for the bureau.

Pu Dianjun had informants in Chengdu who were insiders in the company. In particular, after the company was transformed into a co-managed company by the officials and the gentrymen, more gentrymen were able to see how the system worked. Liu Yiming, an appointed secretary of the Ministry of Finance (*Hubu zhushi*), was the first to bring this issue into question. After he “saw caskets of taels of silver being carried out of the company,” Liu asked around and was told that “the Copper Bureau needed money and so it utilized the capital of the Chuan-Han Railway Company.” This was the starting point of how the “Sichuan people” (*Shuren*) found out about the appropriation of the railway capital. Pu wrote in angry words: “The Copper Bureau has not been established yet, the copper is only on its way, and the startup of copper

production will take forever. Already, the capital of the railway has been usurped!”

Gentrymen of Sichuan sent in a petition to the provincial officials, demanding the Copper Bureau return the appropriated capital to the railway company. However, this petition, written by the appointed secretary of the Ministry of Punishments and two other Sichuan gentrymen, Wu Jiamo and Liu Ziji, did not receive any reply from the Governor-general. Rumor had it that Governor-general Xiliang was “furious” and “put it aside.”⁹⁴

Frustrated, the gentrymen of the railway company went public with the story of the Copper Bureau Incident.⁹⁵ Pu Dianjun’s investigation stated that from the beginning of levying the *zugu* to 1906, the Copper Bureau had usurped more than 2,100,000 taels of capital from the company. With only 5,000,000 taels of capital levied in total, this was a huge loss. Pu then angrily accused the provincial officials of not obeying the law and suggested the Sichuan Governor-general was “impairing the authority of the central government.”⁹⁶ He widely circulated this report, creating immense pressure on Sichuan’s provincial officials.

In the fight against the Sichuan officials, Sichuan overseas students also linked up with Sichuan natives who were metropolitan officials. Pu and his men constantly cited this mistake and all the other misdeeds of the Sichuan officials in handling the railway

⁹⁴ “Tongyuanju nuoyi Chuan-Han tielu gongsi guben Diaocha *baogaoshu*” [Report on the Copper Bureau in Appropriating the Railway Capital of the Chuan-Han Railway Company], in *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu*, vol.1, 10-23.

⁹⁵ “Tongyuanju nuoyi Chuan-Han tielu gongsi guben Diaocha *baogaoshu*” in *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu*, vol.1, 11.

⁹⁶ “Tongyuanju nuoyi Chuan-Han tielu gongsi guben Diaocha *baogaoshu*” in *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu*, vol.1, 17.

issues.⁹⁷ All these letters and petitions created more pressure on Sichuan Governor-general Xiliang. In addition, more student investigators were sent by Pu Dianjun to expose all the problems in every branch of the railway company. Investigative reports from Chengdu, Beijing, and Yichang poured in, accusing the company of being corrupt, slow-moving, and bureaucratic.⁹⁸ They quoted the legal codes of the Qing, claiming that the railways had to be commercially managed according the law. Every month, these reports were mailed to the central government in Beijing, the county governments, and the railway shareholders associations in Sichuan.⁹⁹

On February 20, 1907, Governor-general Xiliang reported that the company was to be transformed from an officially owned company to one that was supervised by the officials and managed by merchants (*guandu shangban*). A discussion group (*Chuan-Han tielu yanjiu suo*) was set up, so that gentrymen would be consulted with. However, still, the main decisions were made by Governor-general Xiliang and the official manager: they simply “met with the gentrymen and ordered them to follow instructions.” Therefore, until 1907, even though the Chuan-Han Railway Company was formally co-managed by merchants and officials, the power still lay in the hands of the officials and “the Commercial Law of the Qing court, the rights that all shareholders deserved, could not be applied and implemented.”¹⁰⁰ Pu Dianjun and his comrades did not give up their struggle.

⁹⁷ *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu*, vol.2.

⁹⁸ *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu*, vol.3.

⁹⁹ Xiao Xiang, “Guang’an Pujun Boying Xingzhuang,” 612.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Finally, in 1907, after their protracted struggle, their efforts paid off and the Chuan-Han Railway Company became commercially managed, with the shareholders having ultimate power. On March 4, 1907, Governor-general Xiliang reported to the court that the Chuan-Han Railway Company would be transformed into a privately owned company, with Sichuan native Qiao Shu'nan as the chief manger and another Sichuan native, Hu Jun, as the vice manager of the company. Soon after this change in management, a new company charter was adopted, proclaiming that the Chuan-Han Railway Company had been transformed from an officially owned enterprise to a privately owned company.

The new charter explicitly protected the rights of shareholders. The railway company set up shareholder associations: there would be a board of directors of thirteen people (*dongshi*) and three auditors (*chazhang yuan*). The board of directors was to be in charge and should consistently discuss railway issues with managers in the company. As for shareholder associations, only people with stock worth at least 50 taels of silver were given the right to participate. Only shareholders with more than 5,000 taels of stock could be elected a member of the board and only shareholders with more than 2,500 taels of stock could be elected an auditor. All these regulations demonstrated that the Chuan-Han Railway Company was a private company, over which the providers of the capital held authority. In addition, a *zugu* bureau was now established in every county and only people with *zugu* worth more than three *dan* (178 kilograms) could be elected to the *zugu*

bureau. The act curbed the arbitrary appointment of personnel of the *zugu* bureau and improved the conditions of *zugu* levying.¹⁰¹

A huge improvement indeed; however, the overseas students were dissatisfied with the new regulations and continued their critiques of the officials. For one thing, the lingering power of the provincial government was still strong in the newly private company. Each local government still had supervisory power in the levying of the *zugu* and managers of all branches of the railway company could not be appointed without officials' approval. Also, the shareholder associations had yet to be fully established. Criticizing the corruption caused by the involvement of the government, other Sichuan-born elites, especially those who were powerful officials in Beijing, demanded more power over the company too.

The students continued their campaign. In the fifth issue of the *Report on Improving the Chuan-Han Railway Company*, the students in Japan again promoted the notion of building up shareholder branches in each county, and their purpose was again to supervise the conduct of the railway company's management to make sure that even shareholders from very small places could make their voices heard.¹⁰² Shareholder associations were established after 1907 and the gentrymen who worked in these bureaus would become another strong force in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement. In 1908, finally, the commercially owned railway company made its final change in

¹⁰¹ Xian Yuhao, "Shilun Chuanlu zugu" [On the *zugu* of the Chuan-Han railways], in *Jinian Xinhai geming qishi zhounian qingnian xueshu taolunhui lunwenxuan* [Papers by young scholars in commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the 1911 Revolution] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), vol.2, 358.

¹⁰² *Chuanlu gaijinhui baogaoshu*, vol.5, 89-91.

personnel, with Hu Jun (who had greatly accelerated the commercialization process) being the chief manager of the railway company in Chengdu. In addition, Qiao Shu'nan was the manager in Beijing and Fei Daochun, manager in Yichang. After the change in leadership, the new private company started to issue the *Newsletter of the Private Sichuan Chuan-Han Railway Company*. A newspaper registered under the Qing Ministry of Posts and Communications, it was publicly circulated so that a wider range of people would see the workings of the railway company. Published every month, the newsletters broadcast laws related to railway issues and exposed misconduct and corruption in the operation of the railway company. The purpose of it was clear: now all shareholders would be able to supervise the operation of the company. Again, *zugu* taxation was the main focus here. Unsurprisingly, gentry in the *zugu* bureaus usurped their power and embezzled the *zugu* tax. However, at the same time, branches of the shareholder associations were in operation, investigating and checking the working of the *zugu* bureaus, finally enabling the taxpayers see that they really had some say in the railway issues.¹⁰³

In sum, the people who were actively involved in the Chuan-Han Railway Improvement Society were Pu Dianjun, Xiao Xiang, Chen Chongji, Shao Congen, and Deng Rong. The new notion of law and the discourse of *quanli* were powerfully applied

¹⁰³ *Shangban Sichuan Chuan Han tielu zong gongsi baogao* [*Newsletter of the Private Sichuan Chuan-Han Railway Company*] issue.15 no.19. Original newspaper found by the author at Sichuan Provincial Library, no page number. The *Newsletter of the Private Sichuan Chuan-Han Railway Company* recorded a case from Fuzhou, about the *zugu* bureau managers taking the *zugu* for his own use. Also, according to Professor Dai Zhili, in his hometown Wenjiang county, the *zugu* bureau's chief manager was rumored to have taking the money. Interview with Professor Dai Zhili in 2004.

in the elite's struggle in establishing their control over the railway company. Via the process, they also became well known to a great number of educated elites, gathered a huge following, and won great reputation. The strong notion that taxpayers deserve rights first entered the public discourse in Sichuan and would be extended to other spheres of struggle. The mode of petitioning, publishing, holding meetings, persuading, and sending pamphlets also became useful methods of campaigning and communication, and would be used more extensively in Sichuan's later political struggles. Even before the local-level Constitutional Reform and election started in 1908, the elites had already utilized a new discourse of *quanli* ("rights") to contend with the state, and in the process of doing so, via their numerous reports and pamphlets, taught this notion to a wider sphere of people.

Conclusion

The story of the last ten years of the Qing has been told in many ways. It was a complicated time: it was the time of reform, the time of revolution, the time of collapsing, the time of regeneration. Change was the order of the day.

Years ago, in Taiwan, mainland China, and the United States, Sun Yat-sen's credentials as the "revolutionary" father of modern China were unquestioned. As a consequence, scholarship that privileged Sun's role in creating "modern China" dismissed the Qing government's last-gasp reform efforts to build a modern nation on the foundation of an empire as fake and futile. These earlier narratives portrayed the New Policies as empty gestures on the part of a Qing court desperate to stave off the attacks of its critics but determined not to submit to anything but superficial change.

Recent scholarship has taken a much more serious view of the reformers' contribution. Historians have argued that whatever the intentions of the empress dowager, the New Policies affected the Chinese polity in important and wide-ranging ways. Prasenjit Duara and Douglas Reynolds believe that late-Qing reform was the basis for the modern Chinese state. As Duara points out, this top-down state effort at modernization had great social implications. The implementation of the New Policies changed Chinese community dynamics in fundamental ways, "creating immense tensions in rural society." In rural areas, the tax increases and incomplete bureaucratization of the New Policies era caused "state involution" and the disintegration of longstanding community institutions.¹⁰⁴ Mary Rankin and William Rowe, from a different angle, stress the new societal power that arose in the late Qing. Rankin and Rowe applied the terms "public" and "public sphere" in studying the late Qing, which was generated by the new translation of Habermas's work.¹⁰⁵ Rankin describes local elite activism in the wake of the Taiping Rebellion and the effective managerial power that local community leaders obtained. She argues that this post-rebellion reconstruction fostered an expansion of the elite-managed local activity. As the elite's dissatisfaction with the state surged during the 1911 Revolution era, they could easily use the associations as a solid organization to overthrow the Qing.¹⁰⁶ In a similar vein, William Rowe finds a rapidly expanding elite

¹⁰⁴ The debate on the meaning and the effectiveness of the late-Qing reform continues, largely because we have not yet probed the details of these reform policies well enough to evaluate their legacies.

¹⁰⁵ William Rowe, "Public Sphere in Modern China," *Modern China* 16.3 (1999): 309.

¹⁰⁶ Mary Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986). Rankin associates the

public sphere and the elite's politicization in Hankow. The key element of the public sphere is not rational discussion, but management by elites in an extra-bureaucratic domain.¹⁰⁷

Both portrayals, in my opinion, are true in characterizing this perplexing time period. Nevertheless, except for Rankin, these interpretations make a clear divide between the “state” and the “society.” This chapter proposes an alternative conceptualization of the power dynamics. Rather than viewing the interaction between state and society as a zero-sum game, I argue that the great pressure put on the provincial government in implementing the overwhelming number of edicts in the New Policies

concept *gong* with community interests. She argues: “As I use the term here, “public” retains a considerable communal element but refers more specifically to the institutionalized, extra-bureaucratic management of matters considered important by both the community and the state. Public management by elites thus contrasted with official administration (*guan*) and with private (*si*) activities of individuals, families, religions, businesses, and organizations that were not identified with the whole community.”

¹⁰⁷ William Rowe, “Public Sphere in Modern China,” *Modern China* 16.3 (1999): 309-329. Rowe offers us a sophisticated historical analysis of the meaning of the term *gong* in his 1990 *Modern China* review article. According to the early historical texts *Liji* and *Shuowen*, originally the word *gong* was used as the opposite of private (*si*). By the time the imperial system had attained its full ideological and institutional maturity in the Tang and Song dynasties, *gong* was used to refer to the business, property, and personnel of the imperial-bureaucratic state. However, in the Ming dynasty, *gong* became the “sum-total of the harmonized self-interests of all members of the community.” Thus, by the mid-Qing, there were several competing notions of the political meaning of *gong* operating simultaneously. On the one hand, *gong* was used with an unambiguous meaning of “governmental” in official documents. On the other hand, *gong* was also used to identify line-items in local administrative budgets (which were different from the regular governmental accounts directly controlled by the central administration), or to categorize properties and accounts beyond governmental control. As time passed by, the non-governmental sense of the word “public” was used more and more frequently, such as in the newly emerging words “public criticism” (*gongping*) and “public opinion” (*gonglun*). These two meanings of *gong* were clearly shown in the Sichuan Provincial Assembly debates in 1909.

Reform led to an opening of the preexisting political system. Officials like Governor-general Xiliang were in need of new talent in grinding out plans to meet urgent directives incessantly sent from Beijing. Provincial elite, like the Sichuan overseas students, optimized the opening of the political system, and founded their base in struggling for more power. Elites and provincial government, from this moment on, started their intricate relation of struggling and collaborating. In the process, they together contributed to the formation of a modern Chinese nation and a modern Chinese state. The reform created a new space, a rather *neutral* space, wherein both the state and societal forces thrived and grew.

In this rapidly changing environment, the Sichuan elite students gained their economic power and political reputation. It was also during the building of the Chuan-Han Railway Company that these educated elite started to practice their repertoire of struggle—holding meetings, filing petitions, and propagandizing ideas in widely-circulated press. They secured their stronghold in the economic sphere, and attracted a good number of followers, which paved way for the fights in the Sichuan Provincial Assembly and culminated in the Railway Protection Movement.

Chapter Four. Sichuan Constitutional Leaders Consolidated in the Constitutional Reform

The struggle between the Sichuan overseas students and the officials intensified day by day. Meanwhile, in China as a whole, the educated elite challenged Qing authority more assertively after the launch of the Constitutional Reform (1906-1911). It gradually became obvious that the beliefs of the new-style educated elite and the officials on how China's polity should be reorganized were deeply different. Their open struggle soon gained sharp articulation as a clash over political principles.

This chapter examines the rise of the Sichuan constitutional leaders—who were also the former overseas students in Japan and the later Railway Protection Movement leaders—in the Constitutional Reform in the last years of the Qing Dynasty. What was the background of their rise? What were the issues they were concerned about? How did they amass and accumulate reputation? In the midst of all the discussion of people's rights and constitutionalism, how did people's rights and constitutionalism become operational?

I. “The Foundation of Reform *Is* Constitutional Reform”

The early period of the New Policies Reform, focusing on increasing the effectiveness of the state, did not satisfy the reformists. Radical political reformers like Liang Qichao criticized and attacked the government's reform methods as “unsubstantial.” Rather, they campaigned for a fundamental political reform that buttressed the new political principles: popular sovereignty and constitutionalism.

It was the urgent international crisis that created the opportunity for the constitutional elite to advance their cause. After September 7, 1901, when the Boxer Protocol was signed between the Qing and the Eight-Nation Expeditionary Force after China's defeat, the imperialist presence was more aggressive than ever.¹ By the summer of 1905, the loss of complete sovereignty over Manchuria, the British advances in Lhasa, the German advancement in Boyang Lake in Jiangxi province, the French and British expansion of their spheres of influence and their roving commission in numerous internal rivers, and Russia's aggressive move along the northwestern border to temporarily take over Kashgar and Yili, all prompted demands for change in China. The internal trouble coming from the radical revolutionaries also led to the determination of constitutionalists to carry out their reform plans speedily. After the intensive debate in 1905 between Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*) and constitutionalists took place in Tokyo, the constitutionalists, though agreeing with the revolutionaries that the country needed an overhaul, were worried that revolutionary activities could wreck the country in the face of dangerous enemies from abroad.²

In particular, it was the Russo-Japanese War that made constitutionalism a nationwide movement. The war between Japan and Russia started on February 10, 1904.

Three days later, an article was published in *Daily of China and Foreign Affairs*

¹ In November 1903, the British Army sent its troops into Tibet and numerous treaties between the Qing and the British, Japanese, and Americans were signed, leading to China's loss of sovereignty over mineral development and inland transportation, including railways. The economic spheres of influences were forming at this time, and again, the crucial issue of extraterritoriality was always a humiliating reminder of the Qing state's weakness in dealing with foreign powers.

² Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 42-44.

(*Zhongwai ribao*) urging readers to pay particular attention to the war. The editorial argued: “The strength and the weakness of nations do not come from the race of their people but from their political institutions.”³ Another article predicted: “From this war onward, the ideals of our countrymen shall be greatly changed.” When conservative officials argued that “the Japanese soldiers, having been given rights, shall think only about themselves,” the constitutionalists replied that “because *minquan* (rights of the people) came from Heaven and soldiers always fight for their natural rights, they would fight fearlessly without hesitation.”⁴

After the Russo-Japanese War broke out, constitutional leaders in Zhejiang and Jiangsu began cooperating with Qing officials to advance their cause. They proposed to send important ministers abroad “to learn from the new politics of various nations ... to assert China’s national sovereignty (*zhuquan*).” The first memorial sent to the court to promote constitutionalism was that of Sun Baoqi, the ambassador to France. In April 1904, influenced by his younger brother Sun Baoxuan, a key constitutional advocate from Zhejiang, Sun Baoqi sent in his memorial to the Office of Governmental Affairs, suggesting taking up a Constitutional Reform. Sun wrote:

The reason that the New Policies Reform is not taking effect is that there is no central principle to the reforms.... One way to eradicate the obstacles to reform and to push the reform forward is to emulate the constitutional system of various other countries. We should also learn from the British,

³ *Zhongwai ribao*, April 4, 1904. In Hou Yijie, 41.

⁴ *Zhongwai ribao*, May 5, 1904. In Hou Yijie, 42.

German, and Japanese political institutions and transform ourselves into a constitutional country.⁵

In great detail, Sun Baoqi advocated establishing the Japanese Diet (parliamentary) system in China. To make this opinion influential, Sun sent a private letter to Hunan Governor Duanfang, urging him and Zhang Zhidong to jointly write a memorial to convince the court.

Meanwhile, other constitutional elites from Jiangsu and Zhejiang, Zhang Jian and Tang Shouqian in particular, also linked up with officials to formulate a political force to launch a constitutional movement. Among these elites, the opinion of Zhang Jian, an industrialist, an educator, and the holder of the first place (*zhuangyuan*) in the metropolitan-level civil service examination, carried enormous weight. In May 1904 he started to correspond with Governor of Jiangsu Wei Guangtao and Governor-general of Huguang Zhang Zhidong, advocating constitutionalism. In June, Zhang Jian contacted the Governor-general of Zhili, Yuan Shikai, attempting to gain his support. Meanwhile in June, besides making connections with provincial officials, constitutional leaders Zhang Jian, Tang Shouqian, Zhang Yuanji, and Zhang Meiyi also tried to influence metropolitan officials, in particular, Grand Councilor Qu Hongji.⁶

The Russo-Japanese War proceeded as the constitutionalists expected. Constitutionalists expected Japan to win the war; if it did, their point that only constitutionalism could save the nation could be established. In May 1905, the Russian

⁵ Sun Baoqi, “Chushi Faguo dachen Sun shang Zhengwuchu shu” [Memorial to the Office of Governmental Affairs sent by Ambassador to France Sun], in *Dongfang zazhi* [Eastern miscellany] first year, no.7. In Hou Yijie, 43.

⁶ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 49-52.

fleet was sunk at Tsushima Strait, leading to a total triumph by the Japanese.

Constitutionalists celebrated with joy. The implication, for them, was clear: now that Russia had lost completely, the court should no longer use Russia as an example and refuse to give people their political rights.

With such nonstop persuasion and the lesson of the Russo-Japanese War, by 1905, many prominent Qing officials, especially the governors and governors-general—Yuan Shikai, Zhang Zhidong, Duanfang, Cen Chunxuan, Zhou Fu—began to show sympathy with the constitutional cause. In February 1905, Ambassador to Japan Yang Shu proposed to emulate Japan in setting up a new political system. In addition, with Zhang Jian's consistent urging, Yuan Shikai decided to support Constitutional Reform. Yuan, along with Zhou Fu and Zhang Zhidong, sent in a memorial that proposed Constitutional Reform over a period of twelve years. In July, Zhou Fu again proposed to set up a system of checks and balances and establish the separation of the three branches of government. In August, Cen Chunxuan made known his approval of setting up a constitutional system. In addition, the crucial Grand Councilor Qu Hongji concretely suggested sending important officials to European and American nations to investigate their political systems. Up to this point, of the eight Governors-general of the Qing Empire, five—the Governors-general of Yungui, Liangguang, Liangjiang, Huguang, and Zhili—had suggested establishing a constitutional system, and Sichuan Governor-general Xiliang had suggested sending investigative teams to foreign nations.

The constitutionalists, especially those from Jiangsu and Zhejiang, played a key role in national politics by pushing the Qing government to transform itself into a modern political entity. The Sichuan overseas students belonged to this larger group of elites

who promoted constitutional politics and they too participated actively in the nation's Constitutional Reform and played an important role in transforming the larger political landscape. During the time of the Russo-Japanese War, Sichuan's constitutional elite, though not as influential as their Jiangzhe counterparts, equally contributed to the constitutional cause. In fact, Sichuanese students were among the most radical overseas constitutionalist groups. In January 1905, Deng Xiaoke of Sichuan drafted the statement "Our Opinions on Returning the Power," demanding that Empress Dowager Cixi return power to the Guangxu emperor and that the court transform the Qing into a constitutional government. It was again a Sichuan student, Zhang Lan, who volunteered to travel to Beijing, plead with the court, and enunciate the students' constitutional aspirations.⁷ Exuberant with energy and power, presenting themselves as the representatives of the people, they declared that "the grand hope of constructing a constitution is the prevailing principle in western political theories, and it is also the greatest happiness of the people."⁸ For them, true constitutionalism included the recovery of the political rights that citizens had been given naturally by Heaven. Even though their differences with the Qing court continued, at this moment the constitutionalists chose to hide the disparity and to collaborate with the Qing government. In 1905, the collaboration was at its peak.

July 1905 marked a new stage in the late-Qing reform: finally, Constitutional Reform became a national policy (*guoce*). Cixi's New Policies, which at the beginning were hardly more than an extension of the kinds of military and educational reforms

⁷ Ibid., 52.

⁸ Ibid., 45.

associated with Self-Strengthening, eventually led to a far-reaching transformation of the polity. On July 9, the decision was made to send officials to study foreign nations' legal and political systems. On July 16, 1905, the court issued an edict complaining that its previous reform decrees had thus far produced few solid results, and appointed five leading officials to go abroad to investigate all aspects of governmental administration with the intention of adopting the best among them. The dispatch in 1905 of a mission to study constitutional government abroad marked the first acceleration of reform.

After many twists and turns, the constitutional mission took off in December 1905, with the final appointees being Imperial Prince Zaize, Hunan Governor Duanfang, Shuntian Prefect Li Shengduo, the Junior Vice President of the Board of Revenue Dai Hongci, and the Shandong Treasurer Shang Qiheng (a Hanjun whose sister had married Cixi's brother). The appointees were divided into two groups, one led by Dai Hongci and the other by Zaize. On December 7, the first group of officials, Dai Hongci and Duanfang, left Beijing for Shanghai. On December 11, Zaize, Shang Qiheng, and Li Shengduo departed from Beijing. This second group visited Japan, then the United States, Britain, France, and Belgium. This mission lasted from January 16 to July 12, 1906. The first group, Dai Hongci and Duanfang, also making Japan their first stop, arrived in the United States on January 23, 1906, then traveled to Britain, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Holland, Switzerland, and Belgium. The two groups of investigators met in Brussels in June 1906. Dai Hongci and Duanfang came back to Shanghai on July 21, 1906, where they met with constitutionalists from Jiangzhe as many as four times to discuss issues of constitutionalism. Passing through Tianjin on August 6, Dai Hongci and Duanfang met with Yuan Shikai on issues of Constitutional

Reform and the reform of the administration. In short, the mission strengthened these prominent officials' determination to implement constitutional politics. Most members of the mission had had no experience of traveling abroad, and their travels effectively converted them into supporters of constitutionalism. When they returned to China eight months later, they unsurprisingly recommended to the court that it emulate the constitutional system of Japan, which they claimed, based on the experience of Meiji Japan, would strengthen rather than weaken the authority of the emperor, because it would deflect political criticism to the cabinet and its prime minister that otherwise would be directed at the emperor himself.

Upon returning from abroad, Zaize was resolute in advocating constitutionalism. On July 24 and 25, 1906, he was received by Empress Dowager Cixi. In a memorial following the meeting, Zaize attributed the wealth and power of the strong countries to the fact that they all had constitutions. Zaize also tried to ease Cixi's concern about losing power, writing that there should be no worry that "a constitution will lead to the strengthening of the power of people and hinder that of the court." Rather, "the constitution of Japan strengthens and amasses power for the center," and thus should be the model for China.⁹ Dai Hongci and Duanfang were equally firm in their attitudes. After returning to Beijing, they were promoted to Minister of Ritual and Governor-general of Zhejiang and Fujian respectively. When received by Cixi, they as well assured Cixi that constitutionalism would only strengthen the country and not hurt the power of the emperor. Crucially, the memorial sent by Duanfang, "Memorial to Set Up the

⁹ Ibid., 68.

Principle of the Country” (*Qingding guoshi yi an daji zhe*), and the memorial jointly sent by Dai Hongci and Duanfang, “Memorial to Reorganize the Administration System” (*Gaiding guanzhi zhe*), elaborated their principles and plans for conducting a Constitutional Reform in China. These two memorials also laid out the entire plan for China’s political transformation.

Ironically, both memorials were written by Liang Qichao, the famous fugitive from the Qing government with a price of a hundred thousand taels on his head! A new discovery in 2008 of Liang Qichao’s draft for these two memorials by a Peking University researcher finally put the last word to the puzzle of the authorship of these two essays.¹⁰ Unsurprisingly, both memorials carried enormous depth and insight on constitutionalism. In particular, the first memorial laid out the key principles for the reform. In Duanfang’s name, this superbly crafted memorial systematically reflected upon the failure of the previous Self-Strengthening movement in building a strong nation. In fact, the entire logic of the memorial was a replica of the 1901 Liang Qichao article “On Constitutionalism”: claiming that the fundamental reason for China’s weakness and poverty was its autocratic political system and that the only way to achieve wealth and power was to transform the system into a constitutional monarchy. To reform, six principles had to be followed:

¹⁰ Xia Xiaohong, “Cong xin faxian shougao kan Liang Qichao wei wu dachen chuyang zuo qiangshou zhenxiang” [Liang Qichao serving as the ghostwriter for the five missionaries: new evidence from the manuscript of Liang Qichao], viewed on December 4, 2008, from *Nanfang zhoumo*, November 12, 2008. This most recent investigation done by Xia Xiaohong from Beijing University led to the discovery of a manuscript written by Liang Qichao, where Liang wrote five memorials for the commissioners.

First, *all* in the country are equal [citizens] before the law; *all* distinctions [between people] should be eradicated.

Second, national affairs should be decided by public opinion.

Third, adopt all the advantages of the Chinese and western nations to attain security and growth of both state and the people.

Fourth, divide and clarify the organs of the court and the government.

Fifth, clarify the boundary between central and local government and practice self-governance.

Sixth, establish a financial system that sets clear budgets and expenditures.

The memorial then requested that the above principles be “pronounced to all people under Heaven as the fundamental principle of the country.” In addition, it gave a schedule for implementing these principles: “In about fifteen to twenty years, the constitution should be established, parliamentary representatives elected, and a National Assembly opened, so that all practices in politics could follow the constitutional model.”¹¹ Importantly, these proposals, specifically asking for political equality, differed drastically from the traditional political morality discussed in Chapter One, which was based on hierarchical political status. In addition, they expressed, in the familiar Liang Qichao language, a strong spirit of anti-autocracy.

Predictably, the reform encountered strong resistance from conservative officials. Conservative groups, and in particular some Manchu aristocrats who believed that constitutionalism benefited only the Han Chinese rather than the Manchus, were antagonistic toward the reform. They argued that a transformation to constitutional politics would lead to a disintegration of the country and the loss of power by the Manchus and the emperor. The persistent issue of Manchu-Han relations emerged

¹¹ Duanfang, “Qingding guoshi yi an daji zhe” [Memorial to Set Up the Principle of the Country], in *Duanminzhong gong zougao* [The draft memorials of Duanfang], vol.6. In Hou Yijie, 69.

notably in the constitutionalism debate. Feeling unsure, Cixi sought suggestions from important provincial officials. Zhang Zhidong and Ding Zhenduo both believed that the timing was not right, because the commoners were not yet enlightened and the education reforms were not widespread. Yikuang, Yuan Shikai, and Xu Shichang, on the other hand, supported the reform. Zaifeng and Qu Hongji, as the third group, supported launching the reform gradually.¹²

Finally, on September 1, 1906, the court announced its launch of the Constitutional Reform. In the edict, it stated: “At this moment in time, the only way for [the empire] to survive is to emulate and carry out a Constitutional Reform. Power resides with the emperor; but various matters should be determined by public opinion. To eradicate the old evils and to clarify officials’ responsibility, we have to start with reform in administration.”¹³ This edict marked the beginning of a new era in Chinese politics and offered great hope to many Chinese at the time. Elites were thrilled; expecting to become stakeholding citizens, they were grateful. Sichuan students were thrilled as well, and in various chambers of commerce, gentry-merchants held celebrations of the announcement of this edict.

As the first step toward constitutionalism, Cixi called for a reorganization of the administrative system. Again, this idea came from Liang Qichao, who first presented it in the memorial he wrote for Dai Hongci and Duanfang. On September 2, the Qing court appointed fourteen officials to draw up plans for the reorganization and another three

¹² “Lixian jiwen” [Chronology of the Constitutional Reform], in *Xinhai geming* [The 1911 Revolution] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1957), vol.4, 14-17.

¹³ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 74-76.

officials (Yikuang, Sun Jia'nai, and Qu Hongji) to review those plans. Five principles for overhauling the administration were set up, the three most important being to “emulate the administration of the constitutional nations,” to “make sure that all officials perform their responsibilities and that no empty titles be allowed,” and “to uphold the idea that the responsibilities of three branches—executive, legislative, judicial—would be clarified and separated.”¹⁴

The administrative reform started from the central level, yet it encountered great obstacles from the very beginning.¹⁵ The tension chiefly came from two issues. One was whether to do away with the Grand Secretariat and the Grand Council and replace them both with a “responsible cabinet” headed by a strong, executive prime minister. The other contentious issue was whether to roll back the independent authority of the provincial officials in an attempt to recentralize authority in Beijing. As historian Hou Yijie summarized the reforms, even though a new cabinet was not finally established, still, the central administration did undergo some crucial changes. One change was the decrease in the number of the Grand Councilors and the empowerment of the ministers because all ministers could now participate in deciding issues for the Grand Secretariat and the Grand Council. The second was the decrease in the number of officials in each ministry and the abandonment of the dyarchy and ethnic slots in the core agencies of the metropolitan government, which allowed even greater Manchu influence later. The third

¹⁴ Ibid., 82-83.

¹⁵ According to Hou Yijie, Yuan Shikai was the real power behind the scenes, despite the fact that Zaize was given the job of supervising the new administrative system (*xin guanzhi*).

was the establishment of the principle of the separation of the judicial and executive branches of the administration. The fourth was the specialization of the ministers for their own posts. And the fifth was the preparation for establishing a National Assembly, a national audit office, a military advisory department, and to divide up the navy and army, military order and military administration.¹⁶

Without a cabinet, constitutional elites were disappointed with the reform. The founder of *Dagongbao*, Yin Lianzhi, regarded the reform as only superficial (*pimao*) and having lost the essence (*jingshen*) of a true reform. Nevertheless, I would argue that constitutional elites might have been a bit too cynical about the central-level administrative reform. This reform did at least launch the principle of separating the executive and judicial branches of government, and formed elementary legislatures in provincial and local assemblies.

As soon as the Qing court finished reshuffling the central government, it started focusing on the reform of provincial and local administration. Zaize, Dai Hongci, Qu Hongji, and Xu Shichang proposed an overhaul of the local administrations; on the other hand, Sun Jia'nai and others officials proposed a much more conservative and moderate reform. On November 5, 1906, the above leaders sent a telegram to all provincial officials, wherein both proposals were announced for provincial officials to decide upon. After numerous debates and discussions and a test run in Manchuria of the new local administrative system, Yikuang and Sun Jia'nai issued the "Proposal for Local

¹⁶ Edward Rhoads, *Manchus and Han: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000), 100-101. Also in Hou Yijie, 83.

Administration Reform” on July 7, 1907. In this proposal, there would be several key changes in local administration. First, a provincial-level council was to be established, in which provincial officials would regularly meet to decide important matters. This would help curb the autocratic power of the governors and governors-general in provinces. Second, all yamen runners’ and clerks’ jobs were to be abolished, and replaced by professional positions to be filled via examination. In addition, the new-style subordinate officials were specialized according to the matters they were in charge of: police (*xunjing*), education (*jiaoyu*), agriculture-industry-commerce (*nong-gong-shang*), communications (*jiaotong*), prisons (*jianyü*), and crucially, taxation (*shuishou*). This act was crucial because this reform gave the green light to the provincial government for its expansion with the new bureaus, which as we shall see in Sichuan, would threaten and upset the local authority of the gentry and alienate the gentry from the state. Third, all provinces would now have a new-style provincial judge called “Supervisor of the Law” (*tifasi*), who managed the administration of the judicial system and supervised all levels of courts in their trials of cases. Along this line, a formal judicial system also started to take off: for the first time in Chinese history, elementary, local, and higher judicial courts were established. Finally, this regulation requested that provincial officials set up local and county-level councils for discussing local affairs (*yishihui*) and local administrative councils (*dongshihui*), which would be the formal organization for local elites to participate in local governance and assist local officials.¹⁷

¹⁷ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 86-91.

If the preparation for constitutionalism from 1906 to 1907 had been slow and mainly focused on institutional changes in the metropolitan and provincial administrations, the assassination of Anhui Governor Enming led to a dramatic acceleration in the political reform. On July 6, 1907, the assassination of Enming, by a revolutionary named Xu Xilin, changed the political scene dramatically. The court reacted promptly. On July 8, two days after the assassination, an edict was issued that all officials and the people (*renmin*), not just those who were originally allowed to submit palace memorials, could send proposals on issues of constitutionalism.¹⁸ In short, the court called upon its subjects to present proposals for reform, but this time the appeal went beyond the elite of top officials who were authorized to memorialize the throne to the much broader group of junior officials and scholar commoners, who were now permitted to have their ideas forwarded to the center by either the Censorate (*Duchayuan*) or provincial officials.

This edict was truly remarkable: it was the first time in Chinese history that its government formally recognized the rights of common people to participate in and discuss political affairs. The gesture was clear. From then on, constitutionalism became the new rallying cry among the educated class in China. Officials, including Manchus, expressed their strong determination to reform.¹⁹ Beginning in the second half of 1907,

¹⁸ *Qingmo choubei lixian dang'an shiliao* [Historical archival documents on preparations for constitutional government in the late Qing] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979) vol.1, 44.

¹⁹ For example, the reform-minded Manchu statesman Duanfang wrote Tieliang upon this assassination, "From this moment on, there was not a single day we [Manchus] could feel restful. Then, given the situation, the only way we can survive is to try our best to reform and to use all methods that we can, so that all under Heaven will be benefited." In Hou Yijie, 98.

the preparation for constitutionalism was carried out at an incomparable speed. A series of edicts was issued to accelerate the pace of reform. First, all levels of officials were required to establish “Study Groups on Constitutionalism” (*Xianzheng yanjiu hui*) and “Schools of Law and Politics” (*Fazheng xuetao*) to cultivate talent for the Constitutional Reform.²⁰ And there came more.

On August 13, 1907, an edict to establish a special political organization for constitutional change, the Institute for Constitutional Compilation (*Xianzheng bianchaguan*), was issued, signifying that the Constitutional Reform was being taken to a new level.²¹ On August 24, Prince Yikuang set forth the concrete regulations of this new organ: it was put under direct control of the Grand Councilors and would serve as legislative bureau (*Fazhiju*) under the future responsible cabinet (*Zeren neige*). The main job of this bureau was to “discuss all matters related to Constitutional Reform, conduct related investigations, and study constitutions of other nations to draw up a constitution and related regulations.”²² On October 26, the *Political Gazette* (*Zhengzhi guanbao*) was launched as the official publication of the Institute for Constitutional Compilation: thus, edicts concerning domestic politics could be publicized to a wide-ranging group of readers. Importantly, many radical-minded intellectuals who had studied abroad were

²⁰ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 99.

²¹ *Qingmo choubei lixian dang'an shiliao*, vol.1, 45-46. It was transformed from the old “Institute of Political Investigation” (*Kaocha zhengzhi guan*) that was established on October 19, 1906.

²² *Qingmo choubei lixian dang'an shiliao*, vol.1, 48.

installed in this institute, and they took a leading role in propelling a true reform from the top.²³

On September 20, 1907, in response to growing demands for the opening of a National Assembly, Cixi, in her own name (*yizhi*), issued edicts that clarified the vague promise she had made a year earlier to institute a constitutional regime. Cixi declared that her ultimate intention was to establish “a bicameral deliberative body.” As a preparatory step, she ordered the immediate creation of a Consultative Assembly (*Zizhengyuan*), appointing the fourth-rank prince Pulun and the elderly Grand Secretary Sun Jia’nan as its co-presidents, and charged them, together with the Grand Council, to draw up a detailed plan for the new Consultative Assembly. In addition, the court decided to send more ministers abroad to study constitutions. Meanwhile, it tried hard to eliminate the obstacles between the Manchus and the Han so that the mounting ethnic antagonism and hatred could be assuaged.²⁴

While the legislative reform at the center was being carried out, legislative organs at the local level—local assemblies and local self-government—were also starting to be established. Beijing was the first place to start. From early 1907, the Ministry of Interior Politics (*Minzhengbu*) ordered the Beijing Police Department to set up local self-government and organize supervising bureaus and study groups for self-governance. From then on, Zhejiang, Guangxi, Guangdong, Jiangsu, Hubei, Hunan, and the city of Ha’erbin in Heilongjiang all set up associations of self-governance. In addition, on

²³ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 100.

²⁴ Rhoads, *Manchus and Han*, 100-101.

October 19, 1907, the court ordered governors and governors-general to “quickly set up provincial assemblies at their capitals” and “lay out foundations for local assemblies in various counties and prefectures (*ge zhou-fu-xian yishihui*) to prepare talent for [self-government] ... and gradually reach the goal that ‘various policies be decided by public opinion.’”²⁵

As the center was rapidly sending out edicts for Constitutional Reform, all around the country, elites holding constitutional ideals were organizing themselves and gaining political momentum. Among these elites, an important group was merchants. Starting in January 1904, Chinese merchants started coalescing. The “Regulation on Chambers of Commerce” encouraged merchants in the Qing Empire to set up associations at all levels of towns and cities. All provincial capitals should establish a general chamber of commerce (*shangwu zonghui*); small cities should establish a chamber of commerce branch (*shangwu fenhui*); and county townships should set up commercial offices (*shangwu gongsuo*). In 1911, there were 669 chambers of commerce in China and Sichuan had 97 in total. These people, viewing themselves as politically charged citizens, took the responsibility for strengthening China and reviving national power upon their shoulders. They actively participated in the Rights Recovery Movement from 1904 onward. It was via movements like these that they realized the importance of organizing themselves for the achievement of their political aspirations: “To organize is crucial not

²⁵ *Qingmo choubei lixian dang'an shiliao*, vol.2, 667.

only for the struggle to recover the railway rights, but also for establishing constitutional politics.”²⁶

Besides merchants, another important group that had arisen was the new-style intellectuals. From 1901 onward, more youngsters in China were sent abroad to study. In 1903, there were a thousand students studying in Japan, and in 1905 there were eight thousand.²⁷ They later became the key force for enlightening the people. In addition, the new-style schools had produced patriotic and responsible students who had knowledge and notions of constitutional politics. The number of those who held constitutional aspirations was growing fast, and indeed, constitutional groups mushroomed all over the country. In Shanghai, Jilin, Tokyo, Guangzhou, Hunan, and even Guizhou, constitutional associations, which had the basic features of a political party, were forming quickly. The constitutionalists published newspapers and constitutional textbooks, set up new schools of self-governance, proposed new regulations, and helped prepare for setting up the provincial assemblies. In doing so, the constitutional parties gained important influence over the public opinion of China at the time.

In particular, among these constitutional intellectuals, Yang Du and his call to open a National Assembly created an important trend. From January 1907 on, using the *New China Newspaper* (*Zhonghua xin bao*) as his base, Yang started writing editorials urging the creation of a National Assembly. Yang maintained that “opening a National

²⁶ *Shengjing shibao*, October 26, 1907. In Hou Yijie, 111.

²⁷ Saneto Keishu, trans. Tan Ruqian and Lin Qiyan, *Zhongguo ren liuxue riben shi* [History of the overseas Chinese students in Japan] (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1983), 36, 39, and 81.

Assembly is the only way to fight against the government and transform the Qing regime from an irresponsible government to a responsible one.” The government “would not seem formidable” if all comrades organized themselves into political parties and submitted their petitions consistently. In addition, starting on September 25, 1907, Yang personally organized groups going to Beijing, sending petitions to the Censorate and then to the court.²⁸ Yang Du linked up with Liang Qichao to form an even more powerful public demand for opening the parliament.²⁹ Together, Liang and Yang created great public influence via important newspapers such as *Shibao* and *Xinmin congbao*. Under their leadership, many educated elite considered the National Assembly issue as the key to Constitutional Reform. Thus, as *Shibao* put it early in 1908, “‘National Assembly, National Assembly’ has become the clarion rallying cry.”³⁰ To open the National Assembly became the focused goal for the constitutional elite.

Meanwhile, the Railway-Rights Recovery Movement in Zhejiang from 1907 on made well-educated reform-minded citizens realize the urgency in opening the National Assembly. One wrote, “We should first set up the National Assembly; then the rights

²⁸ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 184.

²⁹ Ding Wenjiang and Zhao Fengtian, ed., *Liang Qichao nianpu changbian* [Chronicle of Liang Qichao’s Life] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1983), 395-398. In April 1907, Yang Du sent a private letter to Liang Qichao: “I have started propagandizing on opening the National Assembly in *Zhongguo xinbao*. However, this did not receive too much reaction. In my opinion, if we together use *Xinmin congbao* and *Shibao* to together send the message, in the next two to three months, then the problem of the National Assembly would become the most important yet simple issue.” Liang accepted the opinion and then replied: “This is a great idea and I shall follow this and make sure *Shibao* responds.”

³⁰ *Shibao*, February 26-27, 1908.

over mines and railways could be preserved.”³¹ As historian Mary Rankin observes, the issues surrounding railways and the accompanying rise of mobilization politics led to an increase of public activities of civic institutions and private associations, which again contributed to the broadening of political participation, in particular, toward the goal of constitutionalism.³² Soon, a nationwide petition for opening the National Assembly was circulated, demanding that the time for opening the parliament be settled. In December 1907, constitutional groups such as the Association for Constitutional Government (*Xianzheng gonghui*) led by Yang Du, the Political Information Institute (*Zhengwenshe*) founded by Liang Qichao, and the Association for Constitutional Preparations (*Yubei lixian gonghui*) headed by Zhang Jian, Zheng Xiaoxu, and Tang Shouqian in Shanghai, all started their petitions. These groups, first separately and then together, launched a historic lobbying effort. The local self-government organs soon followed. The result was a series of similarly worded petitions from various provincial groups, who moreover began to converge on Beijing. Constitutional elites from Henan, Anhui, Jiangsu, Jilin, Hunan, Zhili, Shandong, Beijing, Guangdong, Shanxi, and Zhejiang all sent in petitions demanding the opening of the National Assembly.³³

The petition to open the National Assembly created great pressure on the Beijing government, forcing it to recognize the demand and deal with it. On June 8, 1908, Grand Councilors Zhang Zhidong and Yuan Shikai invited officials of the Institute for

³¹ *Shenbao*, November 12, 1907.

³² Mary Rankin, “Nationalistic contestation and mobilization politics: practice and rhetoric of railway-rights recovery at the end of the Qing,” 315-361.

³³ Hou Yijie, *Ershi shiji chu Zhongguo zhengzhi gaige fengchao*, 190-198.

Constitutional Compilation to discuss the matter, on which people's opinions differed greatly. While the central officials were debating how many years it should take to open the National Assembly, the petitions continued to arrive, from Guangdong, Guizhou, Fujian, Fengtian, Jiangxi, and Sichuan. Meanwhile, reform-minded provincial officials and representatives started responding in their memorials and asked for the opening of the National Assembly and more officials in the system started taking the constitutional side.

On August 27, 1908, Cixi finally made up her mind and announced a timetable for constitutionalism and agreed to set a deadline for its realization. She also gave her approval to documents drawn up by the Institute for Constitutional Compilation: the Constitutional Outline (*Xianfa dagang*), Outline of Parliamentary Regulations (*Yiyuanfa yaoling*), Outline of Election Regulations (*Xuanjufa yaoling*), and Items of Preparation (*Zhunian choubai shiyi qingdan*). Those documents set up the important rule of the separation of the three branches' powers, and thus a fundamental change in the power of the emperor. In addition, the constitution was established as an ultimate power that even the emperor had to obey. and the Items of Preparation set out the very concrete steps of the Constitutional Reform, in which local elections and provincial assembly elections became a key step. Although the nine-year timetable did not satisfy everyone, still, at all levels of government in the nation, the reform accelerated.

II. The Constitutional Reform in Sichuan

State Reorganization

The earlier Constitutional Reform policy in reorganizing the local administration immensely changed the balance of power in local society and had a deep impact in Sichuan. In Sichuan, from 1901 to 1911, under the rubric of the New Policies, numerous provincial bureaus were established under the supervision of four Governors-general: Kuijun (1898-1902), Cen Chunxuan (1902-1903), Xiliang (1903-1907), and the Zhao brothers, Zhao Erxun and Zhao Erfeng (1907-1911). Each added some bureaus to serve as the evidence of their political achievements. The Copper Bureau, the Opium Bureau, the New Study Bureau, the Police Bureau, the New Salt Bureau, the Chuan-Han Railway Company, the Official Newsletter Bureau, the Commercial Bureau, the Mineral Bureau, the Weapons Bureau, the Lottery Bureau, the Relief Bureau, the New Tax Bureau, the Bureau for Encouraging Industry, the Official Opium Paste Bureau, the Bureau in Charge of Demobilizing the Green Standard Army, and the Bureau in Charge of Investigating the Budget, all appeared over a short period of time.³⁴

According to Zhou Xun, who served as a secretary in the provincial government in Sichuan, the new bureaus added in the New Policies period greatly disturbed the living conditions of the people in Sichuan. The two most devastating were the New Tax Bureau (*jingzhengju*) and the Police Bureau (*jingchaju*).

The New Tax Bureau was set up by Zhao Erxun as soon as he became the Governor-general of Sichuan in 1907.³⁵ The New Tax Bureau set up its branches in all

³⁴ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.2, 12a-22b.

³⁵ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.2, 20a. Also according to Ba county archival documents, we know that the New Tax Bureau started functioning very effectively from 1908.

prefectures and counties of Sichuan and started to function around 1908. The traditional way of levying tax, which was now abolished, had been via local leaders (*lizheng* or *jiazheng*), who, recommended by powerful local residents, were supposed to somehow protect local interests and negotiate with governmental organs. We know that before the New Tax Bureau was established in Sichuan, the old way of taxation was: a county official would come to a locality, tell the local gentry the number of taels of silver he proposed to collect in tax, then discuss with them the feasibility of collecting that amount. The gentrymen would negotiate the number with the official, and after that, they would strike a deal. After a deal was done, the local gentrymen would treat the official to an elaborate banquet, and both sides would be satisfied. However, the establishment of the New Tax Bureau changed everything. The magistrate lost the power to decide the taxation of his jurisdiction. Rather, the commissioner of the New Tax Bureau (*Jingzheng weiyuan*) became the one in charge. The commissioner came to the locale, asked the magistrate for the predetermined amount, and if there were people resisting paying, or magistrates unable to fulfill the levy, the commissioner would report the “delinquency” and “ineffectiveness” of the county magistrates to the provincial capital. It was part of the process of modern state-building. The New Tax Bureau had its own personnel and even its own physical office space in local counties, which was independent of the county officials. In fact, it was the New Tax Bureau that put the wealth of the Sichuan people into the hands of the governor and the state he represented.³⁶

³⁶ Li Jieren, *Dabo* [Great wave], in *Li Jieren Xuanji* [Collected works of Li Jieren] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1980), vol.2, 533.

The New Tax Bureau took over a great number of taxes. Taxes on liquor, oil, and sugar, which were originally levied by the Likin Bureau, came to be levied by the New Tax Bureau. Soon, property tax (*qishui*) was levied by the New Tax Bureau as well. In addition, the tax on pigs (*rouli*), which was originally levied and sent to the provincial treasury, also got transferred to the New Tax Bureau's terrain.³⁷ Over the years, the New Tax Bureau also took over other local bureaus that used to serve specific purposes. The Three Surcharges Bureau (*sanfeiju*), for example, was one. While the Three Surcharges Bureau used to be controlled by local elites for gathering funds to investigate homicides, it was taken over by the New Tax Bureau.³⁸ Because every prefecture, every county had a local branch, the New Tax Bureau became an effective bureaucracy and a key organ for the state to expand its power and to penetrate into society.

The amount levied by the New Tax Bureau composed the great majority of the tax burden of Sichuanese, greater than all other kinds of tax including the railway tax (*zugu*). In Dingyuan county, the level of taxation on the part of the New Tax Bureau was thirty times that of the land tax (*diding*) and several times the other surcharges. Confirming the evidence gained from the archival documents, the secretary Zhou Xun, who had systematically reviewed the history of taxation in Sichuan, also noticed that the surcharge on land tax (*diding*), including “extra charge” (*jintie*), “voluntary surcharge taxes” (*juanshu*), and “new voluntary surcharge taxes” (*xin juanshu*), were not the great burden. It was indeed the New Tax Bureau that made the biggest difference: the biggest amount

³⁷ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.2, 20a.

³⁸ Zhou Xun, *Shuhai congtan*, vol.2, 45b.

added to the burden came from the taxation on pigs, liquor, oil, and sugar, and property. The bureau made sure that much of the tax could be effectively levied. All this led to great hatred against the Zhao brothers and the New Tax Bureau. In the novel *Dabo* [*Great Wave*], a landowner comments: “I have never seen any officials asking this much money before. The New Tax Bureau was insatiable!”³⁹

The second provincial administrative reform that greatly influenced the life of the Sichuanese was the establishment of the new police system, which was first set up in September 1902. The mastermind behind the bureau was the effective Japan-trained official, Zhou Shanpei, who drafted its rules and regulations. Under his leadership, a new police system was successfully established in Chengdu and gradually in outlying counties as well. By April of 1906, more than seventy counties and prefectures had already started to establish the police system. In 1907, a new provincial governor’s office in charge of the all matters concerning police affairs was established, to which Zhou Shanpei was appointed.

The money levied to support the police system was exorbitant: “At first, the money for the police came out of the taxation used for the local militia. Yet, whenever that amount was not sufficient, new taxes were established and were made permanent.”⁴⁰ Before the New Tax Bureau was officially established and served as the chief provider of police funding, police funding came from taxes on shops (*dianpu juan*) and on drama (*xi juan*), opium gum tax (*yandeng juan*), tax that was levied to pay for government-operated

³⁹ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 533.

⁴⁰ Xiliang, *Xiliang yigao zougao*, vol.1, 566.

scales to ensure the accurate measurement of *dou* (*dou juan*), tax on teahouse tables (*zhuomian juan*), and even others. After the establishment of the New Tax Bureau, most of the new surcharges it levied were used for building up the police system.⁴¹ For example, Fushun county's gazetteer noted that "among all charges for the local public services (*difang gongyong*)," that for the police system was one of the heaviest.⁴²

In addition, the policemen were disturbing to the local people. Even the Qing court in Beijing noticed that "policemen were abusive and lawless in most of the provinces, which caused great disturbance to the local people."⁴³ Sichuan's police system might have been worse. Its local literati wrote that "the police system was tried for quite a few years, yet its benefits were never seen and its disadvantages were easy to detect"; and that "it [Sichuan's police system] has become a means by which outsiders (*wairen*) make a living and a way in which unnecessary laborers find a job. The police department was a new organization only in name; it did not capture the essence of a true new system." Some officials would extort people's money and oppress people under color of police authority and the policemen were abusive.⁴⁴ In short, "once Sichuan had the police system, its evil became uncontrollable. If we rely upon coercion to fight against coercion, there is no way that we can solidify local security and get rid of the

⁴¹ *Shubao* [Newspaper of Sichuan], no.9 (1910), "Jishi" [Chronicle]. *Shubao* was the official newspaper of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly.

⁴² *Fushun xianzhi* [Fushun Gazetteer] vol.5, *Shihuo zhengque* [economy and taxation]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 287.

⁴³ *Xuantong zhengji* [The political chronicle of the Xuantong reign], vol.4, Guangxu 34 year 12 month 6 day. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 287.

⁴⁴ *Sichuan guanbao* [Sichuan Gazette], no.1. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 287.

threat to local society.”⁴⁵ The extremely negative comments on the policemen in Sichuan came partially from the local power struggle between the old-style *tuanlian* system and the new police system. After Zhao Erxun became the governor, he extended the reach of the local police system to almost all of Sichuan, including the countryside (*xiang*). Conflicts constantly occurred between the local *baojia* and the police bureau, leading to a new level of contention in local society.

The conflicts and hatred toward the new police and tax agencies were intense. In fact, one slogan used in the Railway Protection Movement was: “Get Rid of Zhao and Zhou, Don’t Hurt Other Common People.” This Zhao refers to the Governor-general Zhao Erfeng, whose brother invented the system of the New Tax Bureau, and who himself would kill demonstrators supporting the Railway Movement in 1911. Zhou was Zhou Shanpei, and who masterminded the Sichuan police system, who would be blamed for turning over the Railway Movement leaders to Zhao. Indeed, as the Qing state tried to mobilize itself and to expand its power, it greatly disturbed local society. In evaluating the modernizing proposals of the New Policies Reform, we have to look at the cost it imposed on local people and investigate the power struggle the reform incited. The targeted hatred toward the New Tax Bureau and the New Police Bureau laid a foundation for the future Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan, in which the local people were

⁴⁵ Ibid.

ready to be mobilized under the leadership of the constitutional elite who had consistently fought against the power of the state.⁴⁶

In sum, at the end of the Qing, modern state-building was taking off in Sichuan. Such state-building angered local gentry and landlords by taking over their former function of negotiating, collecting (or lending money for) taxes, and in some cases engaging in graft. The reform also took away the power of the locally influential *baojia* leaders. The Old Regime was subverted.

The Building of the Provincial Assembly

At the same time that Sichuan's provincial state was expanding and reorganizing itself, Sichuan elite were legalizing and accumulating their power as well. The most crucial event for Sichuan elite and the most relevant to our story was the establishment of the provincial assemblies, which were elected in a two-stage process in 1909.

The official taking-off point for the establishment of the provincial assemblies was on July 22, 1908, when the court promulgated the 62-clause Regulations for Provincial Assemblies and the 115-clause Regulations for Provincial Assembly Elections. The Constitutional Commission gave further instructions to provincial governors, stipulating a one-year deadline for the establishment of the assemblies. Provincial governments were required to set up preparatory bureaus, which were intended to be jointly run by officials and local elites. These bureaus were to carry out two phases of

⁴⁶ In many of the cases in Sichuan, the negative effects of reforms seemed to outweigh any advances. The New Policies in Sichuan, especially the two cases that I investigated in detail, caused much pain to people in Sichuan.

elections in one year. Under this indirect voting system, the first-round elections were for eligible voters to choose electors, who would in turn elect the actual provincial assemblymen in the second-round elections.

In Sichuan, on October 14, 1909, the Provincial Assembly was established. On that day, 105 assemblymen elected from Sichuan's various counties came to Chengdu and attended the meeting. Historian Zhang Pengyuan gives a good description of the people in the Sichuan Provincial Assembly: the average age of the Sichuan assemblymen was thirty, most of them held official degrees, and with a few big merchants, all were respected gentrymen.⁴⁷

Among the 105 assemblymen, the former students who had studied in Japan had the biggest influence. These students, always regarding themselves as "Sichuanese" (*Sichuanren*) and considering themselves as representing the opinion of the people (*gongyi*), came to have great power over public opinion. The students-turned-assemblymen had already established their influence over provincial economic affairs, that is, the Chuan-Han Railway Company; finally, the opening of the 1909 Provincial Assembly gave them their organization in the political arena. The Constitutional Reform created a powerful political elite class, whose authority on both the economic and political fronts expanded drastically.

Indeed, constitutionalism was the talk of the day. There seemed to be agreement among elites (intellectuals and officials included) that the only way to save China from being destroyed was to conduct Constitutional Reform. Whether or not they believed in

⁴⁷ Zhang Pengyuan 1969, *Lixianpai yu Xinhai geming*, Section on Sichuan Provincial Assembly.

it philosophically, they unanimously held that a constitutional government would make China stronger, as it had done, convincingly, for Japan. Before the conflicts became overt and open, we see that the constitutional officials and constitutionalists outside of the Qing bureaucratic system cooperated closely with Constitutional Reform, despite their deeply rooted differences. The goal of the New Policies Reform was to save China from imperialist encroachment. The means for achieving it included both the strengthening of the state, and the absorption into the polity of more people who would become stakeholding citizens.

However, as both elites and statesmen significantly expanded their control over society, the collaboration between the constitutional elite and the statesmen disintegrated. On the one hand, the new provincial bureaucratic organs were expanding, giving the provincial officials more venues for directing and controlling local affairs. In Sichuan, in particular, under the strong management of several able officials, the new provincially-directed organizations were expanding frantically, and some, including the police and taxation bureaus, became strong vertical structures that could reach below the county level. They guaranteed that the needs of the provincial government would be efficiently met. On the other hand, the new local self-government organizations also started to emerge, which would gradually become a solid base for local elites to control power and to fight against the governmental apparatus. The differences in political ideologies between the elites and the state became obvious more than ever.

III. The Debates in the Sichuan Provincial Assembly

At the opening ceremony of the first Sichuan Provincial Assembly, on October 14, 1909, Governor-general Zhao Erxun set forth a very different political philosophy from Liang Qichao. While praising the assemblymen as “the leading scholars in the literary circle” and “the moral exemplars of all Sichuan gentry,” Zhao had little sympathy for their ambitions to exercise practical power, claiming that “all political power belongs to the state”:

We should definitely make sure that [you know] the boundaries of [your] power. Today is the time when statism is in vogue (*yi jinshi guojia zhuyi shengxing zhiri*); all power belongs to the state (*yiqie quanli jie shu zhiyu guojia*). Officials are the operational body (*jiguan*) of the state. Officials do not have power; all their power belongs to the power of the state. [You] assemblymen are the representatives of the people. People do not have power; all their political rights—to talk about politics—are also endowed by the state. Even though today we always talk about the power of the officials and the power of the people, they are nevertheless either exercising the state’s power or are recognized by the state; neither the officials nor the people have any power of their own.⁴⁸

Rather than believing that the rights of people were self-evident, naturally given, and unalienable, as Jean-Jacques Rousseau has argued, the Qing reformer official Zhao Erxun believed that the state “endowed” people with their political rights. In other words, the rights of the people were dependent on the state.⁴⁹ It was the state that had self-evident authority. Without doubt, Zhao Erxun made a good argument, lading it with immense clarity and vigor. Zhao proffered the lifeless entity, “the state,” with the ultimate power.

⁴⁸ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, vol.1, 4.

⁴⁹ As we see, there was a modern understanding of the state behind Zhao Erxun’s reasoning. It is very far from the original Chinese version of *guo*, meaning “fief.” Sovereignty, though its meanings have varied across history, always has a core meaning, that is, the supreme authority within a territory.

Apparently, Zhao Erxun was educated enough to tap into an influential German philosophical tradition of the late nineteenth century—statism (*guojia zhuyi*)—to further strengthen his arguments. In the rest of his speech, the governor-general brought his argument to its apex. But what was this state in operation? Who represented the state in actuality?

To be fair, Zhao Erxun did not simply equate the state with the officials. On the contrary, he made it clear that the state was above officials and possessed collectivity (*gong*) in its nature. In the same vein, Zhao was sophisticated enough to clarify the boundary of power between the people and officials and delineated the people's position in the state. He argued that the officials and the people should not interfere in each other's terrain. Because officials received their operative power from the state, they should preserve that power and not disturb the rights of political discussion among the people. And because the people obtained from the state their rights (*minquan*) that allowed them to discuss politics, they should stay in the terrain of political discussion (*zishou yizheng zhi quan*) and not infringe upon the rights of officials to exercise the state's power. In short, “the ultimate power belongs to the imperial government (*daquan tong yu chaoting*), and various political affairs are up for public discussion (*shuzheng gong zhu yulun*).” “The right of making suggestions belongs to the people (*jianyan zhiquan zai renmin*), and the right of operating lies with the government (*zhixing zhiquan zai zhengfu*).”

On the surface, Zhao urged the people and the officials to stay within their own power domains. However, as Zhao Erxun laid out his more concrete requirements for the Sichuan assemblymen, we see his position more clearly. Often, Zhao's demands were

aimed at emphasizing the power of the central government by making the local people yield, and he clearly saw the central government as taking precedence over the provincial assembly.

At the opening ceremony, after Zhao Erxun forcefully delivered his speech, the assemblymen of Sichuan did not have much to say. Overwhelmed by the reasoning of the governor-general, the representatives of the Sichuan people were silenced. After a while, Provincial Assembly Chairman Pu Dianjun tried to utter something responding to Zhao's speech; yet he did not clearly reveal his own political stand.⁵⁰ At this moment, even though well imbued with Liang Qichao's propaganda regarding the power and the rights of the people (*minquan*), Sichuan assemblymen were not able to articulate their principles well. Rather, they were in great need of lucid and applicable political reasoning that would help them challenge the authority of the provincial official.

At the closing ceremony of the 1909 Sichuan Provincial Assembly, Zhao Erxun attended the meeting again. Just as at the opening ceremony, Zhao maintained his cool and was just as haughty. He claimed that "the chief function of the Provincial Assembly is to assist the administration."⁵¹ Zhao emphasized that the only way to achieve self-government (*zizhi*) was for the people to actually possess the capability for it; otherwise, even if there was an assembly, there would still only be "empty talking."⁵² After addressing the provincial assembly in this somewhat condescending manner, Governor-general Zhao talked about himself rather differently. He considered himself "confident in

⁵⁰ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 7.

⁵¹ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 10.

⁵² *Ibid.*

heart,” “even-minded,” and “fair”: “I did not feel sorrowful because of those who opposed me; nor am I pleased by those who flattered me.” Ultimately, Zhao finished his speech by restating these words: “What I really hope from you is not only for you to *supervise* us, but more importantly, for you to exert all your energy to *assist* us. All those who support me I would consider my helpful friends (*yiyou*). All those who remonstrate with me I consider friends who hold me to high standards (*weiyou*). You should all do the above [i.e., assist officials].”⁵³

Apparently, despite the fact that the Qing was now in transition to becoming a constitutional state, Zhao still considered these assemblymen as “censors,” the traditional “officials with words” (*yanguan*) who in the monarchical system offered suggestions and assistance to the emperor.⁵⁴ However, this time around, in sharp contrast to their silence at the opening ceremony, the assemblymen reacted with strong opposition. First, Assemblyman Jiang Sancheng stepped onto the podium and challenged Governor-general Zhao. “I object to your opinions on [officials] being offended or flattered,” Jiang stated. He claimed that all matters under Heaven should be decided only by their own rightness or wrongness. It did not mean anything at all whether powerful people like Zhao Erxun approved them or disapproved them. In other words, when facing truth, officials and the people should be equal.⁵⁵

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Jia Yuying, *Songdai jiancha zhidu* [The monitoring system in the Song Dynasty] (Zhengzhou: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2006). Also my college thesis of 2000, Peking University, “Songdai de yushitai yu jianyuan” [Censors in the Song Dynasty].

⁵⁵ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 11.

Right after Jiang Sancheng's protest, Chairman Pu Dianjun went to the podium.

He precisely challenged Zhao's points on supervision (*jiandu*). Pu stated:

When Itō Hirobumi traveled in our country, he used to say that the Chinese were the most passive of all peoples. Being passive is actually *the* reason that our country is weak. Now that the provincial assemblies have been convened, if we assemblymen still insist on the principle of "Do not give money and do not do things" (*bu chuqian bu banshi*), then our country still cannot avoid the fate of being destroyed. However, before the provincial assemblies, [I argue that] there should be no reason to blame us people. Why? Because we did give money in the past days; but, [let us ask:] what things have been achieved and where did our money finally go?... If [you] do not allow people to supervise you, [you] shall surely receive no assistance from the people. This is a fact.⁵⁶

In essence, Pu stated, "there would be no assistance without supervision" because all people who paid the money deserved to know where their money was spent. Sichuan elite demanded to take control of provincial business in their own province. Pu Dianjun continued his closing remarks, saying:

Now that the Provincial Assembly has been established, the National Assembly shall follow suit. Also, the edict stated clearly that "various political issues should be solved by public opinion." ... Therefore, today, we, who represent the people, should try our best to demolish old habits for the benefit of the Chinese people. And those who are in charge of things should try their best to put things straight. [We] are the assistance to administration, but we, following the law, are also the supervision to the administration.... To only pay taxes yet not participate in public affairs is the wrong way to do things!⁵⁷

Pu's rebuttal was solid and powerful. In fact, what Pu Dianjun and Jiang Sancheng tried to argue with Zhao was a matter of great importance, namely: what is the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

legitimate and the right way of conducting public affairs in China? In essence, who has the final say? Zhao Erxun argued that “sovereignty resides with the state.” Yet by arguing “we pay taxes, we should have a say in politics,” Sichuan provincial assemblymen claimed otherwise. In their minds, it was the people, no matter how ill-defined and ambivalent the concept was at this time, who should be the masters of public affairs. Indeed, something crucial happened during the one-and-a-half months of the Provincial Assembly meeting. In their struggles with Governor-general Zhao, Sichuan assemblymen learned to develop their own line of reasoning and articulate it.⁵⁸

Superficially, when the assembly first met, the two sides appeared to be in agreement on general principles, but they began to articulate real differences as specific issues came up for debate. Take the principle of “constitutionalism” as an example. Governor-general Zhao Erxun was enthusiastic about it and claimed, “Fortunately, today, our national policy has been established; all people have their hearts set on one road—constitutionalism (*jin xing guoshi dading, renxin xian quyue xianzheng zhi yi tu*).... All those new things like self-government, police, new education, industry, etc., have been put into a nine-year plan for constitutional preparation. We, officials and gentry, should all follow the orders and achieve them step by step. Moreover, I, your governor, will carefully examine and investigate the special circumstances of Sichuan. For those affairs that can be achieved quickly, I will exert my all energy to make them happen and never

⁵⁸ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 10.

procrastinate.”⁵⁹ Zhao invited all gentry and assemblymen to “follow each step closely and participate actively” in constructing constitutionalism.⁶⁰

Assemblymen were equally eager to build constitutionalism. Representing all Sichuan provincial assemblymen, Chairman Pu Dianjun expressed his gratitude toward the imperial court for launching this political reform. Pu said:

Sichuan is geographically far away from the center and communications are inconvenient. At first sight, Sichuan seems to possess enormous resources and encompass a great number of people; however, in political thinking and ability, compared to the Capital and to the southeastern provinces, Sichuan is extremely backward. Nevertheless, today, we Sichuanese receive the same handling as other provinces do: we Sichuanese can also talk about our provincial politics at leisure. This is all because of the kindness and generosity of the court. All we Sichuan gentry, fathers and sons, elders and youngsters, should show our gratitude by advocating [constitutional politics] and trying our best to help our province progress.⁶¹

Representing all assemblymen and the Sichuan people, Pu Dianjun thanked Governor Zhao Erxun, saying that they greatly cherished Zhao Erxun’s input. At the same time, representing all officials, Zhao Erxun fully recognized the contribution of the Japan-trained intellectuals and their sincerity in saving the country. His appreciation was heartfelt: “Always, I see intellectuals from both within and outside of China struggling to strengthen the nation.... Day and night, they submit proposals, hoping to make our country acquire wealth and power. Aren’t they sincere in their hearts to do so?” Zhao even acknowledged the “procrastination, ineffectiveness, and neglect” that intellectuals

⁵⁹ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 7.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

had faced in the past and assured them that things would be different from then on because “our national policy,” constitutionalism, had been solidly established.⁶²

Unfortunately, the “honeymoon” ended quickly as soon as discussion of the *real* issues began, that is: how should taxes be levied and distributed, and who had the power to decide these matters? Both sides used “constitutionalism” to advance their arguments. Yet, these were two very different “constitutionalisms.” For Governor-general Zhao, “constitutionalism” became a legitimate excuse to expand the power of the state bureaucracy, especially at the provincial level. For the assemblymen, “constitutionalism” meant to “empower the people,” to integrate “the people” into the political process, and to transform them into stakeholders in the polity. Practically, their constitutionalism meant that Sichuan people as taxpayers should have some say in the administration and should occupy some sort of role in the decision-making process.

In particular, let us consider the most heated debate among all the 1909 Provincial Assembly discussions, namely, the one concerning the bill proposed by assemblymen “to demarcate the boundary between the main tax and the surcharge and to levy them separately” (*fujishui yu zhengshui huaqing jixian fenbie zhengshou*). Taking a month, this debate was the longest-lasting of them all. The bill was discussed among the assemblymen three times, sent to Governor-general Zhao Erxun twice, and rejected by Zhao both times. On September 26, 1909, ninety-five assemblymen attended the first meeting for the bill. Chairman Pu Dianjun read it out loud, and after listening, a majority of the assemblymen agreed to let a special committee (*weiyuanhui*) revise it to make it

⁶² Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 6.

stronger. On October 4, after the committee finished the revision, the assemblymen got together a second time. Both the chairman and vice chairman attended the meeting, and seventy-eight out of eighty-seven representatives approved the revised version. On October 6, the proposal was sent to Governor-general Zhao Erxun, and on October 9, Zhao's first rejection letter, in which he demanded the assembly "reconsider" (*zaiyi*) the subject, came to the assembly. On October 14, the chairman, vice chairman, and fifty-four assemblymen got together to discuss the bill for a third time; all the fifty-four assemblymen agreed to stick to their original proposal and send Zhao a rebuttal. The rebuttal did not work, and finally, on October 27, the proposal was rejected by Zhao for the second time.⁶³

The intensity and comprehensiveness of this debate make it illuminating. Also, it addressed a key change in taxation in late Qing Sichuan. The proposal read:

We find that when prefectures, subprefectures, and counties pay their main tax to the provincial capital, they generally obtain the money by a variety of means: taxing the slaughter of pigs, the sale of alcohol, and the sale of oil. However, when they obtain money for their own local governments (*bendifang*), they can only use one method: taxing the slaughter of pigs. Before the abandonment of opium, the opium tax was used for [the local government] to set up new school systems, police forces, and "economic development offices" (*quanyeju*). Now that the opium tax is gone, all these expenses are funded by an increase in the tax on the slaughter of pigs.

Nowadays, the slaughter of each pig was taxed an extra 100 or 200 *wen*. However, because all taxes are now levied by the *jingzhengju* [which was directly responsible to the provincial officials], local governments of prefectures, subprefectures, and counties cannot get their surcharge any more but are only said to get the surcharge tax. And the reason for this is that whenever the main tax collected is not sufficient, the *jingzhengju* constables use the surcharge tax collected to make up for the insufficiency of the main tax. This has led to a lack of funding for the

⁶³ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 37.

localities. Now, various gentry have filed a complaint desiring the return of the surcharge tax, but they have received no reply. This has again given the constables of the *jingzhengju* excuses to not return the money. In all countries in the world, the tax for local government and the tax for the central government are divided clearly. We have never heard about using local government's money to fill hole of money for the center. So, we are in favor of demarcating the boundary between the local tax and the tax for the provincial and central governments.⁶⁴

Here, “main tax” referred to taxes paid to the central and provincial governments and “surcharge” referred to taxes paid to the county government.⁶⁵ The crux of this proposal was the bitterness that Sichuan elite felt toward Governor-general Zhao's *jingzhengju*, which from 1908 on replaced the county authorities and local elites in levying taxes. Ever since the Yongzheng period (1723-35), the preexisting practice had been that the “main tax” (*zhengshui*) went to the central and the provincial treasuries and the “surcharge” (*huohao*) stayed in the county yamen. Both taxes were conventionally levied by county authorities, with local gentrymen and county tax secretaries playing an important role in helping magistrates achieve the needed numbers.⁶⁶ However, in 1908, under the name of the New Policies Reform, Governor-general Zhao Erxun set up *jingzhengju* to levy both taxes. Zhao's rationale was understandable: in order to get money more efficiently and quickly to fulfill ever-growing demands from the central government—new expenses from the New Policies Reform, payment of the Boxer

⁶⁴ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 37-38.

⁶⁵ *Zhengshui*, although the term sometimes still refers to the *diliang* or land tax, was more widely used after the New Policies reform. *Fujiashui* originally referred to the surcharge put on the land tax. The main tax originally referred to the land tax (*diliang*). However, after the late-Qing Taiping Rebellion, more taxes were levied by other methods yet were also called “the main tax.”

⁶⁶ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 37.

indemnity, etc.—Zhao decided to put things under his direct control. Quickly, his provincial tax bureau set up branches all over Sichuan, with Zhao and his colleagues in Chengdu directly appointing all the branch personnel. The new provincial tax bureau was intrusive: from then on, the income of the local government was monitored by and dependent on the provincial capital. Local elites wanted the old way back.

Without doubt, interest made these assemblymen intent on getting their way with the Governor-general. Still, I argue that economic interest *per se* does not make a public political fight, because, during public debate, neither side could blatantly use “interest” as a weapon to advance itself. In politics, arguments are based on legitimacy. The aforementioned fight over taxation was also a fight between different political philosophies. As we shall see soon, toward the end of the assembly debate, both assemblymen and Governor-general Zhao exhibited great faith in what they proclaimed and found power and righteousness in their own words.

In their proposal on October 6, the assemblymen took the first action. They laid out three reasons for going back to the old way of taxation and proposed two ways to “fix” the *jingzhengju*.⁶⁷ First, they argued that all “surcharge taxes” were originally

⁶⁷ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 39-41. “First, all the surcharges, such as those on pigs, alcohol, and oil, were levied to advance the public well-being of the local community (*difang gongyi*). The phenomenon in which these taxes also go to the central and provincial government is something that came later. Before [the 1908 establishment of *jingzhengju*], local elites served to take care of the surcharges and they had been doing great.

“Second, after the 1908 establishment of the *jingzhengju*, all the charges for the well-being of the local community have been in great trouble because the provincial and central governments were considered the priority by the people in charge of the *jingzhengju*. We assemblymen know that the main tax was for the state (*guojia*); however, the well-being of the local community is also part of state affairs (*guojia shiwu*).

levied for “the well-being of the local community (*difang gongyi*) and the local elites were doing fine collecting them; thus, considering the precedent, it made more sense to stick with the old way. Second, the *jingzhengju* always regarded the “main tax” as more important than the “surcharge,” which had left the local government (*difang*) in financial difficulty.⁶⁸ Third, the expenditure of the *jingzhengju* was too huge and the salary of its employees took too much of the taxpayers’ money. All these, argued the assemblymen, would “exhaust the wealth of the people” (*minli*) and cause large problems for the “constitutional future.” The assemblymen believed that “the well-being of the local community is also part of state affairs” (*guojia shiwu*) and thus deserved attention. To police the activities of the *jingzhengju*, assemblymen demanded that “no surcharge tax

“Third, the *jingzhengju*’s behavior in using the surcharge tax to fill the holes of the main tax is something that incurs great problems. In doing so, the wealth of the people (*minli*) would be exhausted and this would bring great trouble for our ‘constitutional’ future. Moreover, the expenses of the *jingzhengju* are too huge—two-fifths of the money levied becomes salaries for the constables. This impairs the well-being of the locale and will do harm to the local self-government that is to come.

“Therefore, first, we have to make sure that all the surcharge taxes levied by the *jingzhengju* cannot be used for other purposes, in particular, to fill the holes of the main tax. Otherwise, there is no way we can guarantee that the well-being of the locale can be preserved. Second, from now on, the main tax and the surcharge tax need to be recorded separately and should be submitted to officials and gentry to guarantee that they can investigate whenever they need to. We also propose that all the surcharges that used to be levied by the gentrymen should stay that way and not switch into the hands of the *jingzhengju*. If so, we shall do great things for the future of self-government and the well-being of the local community.”

⁶⁸ Remarkably, the assemblymen did not clarify which “local” they were talking about, whether it was the local self-government organizations (*difang zizhi*) or the local government (*difang xingzheng*). This was intentional. This area, *difang xingzheng*, was the gray area. Zhao Erxun considered it belonged to the state (*guojia*), and thus, he used the *jingzhengju* to levy taxes for the local government. However, the assemblymen decided to make “*difang xingzheng*” part of their territory, by only emphasizing “*difang*.” Both actually had legal backing on this issue.

levied by the *jingzhengju* be used to fix shortages in the main tax” and that “the main tax and the surcharge tax be recorded separately” so that “both officials *and* gentry can make an investigation when they need to.”⁶⁹ In the end, assemblymen proposed that all surcharge taxes that had been levied by the local gentry still be levied by the local gentry, so that both “local self-government” (*difang zizhi*) and “the well-being of the local community” (*difang gongyi*) would benefit.

Not surprisingly, all these arguments were resolutely refuted by Governor-general Zhao, stating that he would not give up his way of levying taxes. First, Zhao claimed that the assemblymen were fabricating the historical record and that in fact the surcharge tax was first proposed in 1901 by the central government (to pay for the Boxer indemnity). Second, he argued that local government and local self-government were two different things. As for issues of local government, assemblymen had *no legal right* to discuss them “owing to the regulations for self-government.” Third, the *jingzhengju* had been established because the central government was in great need of money. And “according to regulations drafted by the Institute of Constitution Compilation,” that was not in the power of the provincial assemblies to discuss. Zhao Erxun quickly rejected the two fixes that the assemblymen offered and stated that the *jingzhengju* was actually one step of Constitutional Reform. Moreover, he found no need to record the two taxes separately and argued that by posting the number publicly as he had done, he allowed “thousands of

⁶⁹ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 40.

pairs of eyes to see” (*wanmu gongzhan*) rather than “having only one or two persons see the number” written in the state account books.⁷⁰

Of course, the assemblymen were exasperated. They wrote a rebuttal to Zhao’s denial letter and basically reasserted everything they had proposed previously. They continued to challenge Zhao’s distinction between local government and local self-government, arguing that both supported the “well-being of the local community.”⁷¹ They kept denying the right of the *jingzhengju* to levy local taxes and charged the office with overstepping its role as an “agent” (*zhiqiang jida zhi dailiquan*).⁷² Lastly, they considered Zhao’s refusal to make a separate account book for the surcharge tax a clear act of avoiding supervision.⁷³ And, predictably, after seeing this angry rebuttal by the assemblymen, Governor-general Zhao quickly gave his second denial. Like the assemblymen, Zhao reasserted everything he had said in his previous letter. For Zhao, the central government always came first and to best serve the state with effectiveness, he would do whatever was needed to preserve his tax bureau.

Both sides put up a good fight. And this debate was not simply a fight over money and power, but was also a fight about political legitimacy: whether the state should take precedence over the locality and be the main carrier of public affairs, or whether the people, by way of self-government organs like county and local councils, should be the heavy lifters of the public business. The Sichuan assemblymen constantly

⁷⁰ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 41-42.

⁷¹ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 43.

⁷² Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 45.

⁷³ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju diyici yishilu*, 47.

argued for the advancement of self-government organizations (*zizhi tuanti*) and always played up their role in supervising the state administration. For them, that was the only way to carry out Constitutional Reform. On the other hand, for Zhao Erxun, strengthening the state bureaucracy was the best way to carry out constitutionalism, especially at a time when the Qing Empire was in the midst of serious internal and international crises. For Zhao, the power of the state trumped popular sovereignty. However, at a time when Constitutional Reform was urgent, both sides claimed that they were best serving the public (*gong*) and the public well-being (*gongyi*), both quoted laws and regulations to advance their arguments, and both maintained that they were carrying out the *true* version of constitutionalism.

Let us pause a moment here. Recall that at the opening ceremony of the Provincial Assembly, assemblymen were flustered and did not know how to react to the formidable arguments made by Governor-general Zhao. Yet, at the closing ceremony, assemblymen *were* finally able to argue against the Governor-general, and stated clearly, “No assistance without supervision.” Indeed, something crucial had happened during the one-and-a-half months of the Provincial Assembly meeting, where the assemblymen had learned to clarify, sharpen, and articulate their ideas in heated political struggle.⁷⁴ These 1909 Provincial Assembly debates might look mundane, trivial, and uneventful; nevertheless, they enabled these men—the most prominent of whom in Sichuan went on to form the leadership of the Railway Protection Movement—to negotiate face-to-face

⁷⁴ Kristen Stapleton, “County Administration in Late-Qing Sichuan county Administration in Late-Qing Sichuan: Conflicting Models of Rural Policing,” *Late Imperial China* 18.1 (1997): 100-132.

with formidable representatives of the Manchu court like Zhao Erxun. In their intense confrontations over practical issues like taxation they were able to turn vague ideas about popular sovereignty and constitutionalism into the focal points of a cohesive and powerful opposition movement.

Sichuan elite did take Liang Qichao as their spiritual guide. Through serious political struggle with the powerful governor-general, elites learned to formulate their political convictions. In this process, Liang's lofty and ambiguous principles became practical, real, and focused. An ideal was transformed into an article of faith held by the assembly leaders, and from faith it became a force. In fact, two years later in the Railway Protection Movement, these Sichuan elite utilized the same principles they had developed in the assembly and successfully mobilized a great number of followers. By then, they had already become masterful orators.

IV. The Concentration of Power in the Chuan-Han Railway Company

Another key fight between Sichuan's elites and officials at the Provincial Assembly was that over the Chuan-Han Railway. By 1907, the company had transformed into the "Private Chuan-Han Railway Company" (*Shangban Chuan-Han tielu gongsi*). However, the corruption did not stop; neither did the taxpayers fully control the company. As one memorial in November 1910 stated: "In previous years, the Sichuan provincial government misused the capital of this Chuan-Han Railway Company; more recently, after the company had become privately owned, misinvestment of the capital in Shanghai private banks depleted the capital by more than two million taels of

silver.”⁷⁵ How did this mistake occur? Another memorial examined the reasons and reported: “It was because even though there were three presidents of the company, the one who lived in Beijing held the ultimate control over the other two presidents. But the president in Beijing was too busy to manage this enterprise properly. He therefore employed his relatives and friends as managers; they misused the capital of the company, but the Beijing president never made a clear account and never investigated.”⁷⁶

Therefore, even after 1907, the Sichuan overseas students, having successfully privatized the enterprise, still could not command enough authority in the company and lacked influence to remove the old personnel. Still, no board of directors was set up, nor auditors, nor levels of shareholder associations.

The 1909 Sichuan Provincial Assembly was a key moment in the building of a strong leadership for the constitutional elite of Sichuan. After becoming legitimate political representatives in a formal organization, the former students took the opportunity of the new power they obtained to overhaul the railway company. On

⁷⁵ “Liangjiang zongdu Zhang Renjun Jiangsu xunfu Cheng Dequan huizou chaming Shi Dianzhang nuokui lukuan zhe” [The jointly written memorial by Governor-general of Liangjiang Zhang Renjun and Governor of Jiangsu Cheng Dequan on investigating the incident of Shi Dianzhang appropriating and losing capital of the Chuan-Han railway company], in *Chuanlu yuebao* [Monthly report of the Sichuan railways] vol.1, (1911 May). Also in Dai Zhili 1994, 427-428. In order to accumulate sufficient capital before the construction of the railways, the Chuan-Han Railway Company managers decided to save the capital and invest the capital, hopefully in a way that made a return. However, the manager in the Shanghai branch, Shi Dianzhang, made some bad decisions in his investments and was basically tricked by a local merchant named Chen Zhouqing. As a result, he lost most of capital of the Shanghai Branch, which again became a main reason that the central government wanted to nationalize the railway company.

⁷⁶ “Gan Dazhang zou” [Gan Dazhang memorial], in *Sheng Xuanhuai dang’an ziliao xuanji*, vol.1: 80-81.

November 19, 1909, at the Provincial Assembly meeting, the assemblymen proposed to “clean up the Chuan-Han Railway Company.”⁷⁷ The constitutional elite were dissatisfied with how things were done in the local branches of the railway company. They wrote: “After six years, the railway company has not been well organized. Still, the chief managers are dependent upon the government and are not elected by shareholders from the shareholder associations.” And the company only carried the title of a private company, without being a real one: “After six years, the shareholders still had not obtained the right to decide railway-related issues.” Again, the assemblymen, among whom the Sichuan students who had studied in Japan formed the backbone, proposed to reshuffle the railway company. There were two issues in particular: one was the reorganization of the company, and the other was the investigation of its accounts (*chazhang*). In short, the purpose of reorganizing the company was to get more control over the railway company for Sichuan merchants and gentrymen.

The Provincial Assembly gave orders for a series of reforms in the railway company beginning in November 1909. In that month, the board of directors was established; among its membership we see the familiar people—Xiao Xiang, Deng Xiaoke’s brother Deng Xiaoran, and Peng Fen, who had studied in Japan and carried the constitutional ideal. Liu Ziji, a key propagandist for the commercialization of the company, was elected chairman of the board. Three independent auditors were elected as well. Finally, the company was organized according to capitalist principles. At the Provincial Assembly meeting in 1909, an important article was proposed by the

⁷⁷ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju yishilu*, 47-51.

provincial assemblymen to Sichuan Governor-general Zhao Erxun to “overhaul the previous Chuan-Han Railway Company” and to “systematically investigate its accounts.”⁷⁸

The new board of directors made sure that the company was running appropriately: changing account books and making a clear divide between the old and the new records (*huaqing xinjiu jixian*), setting up new management in various branches of the company, building railway schools (*tielu xuetao*), supervising each county’s establishment of its shareholder associations, overseeing the *zugu* bureau to ensure that *zugu* payers received their railway stock, electing auditors, and dealing with all the corruption or mishandling of the *zugu* taxation.⁷⁹ These efforts clearly established a link between the Chengdu Board of Directors and the shareholder associations in the counties and prefectures. The Chengdu Board of Directors served as the leader of all shareholders. And this crucial network became the key connection between the constitutional elite in Chengdu and the local elites of Sichuan’s more than one hundred counties. The organization of the Chuan-Han Railway Company propelled the solid cohesion of Sichuan elite. Chengdu elites such as Pu Dianjun were able to gain a huge following. In December 1909, the first shareholder meeting was convened in Chengdu, signifying that cohesion.

⁷⁸ Sichuan sheng ziyiju, ed., *Sichuan sheng ziyiju yishilu*, 35.

⁷⁹ *Dongshihui yi’an zhai you* [Abstracts of the proposals by the board of directors] no.1, from December 1909 to November 1910, 1-4. Original document found by the author at Sichuan Provincial Library.

The link between Chengdu and outlying counties all around Sichuan grew closer the next year, when the railway's board of directors became more powerful and authoritative. In November 1910, the Chuan-Han Railway Company convened its second shareholder meeting. Importantly, local shareholders started to exert their rights and power: the board of directors was reelected, with former overseas students Peng Fen and Du Yonghe becoming the new leaders of the board. Again, *zugu* was among the key issues, and the board was determined to make sure that everyone who had paid the *zugu* tax was given stock.⁸⁰ However, in the innate nature of the democratic style of conducting business, this shareholder meeting became contentious. Various interest groups emerged, and the conflict over the construction of the railways appeared. The Chengdu Board started to expand its personnel and organization, and increasingly became a huge bureaucratic apparatus with numerous clerks being paid regularly and expensively. From 1910 on, all sorts of issues came up, including the power struggle between the Beijing faction led by Sichuan metropolitan officials such as Song Yüren and the Chengdu faction led by Sichuan Provincial Assemblymen such as Pu Dianjun.

Two matters received particularly intense discussion at the second shareholder meeting. The first was to decide which part of the railway should be built first. As early as 1907, the originally proposed section from Chengdu to Yichang was questioned by the overseas students. "Because the need for money was enormous, but it was really hard to obtain, the Chuan-Han Railway board decided to first build railways from Chengdu to

⁸⁰ *Dongshihui yi'an zhai you*, no.2, from December 1910 to July 1911, 1-7.

Chongqing.”⁸¹ At that time, the chief engineer, Hu Dongchao, suggested that “from Yichang to Wan would be difficult, because of the extremely difficult geographical location and the extremely rugged terrain.” But from Wan to Chongqing, the road was equally difficult. Therefore, Hu suggested that the best and easiest way in building the railway was from Chengdu to Chongqing. In addition, Chongqing was a center for merchants and commercial activities, and Chengdu was where officials and gentrymen were located, so the benefits of such a route would be quickly felt. Hu’s proposal was enthusiastically supported by the students in Japan and also some provincial supporters. In opposition, the newly constructed board of directors refused to follow this advice, perhaps because the leading group of the provincial assemblymen came from north Sichuan, such as Pu Dianjun, Luo Lun and Zhang Lan, and the Yichang-to-Wanxian route would benefit their own hometowns. The railway rushed to begin construction of the route between Yichang and Wanxian on December 28, 1909. However, once the construction started, it ran into unexpected problems. Li Jixun, a fourth-rank official who was in charge of the Yichang Branch of the Railway Company, reported all the difficulties that he had encountered to the second shareholder meeting, where he reported that “the cost of the railway construction is enormous and the money is going to run out soon.”⁸² Li’s report alarmed the shareholders attending the meeting; however, because the road was already under construction, there was no going back.

⁸¹ *Sichuan* [Journal of Sichuan], no.1, 149: “Dashiji” [Chronicle]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 454.

⁸² Li Jixun, *Chuanlu Yichang gongchang di moqi shizhuang baogaoshu* [The last report on situations of Yichang branch of the Chuan-Han railways], in Dai Zhili 1994, 34.

The second big fight was about the Shanghai branch manager, Shi Dianzhang, who was first appointed by Xiliang in 1907 as the chief auditor, diverted railway capital into terrible investments, and lost a great deal of it in Shanghai's banking crisis in 1910. In 1909, Shi transferred the capital of the Chuan-Han Railway Company into several Shanghai local banks. However, in the stock market crash due to the rubber bubble in the international market, 140,000 taels of silver were lost. Shi Dianzhang also conspired with a comprador named Chen Yiqing to appropriate 600,000 taels of silver for their own use. Therefore, because of the chaotic account system, Shi was able to usurp almost 2 million taels.⁸³ In total, the loss of Chuan-Han Company capital, between the Copper Bureau and Shi, was 5 million taels. This led to a big conflict between the Sichuan officials who served in Beijing, and the Sichuan provincial gentrymen. Both issues led to the first major friction among Sichuan elite, which was to be clearly seen later.

Simultaneously, the Sichuan constitutional elite became increasingly active in matters of national politics. Escalating waves of petitions for the early opening of the national parliament continued. Via all these struggles, Sichuan constitutionalists won a great number of followers and established their reputation. In 1910, Guo Moruo, then a Chengdu High School student, participated in this struggle against the government. Guo

⁸³ “Liangjiang zongdu Zhang Renjun Jiangsu xunfu Cheng Dequan huizou chaming Shi Dianzhang nuokui lukuan zhe” [The jointly written memorial by Governor-general of Liangjiang Zhang Renjun and Governor of Jiangsu Cheng Dequan on investigating the incident of Shi Dianzhang appropriating and losing capital of the Chuan-Han railway company], in *Chuanlu yuebao* [Monthly report of the Sichuan railways] vol.1, (1911 May). Also in Dai Zhili 1994, 427-428.

recalled the excitement he had when he met Pu and later regarded Pu Dianjun the “Trotsky” of Sichuan.⁸⁴

All the institutional changes occurring in the process of establishing constitutionalism gave these elites a public arena to fight and to exert their ideas and notions as a political group. To advance their convictions on constitutional and parliamentary politics, in 1910 Sichuan assemblymen initiated a third petition to open a National Assembly and urged the Qing government to draft a solid constitution. Once again, the media became Pu’s indispensable mechanism for political action. Using the Sichuan Provincial Assembly’s official newspaper, *Shubao*, he initiated a major follow-up petition in Chengdu.

In short, the leaders of the Provincial Assembly gained their fame and stature from the struggle over taxation and their role in the railway controversy. At the same time, because of the political consolidation of the constitutional elite after the opening of the provincial assemblies, the Chuan-Han Railway Company was finally put under total control by the constitutional elite. Crucially, the company served as a key link between Chengdu’s elites and local elites in various Sichuan counties. The railway issues had given Sichuan constitutional elites their great reputation and fame, and conversely, the strengthening of the political elites empowered their influence over the railway company and the railway company provided these elites with a great network and a strong group of followers. The political forces and the economic forces in Sichuan had converged.

⁸⁴ Guo Moruo, “Fanzheng qianhou” [Life around the 1911 Revolution], in *Xinhai geming* [The 1911 Revolution] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1957), vol.4, 450-451.

Conclusion

As French historian Alexis de Tocqueville wrote more than a hundred years ago, the most dangerous time for an ancient regime was when it started to reform.⁸⁵ Once a weakened government started bestowing some rights on its citizens, it would be on a road of no return. Emerging political leaders would use the new opportunities for their own advancement. Increasingly, they would demand more power and would soon stand so starkly in opposition to the regime that no negotiation or compromise would be possible. While the Qing court accelerating the preparation for constitutionalism and provincial officials were issuing orders to establish self-government organs, the elites—educated gentlemen who came from wealthy households and had been exposed to new political ideas and particularly for Sichuan, those former overseas students—who previously had been only sporadically active in politics, began seizing the opportunity to occupy these newly founded organs and establish their power base. As they consolidated their power, their competition with the government reached a new intensity.

As the huge contrast between the opening ceremony and the closing ceremony of the assembly tells us, the confidence and poise of Sichuan elite progressed tremendously in these short one-and-a-half months. First, the assemblymen's vague dissatisfaction with Zhao Erxun's argument that "the state is the most important of all" was transformed into a focused and articulated counterargument. Assemblymen developed the notion that "if we have paid the money, we deserve to manage political affairs" and that "as the representatives of the people, we need to supervise how the tax is levied and how taxes

⁸⁵ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Jiuzhidu yu dageming* [The ancient regime and the French revolution] (Beijing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1992), 64.

are spent.” These ideas were gradually articulated during the head-to-head struggles with Governor-general Zhao. To protect themselves, Sichuan assemblymen had to quickly learn to express their principles with force and vigor. Second, in these struggles, the new idea of popular sovereignty became something that offered solidarity and confidence to the Sichuan elite. Always claiming to be “the representatives of the people,” these assemblymen found power and justification in that assertion. Whenever they voted for something, among the twenty-one proposals discussed (three by Zhao and eighteen by the assemblymen), assemblymen always voted with an overwhelming majority. Last, and maybe the most important of all, was that, during the debates, elites gained confidence and a sense of righteousness in their new political values. They mounted challenges through disruptive actions against authorities and gained collective affirmation in such acts. Even though they did not win all the proposals they wanted, they *were* winning because they felt stronger about themselves and they had found a way to relate to “the people.” To say the least, a united leadership of Sichuan constitutional elites was formed.

The New Policies Reform provided the chance for the new social group to perform and develop their power. Their power, rather than deriving from legal documents, was gained from the gradual accumulation of economic and political capital over a long period of time. Rather than representing the “society” that was always in opposition to the “state,” these elites were at first in close collaboration with the state and first gained their power via such collaboration. Meanwhile, in the process, the concept of *quan* (“rights”), in this case, the notion of property rights, developed over years of struggles between the officials and the taxpayers. It started to become rooted in the minds of the Sichuanese. In their nitty-gritty clashes with the new police system and the

new tax bureaus, the elites learned to use *quan* as a mobilizing slogan to win their battle. Soon, the open clash between the constitutional elite and the state started, and soon it gained sharp articulation as a clash over their political principles. The conservative officials' and the constitutionalists' beliefs and principles about how China should be reorganized were fundamentally divergent. The constitutional elite played up the difference between their ideas and those of the government to fulfill their political demands.

The Provincial Assembly was a formative moment in emergence of the Sichuan railway movement. It was through the negotiations between provincial elite and the governor-general that free-floating political ideas that had been in circulation for years among the disaffected Chinese intelligentsia finally coalesced into a formidable political movement. The Sichuan assemblymen found a way to address the principle of popular sovereignty as they sharpened their ideas and rhetoric. That principle would soon become a crucial factor in the looming Railway Protection Movement.

Chapter Five. The Struggle. The Movement in Chengdu: Sovereignty of the Nation (*Guoquan*) and Rights of the People (*Minquan*)

In the summer of 1911, in Chengdu, the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement took place. After the Qing court announced its policy of nationalizing the privately-owned Chuan-Han Railway Company and decided to incur foreign loans to facilitate the plan, the entire city was thrown into turmoil. The movement was led by the constitutional elite, and its backbone was the Sichuan provincial assemblymen. They initiated and organized the Railway Protection Association and masterminded the highly effective propaganda campaign under one slogan, “to protect the railway and break the treaty” (*baolu poyue*). The official publication of the association, *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association*, was widely distributed. Printed almost every day, it had a circulation of up to fifteen thousand copies per issue. Sold at the price of one cent and sometimes given for free, the newsletters secured a stable and wide-ranging audience, among whom ordinary urban residents composed a significant part.¹

This chapter is about the movement leaders and the rhetoric they created. Even though the elites did have their own economic interest as they initiated the movement, still, the rhetoric they created generated a common purpose and drew people of different social statuses together under one cause. Then, the common values and expectations brought various kinds of people into one organization and mobilized them against more powerful opponents.

¹ According to Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 117: the price of the newspaper was 1 cent per copy. Yet according to Wang Di, *Street Culture*, 213: the price was 3 cents per copy.

First, I concentrate on the movement entrepreneurs, the people who controlled media and possessed oratorical power. I scrutinize their interests, both economic and political, and their changing attitudes toward the government's policy. Notably, not all Sichuanese were against the foreign loan or the nationalization policy; on the contrary, it was only a faction, namely, leaders of the Chengdu headquarters of the Chuan-Han Railway Company, who were opposed to the central government's will. Yet, this small faction exerted great energy and launched an enormously successful campaign.

I then analyze the content of the movement rhetoric. The intention of the propaganda was both to defend the rights of the people (*minquan*) and to stand up for the sovereignty of the nation (*guoquan*).² These two concepts were inextricably linked together. *Guo* was the totality of *min* and the well-being of *min* determined the fate of *guo*: "If a nation's citizens expire, then the nation cannot exist on its own; therefore, we citizens dare not give up our struggle so that the nation can be preserved."³ Moreover, *min* possessed important political rights and held an important political stake in *guo*; the rights of *min* were protected by the law and were both legitimate and virtuous.

Finally, I study how ideas of preserving both national sovereignty and people's rights were propagated during the Railway Movement. I focus on the new and conventional forms of ideology and language that were used, the collective identities that were created, and the common purposes that were disseminated. I also examine the

² I intentionally use the word "nation" because, as I will explain later, it is a new notion that emulates the western nation-states.

³ "Sichuan baolu tongzhihui xuanyan" [The Manifesto of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association], in *Baogao* no.9, July 6, 1911.

means—newsletters, public speeches, and open meetings—by which ideas were conveyed to a large number of people.

I. The Nationalization Policy and the Chengdu Faction: The People and Their Positions (May 9-June 17)

Certainly, not all Sichuanese were thinking the same way. Who were the “Sichuan people”? This section examines the “high politics” of the Railway Protection Movement. Specifically, I look at the struggles, differences, and alliances among Qing central leaders, Sichuan-born officials who served in Beijing, the Chuan-Han Railway Company’s headquarters leaders in Chengdu, and its branch company leaders in Yichang. Before we dive into examining the movement, let us first take a good look at the people behind it.

The nationalization policy was announced on May 9, 1911, when the Qing central government officially issued an edict to nationalize the trunk lines of the commercially owned Yue-Han and Chuan-Han railways.⁴ The rationale for this policy, as Censor Shi Changxin wrote in his memorial, was “to accelerate the construction of the railways” and “lessen the huge burden it has laid on the people.” In particular, Shi advocated the policy by denouncing the heavy railway tax (*zugu*) on Sichuan commoners (*baixing*) and reminded the court of the terrible loss of Chuan-Han railway capital in a number of Shanghai banks under the leadership of the “factious Sichuan gentrymen” (*shenshi*

⁴ *Xuantong zhengji*, vol.52, 37. In Dai Zhili 1994, 527.

shudang). He then urged the government to “quickly demarcate the trunk lines of the railways” so that they could be nationalized.⁵

All the above reasons for the nationalization policy were noble and seemingly justified. However, a more urgent reason behind this policy was the repetitive and unyielding demands of the foreign lenders who asked the Qing court to finalize the draft contract of the loan, which was secretly signed by Governor-general Zhang Zhidong of Huguang in 1909.

According to the draft of the Huguang Foreign Loan Agreement between the Qing central government and the banks of four nations—Britain, France, Germany, and the United States—the foreign banks loaned a total amount of six million British pounds to China while using Hubei and Hunan’s *likin*, i.e., the internal-commerce tax of these two provinces, as the security for the loan; these four nations held monopolistic rights in constructing all trunk lines of the Chuan-Han Railway in Hubei and the Yue-Han Railway in Hunan and Hubei, and retained priority in constructing trunk lines of the Chuan-Han and Yue-Han railways in other provinces.⁶

The evaluation of the role of the foreign loans was a difficult task and we have to look at the history of railway-building in China to get a better understanding of this. In China, from 1903 to 1907, there was a strong trend for railways to be self-reliant, that is, to use only Chinese capital. Nevertheless, as Historian Ralph William Huenemann convincingly shows in a number of cases, the companies that had newly gained their

⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 522-524.

⁶ *Hubei Hunan liangsheng jingnei Yue-Han; Hubei jingnei Chuan-Han tielu jiekuan hetong* [Huguang Foreign Loan Agreement], in Dai Zhili 1994, 540-548.

commercial nature were not doing well, and the efficiency and effectiveness of these commercialized railways were deeply problematic. For example, after the Yue-Han (Canton-Hankow) Railway was redeemed in 1905, provincial railway companies were set up in Guangdong, Hunan, and Hubei to continue the work that had been started by the American China Development Company. But factionalism and corruption plagued the company, and only about 80 kilometers of line were completed. Furthermore, the appeal to private investors was less successful in Hunan and Hubei than in Guangdong; the new company was organized as a government-managed enterprise and the local gentry and merchants displayed little interest in it. Unfortunately, the problems encountered in Guangdong, Hunan, and Hubei also existed in the other provinces, Sichuan included. Inadequate financing, factional bickering, and corrupt practices were pervasive.⁷

Under these circumstances, even the governor-general of Huguang, Zhang Zhidong, who in 1905 had been very supportive of redeeming the Yue-Han Railway from the foreigners, was willing to consider a foreign loan for the trunk lines from Hankow to Canton and from Hankow through Yichang to Chengdu. Discussions were begun with a group of bankers from England, France, and Germany and a preliminary agreement for what is called the Huguang Loan was reached in June 1909.⁸

Furthermore, after the establishment of the Ministry of Posts and Communications in 1908, a tide of nationalizing commercial railways moved quickly. All articulate public opinion in China agreed that in the face of the imperialism of the

⁷ Ralph William Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse*, 71.

⁸ Ralph William Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse*, 72.

industrialized nations, China had no choice but to carry out a program of railway construction. But people differed in how the railways should be financed and controlled. Huenemann discerned that such differences emerged with increasing clarity after 1908. By 1908, the Chinese government was quite disenchanted with the commercially owned railroads. This disenchantment, expressed in an official edict of June 27, 1908, had three components. First, there was a growing feeling that the local companies were not merely ineffectual but were actually causing popular discontent, because of their tendency to rely on taxes rather than voluntary investment. Second, some commercial railway companies were closely identified with Han nationalism, causing concern among central-government Manchus. Third, it was apparent that railways were making profit. At a time when the government had expenditures of 296 million taels but revenues of only 263 million, the railway revenues became irresistible. Of course, the Ministry of Posts and Communications would need to borrow foreign loans to nationalize the railway companies.⁹

This state-society struggle in the internal political dynamics, plus the constant foreign pressures after the signing of the draft loan treaty, finally led to a decision to curtail the commercial railways. The Ministry of Posts and Communications issued a memorandum in November 1910 that formally approved a strategy of seeking foreign loans, and simultaneously Sheng Xuanhuai pushed ahead with the negotiations for the Huguang Loan Treaty, which would grant more financial concessions to foreigners. Pressured constantly by foreign lenders, on March 11, 1911, the Qing Ministry of Posts

⁹ Ralph William Huenemann, *The Dragon and the Iron Horse*, 73.

and Communications began to negotiate with the foreign lenders about the contract.¹⁰ Notably, it was under this context that the May 9 nationalization policy was announced. The nationalization policy *did* serve to make the idea of borrowing foreign loan sound less outrageous but more sensible.

On May 20, 1911, the final version of the Huguang Foreign Loan Agreement between the Qing central government and the banks of the four lender nations was signed. Compared to the Zhang Zhidong draft, a key change, which I shall elaborate later, is that it subjected Sichuan, which was not in the original draft, to this new agreement in a backhanded way. This insincere manner in treating Sichuanese, quickly detected by acute observers after they learned about the content of the new treaty, was considered a clear mistreatment by the Sichuanese.¹¹

Nevertheless, from May to early June in 1911, without much knowledge of the details of the foreign loan, the Chuan-Han Railway Company's leaders were concerned mostly about the operation of the nationalization policy. The company's leaders, especially those in Chengdu, were controlled by Sichuan's provincial assemblymen, of whom Pu Dianjun was the head.¹² In addition, Deng Xiaoke, the chief editorialist of the

¹⁰ *Meiguo waijiao wenjian* [Diplomatic Documents of the United States], the year 1911. In Dai Zhili 1994, 537.

¹¹ The full text of the foreign loan agreement is included in Dai Zhili 1994, 540-548. Originally from Wang Liang, ed., *Qing Xuantong chao waijiao shiliao* [Diplomatic historical materials of the Xuantong reign of the Qing] (Beiping: Waijiao shiliao bianzuan chu, 1935), vol.20, 38-51.

¹² Chang Peng-yuan, "The Constitutionalists," in Mary Wright, ed., *China in Revolution: The First Phase 1900-1913*, 174. In fact, seven out of thirteen members among the company's board of directors were Chairman Pu's people.

assembly's newspaper, *Shubao*, was their leading speaker. After the nationalization edict was issued on May 9, leaders at Chengdu headquarters started to exchange letters obsessively with their informants in Beijing and other cities, asking numerous questions about the policy's true intention.¹³ Finally, in early June, they formulated their official response to the policy. In the widely circulated article in *Shubao*'s 5th Month issue, titled "Methods in Dealing with the Sichuan Railway," Deng Xiaoke proclaimed:

If [the government] promises to quickly finish building the railway ... if it agrees to build an additional railway between Sichuan and Tibet ... if it gives precedence in using Sichuan's personnel and raw materials in building these railways and if it lets the Sichuanese keep the railway capital in developing Sichuan's industry, ...

then it would be all right "to let the government have the railway lines."¹⁴ Markedly, at this point, Deng Xiaoke did not take issue with the government's violation of legal procedures; namely, as a constitutional government, the Qing court's decision to incur foreign loans without permission from the National Assembly was unlawful. Rather, Deng dismissed the issue of legality in this *Shubao* article by saying, "let us put it aside for a while" (*zhan zhi bulun*).¹⁵ Therefore, from May to early June, it is clear that one of the main goals of the Chengdu railway elite was to maintain the capital in their own

¹³ There were eight correspondences among the Chengdu headquarters, Yichang Branch, Shanghai Branch, and Beijing-based official Qiao Shunan: telegrams on May 11, May 13, and May 15. In *Chuanlu shouhui guoyou wanglai yaodian* [Telegraphs concerning the Sichuan Railway Recovery]. Original document from Professor Dai Zhili. See also Dai Zhili 1994, 553-556.

¹⁴ *Shubao*, no.12 (1911). Later, it was republished in an independent pamphlet. In Dai Zhili 1994, vol.1.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

hands.¹⁶ They were simply trying very hard to strike a good deal with the central government.

Other Sichuan dignitaries had their own ideas regarding the railway capital. The failure and mismanagement of the Chuan-Han Railway Company had in effect disheartened and alienated those Sichuan-born officials who served in Beijing. Gan Dazhang and Song Yuren, for example, were two Beijing-based officials who fully supported the central government in taking over all the existing railway capital and transferring it to Beijing. Being so far away from Chengdu, Gan and Song paid *zugu* as landowners yet had no control over the railway company. These gentlemen believed that it was safer to let the central government manage the money than to let their compatriots in Chengdu possess it so that disasters like the Shanghai stock-market losses would not happen.¹⁷ Moreover, Li Jixun, manager of the Yichang Branch of the Chuan-Han Railway Company, urged the central government to exercise its authority. Throughout the years, Li had felt rather constrained and somewhat unsupported by leaders at the Chengdu headquarters. As the manager of the only branch that was actually constructing railway lines for the Chuan-Han Railway, Li understood what it was like to have little power in allocating railway capital or appointing personnel, even for his own branch.

¹⁶ Transcripts of a special meeting in Chengdu held on May 28, 1911. At this meeting, Deng Xiaoke trumped his opponents and became the voice of the Sichuan elite in Chengdu.

¹⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 750.

Having suffered from the bureaucratic working style of the Chengdu headquarters for years, Li had finally had enough.¹⁸

The divergent interests represented by the Sichuan elite were so demarcated that Sheng Xuanhuai, the minister of posts and communications, and Duanfang, the Imperial Commissioner of Yue-Han Chuan-Han railways, decided to take action. These two men promptly sensed the conflicts brewing among “the Sichuan people” and formed an alliance with Li Jixun and the Beijing-based Sichuan officials. In June 1911, they aggressively started to investigate the accounts of the Yichang Branch of the Chuan-Han Railway Company and demanded that the accounts of all other branches be investigated. They were confident that the issue in Sichuan would be solved easily: not only would they successfully nationalize the railways, but they would also obtain all the capital from Chengdu into the central treasury.¹⁹

II. The Rhetoric: *Guoquan*, *Minquan*, and the Rule of Law

June of 1911 was an awful time for the Chuan-Han Railway Company’s headquarters leaders in Chengdu. Central officials Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang had accelerated their efforts to nationalize the railway. They made unsympathetic and constant demands on Sichuan Acting Governor Wang Renwen to “investigate and clarify the accounts of all Chuan-Han Railway Company branches” and specifically ordered the

¹⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 587 and 606.

¹⁹ Telegram from Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang to Wang Renwen on June 1, 1911, in *Chuanlu shouhui guoyou wanglai yaodian*, 10-11.

Chengdu Branch to turn in the seven million taels of silver under its control.²⁰ Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang were meticulous, applying multiple methods to ensure their success.

First, they used Yinliang, the Sichuan provincial treasurer, as their spy in Chengdu and thus obtained an up-to-date and rather accurate account of the activities of the participants within the Chengdu headquarters. Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang also impeached Wang Renwen, who they thought was too soft and sympathetic towards the Chengdu elite; at the same time, they pressured Zhao Erfeng, whom they figured to be a staunch advocate, to transfer from a post on the Tibet-Sichuan border to Chengdu. In the meantime, they were steadily convincing Li Jixun, the manager of the Yichang Branch of the Chuan-Han Railway Company, to join them. Li, who was tired of the constraints placed on him by the Chengdu leaders, grew closer to agreeing that the railway should be owned by the central government. Taken collectively, these actions provided great momentum for Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang to nationalize the Chuan-Han Railway Company.

As the central government officials grew tougher on the nationalization issue, how could the Chengdu headquarters stem the tide? Guangdong and Hubei had been silent and restful for a while, and even the fervency of Hunan, the province where the Railway Protection Movement had been initiated, began to simmer down. It seemed as if the responsibility for the entire railway movement had been placed solely into the hands of the Sichuanese, and most importantly, into the hands of the railway elite in Chengdu.

²⁰ Ibid.

Luckily for these leaders, the infamous May 20 Huguang Foreign Loan Agreement arrived on June 13 and the June 1 Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang “Ge Telegram” (*Gedian*) arrived on June 16—which ordered all Chuan-Han Railway capital to be nationalized and no shareholders to withdraw investment, and which ordered that Sichuan’s revenue was taken as mortgage security—provided the disheartened group with an opportunity to bounce back and formulate a vigorous argument against the central government. Before the foreign loan and the Ge Telegram were received, the Chengdu Branch leaders of the railway did not really have a good case against nationalization on legalistic or economic grounds. But the treaty’s provisions and the telegram became known at a critical point in the debate, which let them bring the issues of nationalism, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law into the debate and let them exploit the debate for their own purposes. These arguments had extensive implications, far beyond the ownership rights of the railway.

In their struggle, the Chengdu leaders intertwined a sense of political subjectivity and a notion of the modern nation-state, a state whose sovereignty lies with the people. They created a new propaganda of nationalism (*aiguo*), asserting that one had to protect national sovereignty (*guoquan*) in conjunction with protecting the rights of the people (*minquan*), and offered a fresh relation among the nation (*guo*), the state (*guojia*), and the national citizens (*guomin*).

Guoquan and a New Meaning of “Guo”

Luo Lun, the vice chairman of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly, was the mastermind behind the systematic attack against the Huguang Foreign Loan

Agreement.²¹ In this lengthy analysis of the foreign loan agreement (that was sent with Wang Renwen's June 27 memorial to court), composed in purely legalistic language, Luo and his colleagues argued that the agreement seriously limited China's national rights (*sangquan taiduo*). To be specific, the title and content of Clause One suggested that the trunk lines would be used to secure the loan.²² Clause Two replaced the railway linking Jinmen and Hanyang, both in Hubei province (which was in Zhang Zhidong's original draft), with the railway linking Yichang in Hubei and Kuizhou in Sichuan, thus subjecting Sichuan to this agreement in a backhanded way. Clause Three requested a quick transfer of all capital and property of the railway company to a new bureau, the Yue-Han and Chuan-Han Railways Official Bureau, without shareholder approval. Clause Nine determined that before paying back the foreign loans, "the likin tax in Hunan and Hubei could not be used as a mortgage security for other purposes," thus subjugating the likin under the power of the four foreign nations. Clause Fourteen gave the rights of managing railway investment to the German Deutsche-Asiatische Bank to build the railway in Sichuan and the rights of managing railway investment to the British HSBC Bank to build the railway in Hunan and Hubei. Clause Seventeen ensured that the Qing government had to select at least one Briton, one American, and one German as the chief engineers in building these railways; and Clause Eighteen stated that the chief engineers

²¹ *Sichuan baolu tongzhihui dianwen yaolu* [Key Telegrams of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association], 15-27. The full text of the foreign loan agreement is included in Dai Zhili 1994, 540-548.

²² In Dai Zhili 1994, 638.

would have the final say in buying railway materials. In the end, to recapitulate all these points, Luo Lun and his colleagues wrote:

It [the foreign loan treaty] mortgages the trunk lines for the loan. It offers the rights of constructing the railway, managing capital, appointing personnel, buying material, and handling bank interests, in sum, all rights concerning the railway business, to the banks of the four foreign leasing nations. Even though it is never clearly stated in the loan itself that the trunk lines themselves should serve as the security for the loan, all the privileges that the banks have obtained in intervening with the railway issues have indicated worse results. All these privileges would impair our railway rights and suffocate us. Once the loan agreement is signed, our railways are forfeited.²³

In fact, it was this dull, lengthy, and lawyer-like critique of the foreign loan treaty that elucidated all the key points and served as the foundation for the more impassioned propaganda that would follow. Basing their argument on this document, Chengdu headquarters felt that it could finally make a legitimate and solid case.

On June 17, 1911, at the Chuan-Han Railway Company, an urgent meeting was held by members of the Provincial Assembly and professional groups (*fatuan*) to build a railway protection association throughout Sichuan to struggle against the Qing government. On the same day, the official newspaper of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly, *Shubao*, published a widely circulated special issue (most likely written by Deng Xiaoke) that dramatized Luo Lun's arguments with emotional language and printed memorable slogans from his argument in a huge font:

[The treaty] deprived us national citizens [of the railway]; offered it to foreigners.

²³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 643.

People of our nation should rise up against it; people of Sichuan should rise up against it.
 [The treaty] snatched our railway; robbed our capital.
 With such an act of robbery, however, there was no plan for building our railway.
 People of Sichuan should rise up against it; people of our nation should rise up against it.
 If we fail to struggle, we would have no place to die.²⁴

In punitive language, the writer continued and accused Sheng Xuanhuai of ten lethal crimes:

First, the crime of selling the railway.
 Second, the crime of offering strategic railway lines to foreigners.
 Third, the crime of giving up the rights of managing capital to foreigners.
 Fourth, the crime of giving up the rights of appointing personnel to foreigners.
 Fifth, the crime of giving up the rights of buying materials to foreigners.
 Sixth, the crime of offering the interest to foreigners.²⁵
 Seventh, the crime of cheating the emperor and bullying the national citizens.
 Eighth, the crime of snatching the railway from the national citizens and giving it to foreigners.
 Ninth, the crime of tyrannizing the people and disobeying the edict.²⁶
 Tenth, the crime of robbing the railway and its capital without planning to build further.²⁷

As we see, many of the accusations were dramatized and the Chengdu elite did take liberties in interpreting the clauses when publicizing them. Yet, this document is useful

²⁴ *Shubao*, Special Issue (June 17, 1911), in Dai Zhili 1994, 633-638.

²⁵ This charge is particularly nonsense, because it was normal practice that interest should be saved up to pay the lenders.

²⁶ This is the May 9 nationalization policy edict that pledged to protect the interest of the Sichuan people. The central government changed its attitude to Sichuan people soon and it wanted all the existing money in the Chuan-Han Railway Company.

²⁷ *Shubao*, Special Issue (June 17, 1911), in Dai Zhili 1994, 633-638.

to analyze because it showcased key changes in the concept of *guo*, a new concept that was very much different from the traditional understanding of the word.

The original notion of *guo* is: “the fief of the feudal lord; or, the household of the lord.”²⁸ This old notion of *guo* is keenly related to the head of the fief and the ruling house of the territory. However, the above document indicates a new notion of *guo*, that is, the notion that somehow *guo* has more affinity with *min* and *ren* than with the ruling heads of the polity. Here, *guo* is frequently used in conjunction with the word *min* and *ren*, like *guomin* and *guoren*, and obtains the meaning of being the counterpart to foreigners (*wairen*).²⁹ As a corollary of this new notion, *guo* becomes the totality of the people.

The new understanding of *guo* was clarified as the railway movement continued. On June 21, *Newsletter of the Sichuan Chamber of Commerce* published an article titled “The Foreign Loan Agreement Sells Out National Sovereignty (*guoquan*).” In this article, the writer clearly described the relation between *guo*, *min*, and *zhengfu* (government). He pitted the government against the people, stating, “Even though *zhengfu* obtained unparalleled power and authority, it could not repress the energy and the hearts of the people (*renmin*).” Also, “the people were deeply concerned about their country being destroyed (*wangguo*),” and that was why even though the nationalization policy was actually decreasing the people’s tax burden, they would still “exert their blood and sweat to build the railway on their own (*ziban*).” The writer argued that the railway had to be

²⁸ *Kangxi cidian* [Kangxi dictionary], online version, Viewed from <http://www.kangxizidian.com/index2.php> (May 2008).

²⁹ *Shubao*, Special Issue, June 17, 1911, in Dai Zhili 1994, 633-638.

self-managed so that the goal of being “completely and truly owned by *guo* (*wanquan guoyou*) could be accomplished.”³⁰ In short, *guo* was the totality of the people; *guo* was the people’s *guo*. This novel relationship among *guo*, *min*, and *zhengfu* was championed in another newsletter article on July 18, in which the writer argued that the “interests of the people” should be the foundation of all decisions made in the public sphere, quoting numerous examples from western nations.³¹ In other words, the interests of the people were the basis on which to conduct politics; thus, according to this standard, Sheng Xuanhuai was a “criminal offender against all of China” (*Zhongguo quanguo ren zhi zui ren*).³² Thus, the notion of *guo* now actually carried the sense of “nation-state.”

Indeed, nationalism enabled the slighted Chengdu elite to regain the momentum they needed to challenge the nationalization policy. It liberated these leaders from the bargain with Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang regarding the capital in the Chuan-Han Railway Company, a bargain that they were clearly losing. By creating slogans that protected *guoquan*, Chengdu leaders won a moral upper hand over the government officials. Equally important, by distancing the political concept *guo* from *zhengfu* and linking *guo* with *min*, the Chengdu leaders hinted: the legitimacy of a nation should come only from the people.

Minquan and the Rule of Law

³⁰ *Sichuan shanghui gongbao* [Newsletter of the Sichuan Chamber of Commerce] June 21, 1911, in Dai Zhili 1994, 656-657.

³¹ *Baogao*, no.18, July 18, 1911.

³² *Ibid.*

The movement entrepreneurs were also well versed in constitutionalism and the rule of law. They used constitutionalism as a focal point for their fight for national sovereignty and the people's rights and also in advancing their causes. For example, one leader prized the notion of constitutionalism and wrote: "For a constitutional nation, all financial policies should be discussed in the assembly and passed by the assembly. This was written in the regulations of the National Assembly."³³ The writer continued his challenge, "If the circumstances like government official Sheng Xuanhuai signing the treaty without submitting it to any people-based assembly were to be tolerated and such violation of the law and constitution were to be condoned, how it could be guaranteed that one day China would be ruled by law? ... And how would the rights of the people be protected under this despotic government?"³⁴

Leading orator Deng Xiaoke as always had the final word about the reasons that the Sichuan elite took action to "protect the railway and break the treaty." There were three reasons, Deng argued. First, the Foreign Loan Agreement destroyed the possibility of building a political system based upon the rule of the constitution; second, it sacrificed the rights of the national citizens to foreigners; third, it enabled the Ministry of Posts and Communications to disparage the people (*mieshi renmin*) and violate the interests of merchants and the people (*shangmin*).³⁵

Thus, by the middle of July, a consensus had been carefully crafted by the Chengdu headquarters elite. Their principal motive: to protect both *minquan* and

³³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 656-657.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ *Baogao* no.11, July 8, 1911.

guoquan. With the gist of their rhetoric established, what the movement leaders had to do next was to convey their ideas to the general public and organize their movement.

III. Starting the Movement: The Founding Meeting, the Organization, and the Motive

The Founding Meeting

On June 17, 1911, an impassioned public meeting took place at the Chuan-Han Railway Company on Yuefu Street in Chengdu. The organizers of this meeting were the Chengdu headquarters leaders. Feeling “endangered and hugely pressured by the situation,” they could no longer wait for the formal shareholders’ meeting, which was scheduled for August 4, to occur, so they decided to invite leaders of various professional associations (*fatuan*) and shareholders who were at the moment in Chengdu to “discuss and prepare” methods to help with their situation.³⁶ According to contemporary records, several agreements were reached at the founding meeting of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association. Sichuan Acting Governor Wang Renwen wrote on the same day as the meeting, addressing the cabinet, the Ministry of Posts and Communications, and Imperial Commissioner Duanfang:

Early this morning, various professional associations came to the railway company and held their meeting. More than two thousand people came. The speech was about the relation of the foreign loan treaty to the life and death of *guojia*. People were crying so hard that it was earthshaking; some hid their heads behind tables and sobbed in private. In the end, it is determined that a railway protection association should be founded and representatives should be selected by the association to go to Beijing, pay a formal visit to the Ministry of Posts and Communications, and reach a

³⁶ *Baogao*, no.2, June 27, 1911.

solution. They asked that the investigation of the account books be carried out only after both sides reach an agreement. Fortunately, there was neither agitation nor commotion. Yet, the predicament of sadness and pain was extraordinary.³⁷

The person who cried the hardest at the meeting was the respectable Chengdu commissioner of education, Meng Gongfu. Since Meng was the leader of the literati circle (*xuejie*) of Chengdu, his tears were highly effective: many of his students were moved to tears as well and decided to found an association of young students in protecting the railway.³⁸ The *Shubao* editorialist Deng Xiaoke also came to the meeting. Deng emphasized the terrible consequences that the foreign loan would bring, and made a thorough and “heart-striking” critique of the treaty.³⁹ Of course, the master orator Luo Lun never missed a gathering like this. Luo claimed that it was definitely not enough to have only one association, in Chengdu; rather, it was vital that all Sichuanese understood “the railway is a matter concerning everyone.” Luo Lun urged the seventy million Sichuan people not to be afraid of the peremptory Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang and the vicious foreign countries.⁴⁰ However, the most astounding scene at the founding meeting was created by Zhu Shan, the chief editor of *Shubao*. A young man in his twenties, Zhu

³⁷ “Wang Renwen zhi neige, youchuanbu, ji Duan daren dian” [Telegram by Wang Renwen to the Cabinet, Ministry of Posts and Posts and Communications, and Duanfang], in Chen Xulu et al. ed., *Xinhai geming qianhou* [Time Around the 1911 Revolution] (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 1979), 102.

³⁸ Li Jieren, vol.1, 36 and 41.

³⁹ “Tielu guoyou an” [The Case of Nationalizing the Railways], in *Manqing yeshi* [The unofficial history of the Manchu Qing], vol.4, item 13. Original document, first published 1920, from Professor Dai Zhili.

⁴⁰ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 36.

presented himself in a “fashionably and sharply tailored robe.”⁴¹ He claimed that two things had to be done to protect the railway: one was to call upon people in the outer counties to join the Chengdu leaders; and the other was to mobilize an army of national citizens to fend off the foreign nations.⁴² Zhu Shan requested that he be assigned both responsibilities and volunteered to start accomplishing them the next day. To display his determination, Zhu pounded his palms on the table, broke a tea cup, and stabbed his hands.⁴³ The “bloodshed” of Zhu Shan added more drama to this already emotional meeting. People were provoked.

Despite the sweltering heat, the turnout for the meeting was huge. Even though the exact number attending the meeting was not certain, figures ranging from several hundred to five thousand in various historical accounts, it was clear that a considerably large number of people showed up at the meeting hall.⁴⁴ Their enthusiasm was undeniable. Li Jieren wrote, “People from all different walks of life came; and it seemed that students and young handicraftsmen outnumbered other people and formed the majority.”⁴⁵ Li continued, “The place was extremely crowded and even the street [on which the railway company was located] was packed with people.” The place reminded

⁴¹ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 41.

⁴² “Tielu guoyou an,” in *Manqing yeshi*, vol.4, item 13.

⁴³ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 41; “Tielu guoyou an,” in *Manqing yeshi*, vol.4, item 13.

⁴⁴ In Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 57, the number is 700. In “Tielu guoyou an,” in *Manqing yeshi*, vol.4, item 13, the number is 4,000. In Wan Renwen’s telegram, the number is 2000. In *Baogao*, no.2, June 27, 1911, the number is several thousand. In “Telegram to Xiao Xiang and Li Wenxi,” in *Shibao*, July 3, 1911, the number is 5,000.

⁴⁵ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 33.

him of “a drama stage” (*xitai*).⁴⁶ After the meeting was adjourned, enthusiasm lingered as participants were welcomed to sign up for various branches of the Railway Protection Association. One student “had to wait for quite a while before he could finally grab a brush and sign his name.”⁴⁷ Following the meeting that founded the association, leaders marched to the provincial government to make their petition. The elite gave up their privilege of traveling in sedan chairs; on the contrary, they chose to walk on open streets in Chengdu to demonstrate their sincerity and determination. With policemen carving out a way in the front, the procession marched from the railway company to the provincial yamen. The entire scene was rather impressive. Eighty-year-old Hanlin Academician Wu Songsheng was the leader of the parade. He was followed by a bunch of Sichuan provincial assemblymen who were also shareholders in the railway company. Following these figures was a group from the railway company, and behind them were a number of gentlemen of the literati circle. Famous people like Luo Lun, Deng Xiaoke, Meng Gongfu, and Zhu Shan were among the procession. These dignitaries, followed by their servants, private secretaries, and clerks, formed a true spectacle for the people of Chengdu to watch.⁴⁸

After the memorable day of June 17, protecting the railway became one of the most talked-about issues in Chengdu. The Sichuan people would soon surprise officials like Yinliang, who at first did not take the situation seriously and expected the antagonism to vanish immediately. In fact, Yinliang wrote on June 17: “I expect that in

⁴⁶ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 34.

⁴⁷ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 38.

⁴⁸ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 41-42.

four or five days, the Sichuanese will be humbly following the edict.... In Sichuan, the power [of the people] is much weaker than that in Guangdong and Hunan; Sichuanese are simply following [the people of those two provinces].”⁴⁹ Much to the surprise of Yinliang, the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement not only did not die out; on the contrary, it became increasingly intense and powerful.

The Organization

After the establishment of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association, a highly effective propaganda campaign was launched. The Sichuan Railway Protection Association carried out new ways of organizing, sending its own representatives to each county to make sure the message was conveyed accurately. The *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association* detailed not only the propaganda used in the movement, but also the expansion of this movement from Chengdu to the entire province of Sichuan. Such expansion was achieved by establishing branches of the association, an activity that was painstakingly planned and carried out by the movement leaders in Chengdu.

Given that the leaders of the Railway Protection Association and members of the Chengdu headquarters of the Chuan-Han Railway Company were one and the same, they never lacked money. In fact, they used as much as forty thousand taels of silver from the

⁴⁹ “Chengdu Yin shu fansi liang zhi Duan daren dian” [Telegram by Yinliang to Duanfang], in Sheng Xuanhuai, *Yuzhai cunqao* [Materials preserved in Yu House], vol.78, 9.

railway company. The Chuan-Han Railway Company Chengdu leader Peng Fen reminisced:

In the middle of the 4th Month of the Xuanton 3rd year [more likely to be the 5th Month], Deng Xiaoke said to me that, “we now need to issue magazines, vernacular newspapers, and newsletters, send representatives to Beijing, Shanghai, Hunan, Hubei, and Guangdong, and various prefectures and counties in Sichuan. Without financial support, these things could not be achieved.” I then withdrew forty thousand taels of silver, which was deposited by the Chuan-Han Railway Company in the bank called Ri-Sheng-Chang, and gave it to Li Qiulu and Li Wengeng for management.⁵⁰

According to Peng Fen, the money was well spent. The funds supported three newspapers, allowed Liu Shengyuan to travel to Beijing in order to call on Prince Qing, patronized Xiao Xiang to go to Shanghai and meet the press, and assisted other messengers to go to Hubei, Hunan, and Guangdong; in addition, it sustained young students who returned to their hometowns and mobilized people from outlying counties in Sichuan.⁵¹ In total, ten thousand taels of silver were used. Because of the huge effect that the money had generated—“all Sichuan was restless and so was the entire country”—Peng Fen believed it was all worth it.

At one point there was a suspicion that the railway capital had been usurped by the association, but this misunderstanding was quickly pacified. A reply entitled “The Expenditure of Our Association” was published in the twelfth issue of the newsletters, explaining, “All the people working at the association do so voluntarily. They regard

⁵⁰ Peng Fen, *Xinhai xunQing zhengbian fayuan ji* [The Origins of the Qing Regime Change 1911], 31. Original document from Professor Dai Zhili.

⁵¹ Ibid. Peng recollected, “In general, there were about 10 people in each prefecture....the average travel fund for these students was ten *yuan*.”

their work as a duty and even spend their own money on transportation. No one is taking any kind of salary; except for tea, water, food, brushes, ink, and expenses for printing, mailing, and sending telegrams, not a single penny was spent.”⁵² After this public reply, the railway association was not bothered by further charges regarding its expenditure and it continued to run smoothly.

The Sichuan Railway Protection Association’s regulation described the basic structure of its organization. The agenda of the association was “to refuse incurring foreign loans and to break the treaty and protect the railway” (*jujue yangkuan, feiyue baolu*).⁵³ There were four divisions under the association: General Affairs, Speech, Documents, and Public Relations. The Division of General Affairs took up the general managerial role and kept the seal of authority. The Division of Speech propagated the chief motives of the association; moreover, it set up local branches of the association in various prefectures and counties and linked up with all other groups outside of Sichuan for coordination. The Division of Documents was responsible for all editorials and regulations relevant to railway issues; it also dealt with letters and telegrams addressed to the association. Last but not least, the Division of Public Relations worked on countering forces that were against the association. Not surprisingly, Sichuan Provincial Assemblyman Jiang Sancheng headed of the Division of General Affairs; Assemblyman Cheng Yingdu led the Division of Speech; predictably, assembly newspaper editorialist

⁵² *Baogao*, no.12, July 11, 1911.

⁵³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 674.

Deng Xiaoke was the director of the Division of Documents; and the Assembly's vice chairman, the master orator Luo Lun, was in charge of the Division of Public Relations.⁵⁴

The organizing principle of the association was open and democratic. First, all people, not only Sichuanese but also those of other provinces were welcomed to join the association; also, all members could choose to join any division freely. In terms of representing various counties in the association, the regulation determined, “out of ten association members who come from the same county, one should be selected as the spokesperson of the ten. Out of five spokespersons that are selected, one should be elected as the chief spokesperson of the five.”⁵⁵ These chief spokespersons were especially vital to the Division of Documents because they would read and select articles from their home counties to be published in the newsletters.⁵⁶ All important matters were to be discussed and decided by members of the association collectively. “Each member should be present at important meetings when meetings are called” and “all decisions made by public meetings should be carried out without avoiding responsibility.”⁵⁷ Another stipulation was that members of divisions should meet at least once a week.⁵⁸

The most important two divisions of the association were the Division of Documents and the Division of Speech. Both shared the key slogan, “to protect the

⁵⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 683. Pu Dianjun, the behind-the-scenes mastermind, did not assume any public position in the Railway Protection Association, but was heavily involved in all the association activities.

⁵⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 674.

⁵⁶ *Baogao*, no.19, July 19, 1911.

⁵⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 676.

⁵⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 675.

railway and break the treaty (*baolu poyue*).” The Division of Documents “exerted all the powers of a pen to guarantee that the association’s messages were communicated clearly and powerfully.”⁵⁹ Its chief achievement was the *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association*. The newsletters provided a crucial mouthpiece for keeping the people of the outer counties on the same page as people in Chengdu: gentry and merchants from Langzhong county, despite the 700 *li* (350 kilometer) distance from Chengdu, rushed to the provincial capital in three-and-a-half days just to buy the newsletters.⁶⁰ Also, the Division of Documents in the Tibetan Border Education Bureau asked for the newsletters, hoping to “mobilize public opinion and sentiment in the border region.”⁶¹ In Zizhou prefecture, a teahouse owner was so moved after reading the newsletters that he started to ardently conduct his own speech at the teahouse on railway issues, “with the newsletters in hand.”⁶² Besides the newsletters, another important newspaper produced by the Division of Documents was *Xigubao* (literally, *Western Caring Newspaper*); its circulation was also huge in Chengdu and it served as another important platform to discuss railway issues.⁶³

In addition, it was the Division of Speech that made the Railway Movement spread throughout Sichuan. Almost every day, there was at least one speech carried out in a public place in Chengdu. First, in Chengdu, almost every day there was one public

⁵⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 679.

⁶⁰ *Baogao*, no.12, July 11, 1911.

⁶¹ *Baogao*, no.17, July 17, 1911.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Xigubao*, no.36, in Dai Zhili 1994, 694-695.

speech organized by the Division of Speech. Special advertisements were created for these lectures, which announced the place, time, and names of the lecturers and urged gentry, merchants, and ordinary residents to attend. These speeches were given by important movement leaders such as Luo Lun and were delivered in public spaces such as the Three Righteousnesses Temple (*Sanyi miao*), Fire Deity Temple (*Huoshen miao*), and Literacy God Temple (*Wenchang gong*), so that ordinary Chengdu residents all around the city could easily attend.⁶⁴ The Division of Speech was also in charge of sending people to build branches of the association in outer counties, which I will discuss in the next chapter. In sum, the two departments brought together a broad coalition of supporters focused on one claim—*baolu poyue*.

The Propaganda: Key Concepts

On July 7, the *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Association* published a manifesto that elaborated on the motive of the Sichuan Railway Association. After the movement had gone on for two weeks, the leaders found it necessary to reclarify their purpose. The essence of their rhetoric again employed the dual propaganda of the rights of the people (*minquan*) and the sovereignty of the nation (*guoquan*). On *minquan* and constitutionalism, the manifesto asked:

Why there are thousands of people devotedly calling upon constitutionalism? Isn't that because "with a constitution, the government cannot arbitrarily carry out policies that betray the people"? The National Assembly was just convened, yet the first policy of the new cabinet was to disparage the law. Clause 14.3 of the National Assembly Regulation

⁶⁴ *Baogao*, no.2, June 27, 1911.

clearly states that the National Assembly has the power to decide on public loans. Why didn't the government wait for its decision? Clause 12.1 of the Provincial Assembly Regulation clearly states that the Provincial Assembly has the power to decide on matters affecting provincial rights, which certainly includes matters like nationalizing the railway. Why didn't the government wait for its result? According to the Commercial Code (*shang lü*) and Company Code (*gongsi lü*), all decisions concerning commercial railways should be made only by shareholders. Why didn't the government wait for shareholder discussions? Censoring mail and telegrams should be used only occasionally by the emperor under urgent circumstances.... What rights did the Ministry of Posts and Communications have to prevent people from using telegrams?⁶⁵

The new cabinet is merciless and arbitrary: it disparages the court, robs the people, betrays the previous emperor and deceives the present one ... and forbids people to voice a single complaint.... [But] even if the motive of the treaty were justifiable, its content good; even if the policy were favorable and made no shareholders lose anything; we would still fight against the treaty and the policy resolutely, because, if we did not, we would never be able to talk about building constitutionalism, opening a parliament, and meeting in the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies!"⁶⁶

Indeed, by this point, the Railway Protection Movement possessed great significance in constructing constitutionalism and the authority of the law. It seems that the leaders of the railway movement were changing their rhetoric. Previously they objected to the specific details of the management of the railway; then they objected, on nationalistic grounds, to the content of the treaty; but now they were invoking even bigger and more general ideas, invoking "the principle of the thing," the constitutional issues. On *guoquan*, the manifesto claimed:

The foreign loan treaty has strangled the people. Its Clause Twenty-Five clearly gives all business regarding the 3,600-*li* (1,800 kilometer) railway into foreigners' hands. The purchase of a nail or even the use of a clerk

⁶⁵ *Baogao*, no.9, July 6, 1911.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

cannot be decided by our countrymen (*guoren*)... We national citizens (*wu guomin*) should know that wherever the foreign railway goes, the power and rule of foreigners follows. We have had enough examples of this kind and this is why in order to survive we had to resist [against the treaty] at the cost of our lives.⁶⁷

Importantly, the manifesto then drew the link between *minquan* and *guoquan*: “If national citizens expire, then the nation cannot exist on its own; therefore, we citizens dare not give up our struggle so that the nation can be preserved.”⁶⁸

Following the above declarations, the proclamation clarified which railway they were protecting and what treaty they were breaking:

To protect the railway is to protect a Chinese railway from being owned by foreigners, not to protect the privately owned Sichuan railway from being owned by the state (*guojia*). To break the treaty is to break the treaty that was selling out [a Chinese railway’s] interests ... and the treaty that was produced via *unlawful* procedure, without being submitted for discussion in the National Assembly.⁶⁹

Therefore, “to protect the railway and break the treaty” is essentially to preserve *minquan* and *guoquan*. The constitutional leaders channeled their long-term political demands into this concrete and powerful collective movement. Because *minquan* and *guoquan* are the two concepts that were repetitively disseminated in all kinds of propaganda, they became deeply entrenched in the minds of movement participants; and later on, Sichuanese used these two internalized concepts for their political struggles that were to come.

In sum, leaders of the Railway Movement tried their best to make sure that everyone understand and participate in the movement; and they used the slogan “to

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

protect the railway and break the treaty” to signify that purpose. In the scholarship of collective movements, many reasons have been proposed to explain why people affiliate with social movements, “ranging from the juvenile desire to flout authority all the way to the vicious instincts of the mob.”⁷⁰ However, just as Sidney Tarrow observes, “while it is true that some movements are marked by a spirit of play and carnival while others reveal the grim frenzy of the mob, there is a much more common and prosaic reason why people band together in movements: to mount common claims against opponents and authorities or elites.... Both the theory of ‘fun and games’ and that of mob frenzy ignore the considerable risks and costs involved in acting collectively against well-armed authorities.”⁷¹ Indeed, people did not risk their skins or sacrifice their time to social movements unless they thought they had good reason to do so; common purpose was that reason.

IV. Carrying on the Movement: The Sensations, the Old Symbols and the New Repertoires, and the Popularization of the Abstract Concepts

Even with the strong common purpose “to preserve national sovereignty and the people’s rights” established, it was still essential for organizers to distribute their propaganda in a convincing way. In 1911, Chengdu movement leaders invented, adapted, and combined various forms of collective action to stimulate support from the local people, and sought tangible symbols and examples to drive their points home. In doing

⁷⁰ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 4.

⁷¹ Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 4-5.

so, they first constructed two sensations: Sichuan drama (*chuanju*) actor Yang Sulan and movement martyr Guo Huanwen.

Yang Sulan first appeared in revolutionary propaganda when he allegedly donated 60 *mu* (4 hectare) of land to the Railway Protection Association on June 24.⁷² Yang, one of the most famous and notorious Sichuan drama performers in the 1900s, was idolized in Chengdu. Love affairs between Yang Sulan and his ardent fans (including many Sichuan provincial officials) were some of the most talked-about public rumors among Chengdu residents.⁷³ Therefore, Yang brought star power and celebrity appeal to the table when he joined the movement. In the third issue of the newsletters, an article titled “Patriotism of a Little Performer” appeared, in which Yang expressed his devotion to the cause. The article states:

Sulan is a member of the Sichuan people. Even though I am ashamed of belonging to the lower class (*xialiu*), I still understand the great righteousness (*dayi*). Even though I cannot serve to the fullest extent, I want to donate all my savings of 60 *mu* of land to your association to help preserve the railway rights and resist the foreign loan. I am simply assuming my duty as a Sichuanese. And [if we] can invoke the emotion of our compatriots, [our power] will be like little streams congregating into an ocean and tiny mosquitoes amassing into a mountain. If every single one of us struggles against this dangerous situation, then our situation will transform from danger to safety.... Losing the railway is destroying our country.⁷⁴

Yang then put his 23 *mu* of land in Tieding Temple and 37 *mu* of land in Pengxi county under the name of the Railway Protection Association. Yang’s act was popularized in the

⁷² *Baogao*, no.3, June 28, 1911.

⁷³ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 117.

⁷⁴ *Baogao*, no.3, June 28, 1911.

newsletters at least once every few days; for example, a local literatus composed a folk song (*qu*) about Yang, praising his nationalistic action.⁷⁵ Yang Sulan's story was also used by some radicals to reinterpret the meaning of "lower-class" and "upper-class." One commentator wrote that Yang was a "high-class" (*shangliu*) gentleman, despite the fact that he was only a performer. On the contrary, Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang were regarded as "low-class" (*xialiu*) in their behavior, even though they were truly high-class officials.⁷⁶ Thus, the "Yang Sulan Incident" kicked off a colorful propaganda campaign and successfully generated great enthusiasm and attention among the locals in Chengdu.⁷⁷

Following Yang Sulan, Guo Huanwen's suicide provided an even more dramatic, and even more effective, propaganda tool. The sixth issue of the newsletter published the event in a huge font, in an editorial entitled: "The Early and Unexpected Death of Gentleman Guo." The editorial disclosed details of a dramatic death:

After Guo heard that Sheng Xuanhuai was selling the railway, he was so infuriated that he suffered a severe disease. On the night of the 28th day of the 5th Month [June 24], he rushed out of his apartment hall and shouted: "Our country is about to be destroyed. At least we comrades of Sichuan have the passion and tenacity to break the treaty and preserve our railway. But I am worried that our movement will end too soon even though it started out so strong. I shall die today in order to solidify the determination of our comrades."⁷⁸

The editorial continued, "When we first heard Guo screaming and calling upon people, we all thought he was crazy and we did not take him seriously. However, two days later,

⁷⁵ *Baogao*, no.4, June 29, 1911.

⁷⁶ *Baogao*, no.3, June 28, 1911.

⁷⁷ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 117.

⁷⁸ *Baogao*, no.6, July 1, 1911.

Mr. Guo was nowhere to be found. On the morning of the 1st day of the 6th Month [June 27], the superintendent of his apartment suddenly discovered a body floating in the well ... and that was the body of Mr. Guo, who decided to die first so that the determination of the Sichuan people would not be deterred!”⁷⁹

The death of Guo Huanwen was so spectacular that he became the patriotic man dying for his country *par excellence*.⁸⁰ Soon after, the newsletters started a massive campaign centering on Guo’s story. In the propaganda, Guo’s tragic suicide was described with increasingly intimate details. Even a farewell letter from Guo was posthumously “discovered,” wherein Guo allegedly urged every one of his comrades to strengthen their determination and succeed in “preserving the railway and breaking the treaty.”⁸¹ Copies of the seventh issue of the newsletter were distributed for free to the general public as a means to commemorate the great martyr Guo Huanwen.⁸² From this moment on, in almost every issue of the newsletter, there was something about Guo, constantly reminding the readers of his patriotic action. The “Guo Huanwen Incident” was also transcribed into speeches recited all over Sichuan, and people responded by paying tribute and writing articles in mourning for their martyr.⁸³ In fact, Guo Huanwen

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ As a matter of fact, Guo Huanwen’s death had nothing to do with the issue of “recovering the railways and breaking the treaty.” Guo died as a result of mental illness, yet to make use of his death, writers for the newsletters made it meaningful. Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 45-47.

⁸¹ *Baogao*, no.7, July 2, 1911.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ *Baogao*, no.13, July 12; no.14, July 13, no.15, July 14, 1911.

touched people's hearts so deeply that they decided to take issue with Sheng Xuanhuai and the central government. As novelist Li Jieren recalls, Guo Huanwen's life story led several Chengdu apprentices to realize that "caring for the country and caring for Sichuan actually had something to do with us." One apprentice commented, "Before [Guo Huanwen's suicide], we craftsmen cared only about doing our own business. However, after seeing that someone [Guo] did not even hesitate to sacrifice his life ... we all agreed that we should form our own branch of the Railway Protection Association."⁸⁴

After people were invigorated by the two sensational stories, the agenda to preserve national sovereignty and the people's rights appeared to be well-established. To achieve the dual purpose of preserving national sovereignty and the rights of the people, movement leaders in Chengdu drew people into collective action by using an old repertoire of contention and by creating innovation around its margin. They used local folk songs, couplets, and poems and local dramas to help them advance new ideas, including both *guoquan* and *minquan*. They utilized old cultural symbols like "traitor" (*hanjian*), "righteousness" (*zhong*), and "treacherousness" (*jian*) so that their ideas might possess a familiar feel and stir people's emotions. Occasionally, they applied markedly new language and concepts. In this fervent propaganda campaign, certain key words served as revolutionary incantations: "nationalism" (*aiguo*) was perhaps the most universally sacred, but others included "constitution," "law," "National and Provincial Assemblies," and of course, "preservation of the nation."

⁸⁴ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 116-117.

The propaganda elite indisputably made *guoquan* their top priority, and used folk songs to convey a sense of urgency. In the folk song “On Nationalizing Railways,” the rhymester wrote:

All these days, agitated and congregated, Sichuan people formed a corps of comrades. Why form the corps of comrades? It is because the destruction of our country is near at hand. Why is our country being destroyed? It is because foreigners hooked up with the *hanjian* (“traitor”).⁸⁵

The folk song then systematically critiqued how the treaty was “selling out” to the foreigners. When attacking Clause One, it stated, “The action of the Qing state borrowing six million pounds to build railways is like that of a landowner borrowing money while mortgaging his land.”⁸⁶ It continued, “Clause Eight shows that when having difficulty returning the loan, the Qing state borrows additional money to replay the lender. This is like an unlucky country fellow who encounters a drought: he mortgaged the harvest of his grain to pay the loan interest. Even though the drought makes it impossible for him to pay the interest, he has to repay it, even at the cost of selling his wife and children.”⁸⁷ It continued, “The most evil clause is number seventeen [the one on employing foreign personnel]. It is as when building a house, one grants complete freedom to the lender, letting him appoint the manager, accountant, and all

⁸⁵ *Baogao*, no.2, June 27, 1911.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

apprentices. Then, long before the house is finished, all of those involved appropriate the loan and claim that the money has disappeared.”⁸⁸

Remarkably, the arguments made in this example exactly replicated the points that Luo Lun had published in his petition half a month earlier. But here, in lively jingles and rhyming colloquialisms, the propaganda elite made Luo’s opaque arguments accessible to a much larger audience. The producers of the propaganda used relevant examples from daily activities of Sichuan commoners to convey their points; they did their best to make sure their message was simple enough to be understandable. In the meantime, the *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association* also serialized the original foreign loan treaty.⁸⁹ It made the content of the foreign loan known to the general public so that people could critique the original document.⁹⁰ In doing so, the propaganda elite educated people on the political situation and provided them with the data they needed to make a convincing case.

Of course, the propaganda leaders never forgot the important issue of *minquan*. In the fifth issue of the newsletter, the folk song “On Nationalizing Railways” continued into its third episode, where the elite tackled the important problematic of *minquan* and spelled out the relation between *guojia* and *renmin*:

This time, let’s talk about the issue of *guojia* and *renmin*. *Guojia* is like a house and *renmin* are the masters (*zhuren*) in the house. If the house did not exist, then, where would people hide? A house should be built on a piece of land. If the land did not exist, where could we build the walls of

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ *Baogao*, no.2, June 27; no.3, June 28; no.5, June 30, 1911.

⁹⁰ *Baogao*, no.3, June 28; no.4, June 29; no.5, June 30, no.6, July 1, 1911.

the house?... If the land and the house were together mortgaged and the lender suddenly decided to pull out his capital, then, the only outcome [for the debtor] would be to sell his assets. All this is because of the debtor's reckless act of borrowing money, and his debt would never go away.⁹¹

Uncompromisingly, the folk song continued by mocking the high officials behind the foreign loan scheme and lecturing the officials about the relation between their fortunes and *guo*:

A traitor who sells his nation is doing exactly the same thing as the terrible debtor. A traitor would slice the interest of the people to satisfy his own evil ambition: he would invite outsiders to come into the room and see them eat, dress, and enjoy a pleasant life. The case of Korea [in 1910 Korea became a Japanese colony] should have educated them: all those aristocrats of five classes, who had one day humbly thanked the Japanese emperor, were quickly dethroned and demanded a return of their stolen possessions.... Everyone knows about the benefits of being an official (*zuoguan de haochu renren dong*), but to be an official indefinitely, the existence of the nation is the precondition.⁹²

To fight against the officials who had “betrayed their nation,” the propaganda urged people “not to be disheartened,” but to draw evidence from regulations of the National and the Provincial Assemblies: “The regulation of the National Assembly has clearly stated its position on its power in representing national sovereignty. And the regulation of the Provincial Assembly has clearly stated its position on representing public opinion.... Now, the comrade corps is like a light beaming in the dark night, shining on us people walking on the road.”⁹³

⁹¹ *Baogao*, no.5, June 30, 1911.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The movement leaders called attention to each person's rights; in particular, his constitutional rights. In the folk song titled "On Legal Protection," the author wrote:

The lyrics of this folk song are very unusual, and the title of it is admittedly nerdy. Let us pause for a moment and explain this title: "Law is an extremely important matter for each person's life." *Guojia* should be the sovereignty holders and should be responsible for disseminating laws. Law has the power to supervise the son of Heaven and all officials; law also prevents the people from behaving subversively. The spirit of constitutionalism is that all matters should be conducted under the framework of law and therefore, in doing so, all things will be guaranteed to remain peaceful. If we think about the effects of the law in protecting the people—their life and property would remain intact—then, we should recognize the fact that "law" is incomparably splendid.⁹⁴

The writer then went to great lengths to discuss Constitutional Reform and local elections and noticeably emphasized the legitimacy of electoral politics. He wrote, "We should count on assembly members to deal with national affairs of importance because they are elected by the people and thus they represent the people to participate in politics."⁹⁵

Forcefully, the writer denounced Sheng Xuanhuai for trampling on the law and putting out a fake constitutionalism (*jia lixian*). He then called on people to save the nation from the evil hands of officials like Sheng: "If *guojia* was willfully disposed of by Sheng Xuanhuai ... then destruction is near. Everyone is responsible for it [the fate of *guojia*] and should not give up our vigilance and struggle."⁹⁶

If "people's rights," first proposed by Liang Qichao, had been the watchword and the most essential rallying cry of the first decade of the twentieth century, in the year

⁹⁴ *Baogao*, no.9, July 6, 1911.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

1911 it gained additional concrete substance and established its definitive legitimacy. People's rights were not only considered virtuous, but were also legally obtainable within the existing political framework. Certainly, after the National Assembly and Provincial Assemblies were established and put into action, people had a legitimate routine by which they could pursue their political rights. The Sichuan Railway Movement elite did not have to resort to violence or cry out loud using vicious language to get what they wanted. Rather, they stressed the nonviolence of their struggle and constantly referred to the authority of the law to buttress their perspective. Leaders emphasized the important contribution of their struggle in maintaining the constitution and stressed their distance from the "uncivilized and uneducated barbarians" who used violence. They championed the virtue of their actions and denounced the utter villainy of their enemies:

To make things work smoothly, we have to follow established regulations. Now that the regulations of the National and Provincial Assemblies both clearly stipulate that only with their permission can political issues be settled ... the representatives [in the assemblies] will help us refute the foreign loan treaty.... As far as we are determined and base our arguments on regulations, we always will have the law on our side, regardless of the constant telegram exchange by the Ministry of Posts and Communications and the pressure it gives to Sichuan.... We should solidify our position yet not turn violent when facing foreigners and missionaries. We should definitely maintain order. If we cannot keep order, then, that is barbarianism. Barbarians are unpleasant and irritating and even the law cannot protect them. Let us make this neologism "*faliu*" (law and regulations) our new catchword.... Both the new and the old factions (*xin dang jiu dang*) should get together and see this.... Let us all put aside our factional biases, behave like civilized people, and be united.... Finally, we should all respectfully place the law in our most sacred shrine.⁹⁷

⁹⁷ *Baogao*, no.9, July 6, 1911.

Indeed, the talk about propping up legal practices and using the law as the most important weapon for political struggle was remarkable. Every citizen, even the emperor and all the high-level officials, had to endorse and respect the law. The consecration of *law* was something unheard of in all previous collective contentious movements in the history of China.

Still, for many, concepts like *guo* and the authority of the constitution were too abstract to understand and to relate to. To solve this problem, a new conception, that is, the conception of “the people of Sichuan” (*chuanmin* or *chuanren*) was invented to help bridge the gap between *guo* and the ordinary people on the ground. *Chuanmin* and *chuanren* persistently appeared in propaganda publications. The sixth issue of the newsletter, for example, contained a propaganda article entitled “People of Sichuan Crying for Justice from Heaven,” in which *chuanmin* was frequently linked with the word “we” (*wo*). Phrases like “our Sichuan” (*wo Sichuan*), “we people of Sichuan” (*wo chuanmin*), “our life and property” (*wo shengming caichan*), and “our rights” (*wo quanli*) were employed throughout the propaganda, provoking strong feelings in the readers.⁹⁸ The propaganda masters were savvy enough to tap into the strong and long-lasting sentiment of “loving one’s native land” to evoke people’s love for their province and, eventually, their nation.

In the eleventh issue of the *Newsletter*, a critic effectively linked the conceptions of *chuan*, *min*, and *guo* together, claiming: “Ever since the preparation for constitutionalism, important and wise people have repetitively talked about ‘loving one’s

⁹⁸ *Baogao*, no.6, July 1, 1911.

country.’ However, *for us to love our country, we should start by loving our homeland.* Our homeland is Sichuan, and the railway of Sichuan was the commonwealth of the seventy million people of Sichuan.”⁹⁹ The columnist then criticized the Qing government for strangling the Sichuan people. He then pitted the despotic Qing government against *guo*, *min*, and *chuan*. In his argument, *chuanren* was part and parcel of *guoren*: their interests were the same and *chuanren* could certainly represent *guoren*. In so doing, the writer effectively drew inspiration from the time-honored sentiment of loving one’s home to evoke a new and modern attitude of loving one’s nation.

To be clear, Sichuan was only a mediating point in the hierarchy of one’s multiple political allegiances, pointing to the loyalty to one’s nation at the top. The writer addressed this issue head on:

The Sichuan Railway Protection Association is for all national citizens; not just for the people of Sichuan. Its goal is to preserve all the railways in all four provinces; yet our goal does not stop there. We are standing up for all the people in our nation. If all the national citizens are protected, then the nation will be saved.... Thus, we should convince our comrades, fathers, brothers, and sisters that because we share the same race, the same nation, and the same determination, we should fight for our railways without hesitation. We shall not be scared by any force and shall not be divided by our different origins.¹⁰⁰

Thus, the solidity of people joining together to save the nation is *the* dominating idea from the rhetoric in the Railway Movement. Even though Sichuan served as an important steppingstone for one to extend one’s love for native place, the propaganda made clear that one’s allegiance and love were directed towards the destiny of

⁹⁹ *Baogao*, no.11, July 8, 1911.

¹⁰⁰ *Baogao*, no.6, July 1, 1911.

nationalism. People were not fighting for the well-being of Sichuan, but for the survival of China.

With these key arguments soundly displayed and linked to the action of “protecting the railway and breaking the treaty,” the new relations among *guo*, *min*, and *chuan* became increasingly unmistakable. In the railway movement rhetoric, in a *guo*, sovereignty should lie with the people. *Guo* was made of *min*; thus the loss of national sovereignty affected every single citizen. Also, it was the law that protected the civic rights of *min* and punished those who violated the rights of *min*, no matter who that person might be, because before the law every citizen was equal.¹⁰¹ The movement’s leaders thus had effectively used the concept of a new nation on the basis of a new consensus; they had fundamentally challenged the traditional basis of monarchy—now, even the son of Heaven had to obey the law and he now possessed no sacred supremacy over the law—and opened up general questions about the location of authority. The leaders of the movement, the Sichuan assemblymen had put Liang Qichao’s idea of nationalism, popular sovereignty, and constitutionalism in real political struggles. And they effectively used these concepts and mobilized a force.

To defend the new concepts and to congeal the new consensus, the movement’s leaders continued to develop their popular style of campaigning and soliciting more participation. Crucially, every movement needs a perfect target (e.g., in the case of France, the poor queen Marie Antoinette) to mobilize the emotions of its participants and

¹⁰¹ This also related to the cultural and legal transformation that was happening in China at that time. For example, in the new Criminal Code, for the first time in Chinese history, the principle that everyone is politically equal before the law was established.

direct these emotions at something concrete to better facilitate solidarity. In the Sichuan Railway Movement, that perfect target was Sheng Xuanhuai, the “demon incarnate” ever since the Zhejiang Railway Movement of 1907. In 1911, in Sichuan, Sheng Xuanhuai was once again the demon incarnate; moreover, this time, he was also deemed the symbol of the “unlawful and presumptuous government” (*qiangheng de zhengfu*) by public opinion.^{102,103} The movement’s rhetoric pitted Sheng Xuanhuai against the Sichuan people and the Guangxu emperor:

We Sichuan people have been saving and putting our hard-earned money [into the railway company] to preserve our province,... only hoping that no foreign power would ever coerce us.... However, suddenly, there was this white-faced treacherous court official, who cheated the emperor and the people. He was an official of the Ministry of Posts and Communications, with the name Sheng Xuanhuai. He is evil and dangerous, conceited and crooked, pitiless and corrupted. He deviously borrowed hundreds of thousands of pounds in foreign loans and behaved as a traitor (*hanjian*) working for Britain, France, Germany, and the U.S.... All we Sichuanese who had life and property in Sichuan should regard Sheng Xuanhuai as our archenemy (*dou yu na Sheng Xuanhuai bugongdaitian*)!¹⁰⁴

To demonize Sheng Xuanhuai, many conventional tropes were used to evoke people’s resentment against him. For example, the typical *chuanju* symbol of a treacherous court official, the “white face,” was adopted here, almost making the whole movement seem like a kind of show. Of course, the most frequent referent for Sheng Xuanhuai was

¹⁰² *Baogao*, no.6, July 1, 1911.

¹⁰³ Mary Rankin has a similar point: in Rankin’s words, “Sichuan activists also presented a stark contrast between the dead Guangxu emperor and the new regency.” Guangxu had “‘boldly’ prepared for a constitution and sought rapport with the people, but the new cabinet, represented by the evil Sheng Xuanhuai, had cheated the people and abandoned the goals of the former ruler.” Mary Rankin, “Nationalistic contestation and mobilization politics: practice and rhetoric of railway-rights recovery at the end of the Qing,” 343.

¹⁰⁴ *Baogao*, no.6, July 1, 1911

“traitor” (*hanjian*) and “renegade” (*maiguozei* or *maiguonu*).¹⁰⁵ Tropes like *hanjian* and *maiguonu* appeared repetitively and became increasingly emotional and out of control. In an article titled “Blind People’s Patriotism,” the writer utilized the well-worn examples from Chinese history to help depict the situation and describe the type of despicable person Sheng Xuanhuai was. The author obdurately used the most infamous traitor, Qin Hui of the Southern Song dynasty; the most notorious and treacherous of court officials, Yan Song and Wei Zhongxian from the Ming dynasty; and the villainous Manchu official Qishan, who had “sold Macau,” as twins of Sheng Xuanhuai.¹⁰⁶ These stories and cultural symbols were so familiar to ordinary Chinese people that it went without saying that people’s sentiments were easily provoked.

Sheng Xuanhuai became the archenemy of all Sichuanese. Against him and in contrast to him, the movement’s leaders positioned the most moral and brave of Sichuan natives, Liu Shengyuan. Liu was the representative of all Sichuan people and was selected to petition against the foreign treaty before the central government. On July 1, a huge public meeting was held to send off the hero when he headed for Beijing. At the South Square in Chengdu, at “9 o’clock in the morning ... ten thousand people had already congregated.”¹⁰⁷ Despite the pouring rain, the chairmen of the meeting decided to stick to their original plan and continue their gathering. Liu Shengyuan bowed in front of his Sichuan compatriots and delivered the following speech:

¹⁰⁵ *Baogao*, no.2, June 27; no.6, July 1, 1911; no.11, July 8, 1911.

¹⁰⁶ *Baogao*, no.19, July 19, 1911.

¹⁰⁷ *Baogao*, no.8, July 5, 1911.

Today I came here to say my final goodbye to you. This time I am going to Beijing; I have determined to make “a seven-day cry in the Qin quad”¹⁰⁸ so as to persuade the court to change its mind and achieve our goal of breaking the treaty and recovering the railway. If the treaty is not broken, I will choose to die and will never come back alive. My only wish is that after I die, our railway protection comrades will continue to carry out our struggle and do so peacefully and orderly....¹⁰⁹

As Liu spoke, “people on and off the stage were all crying.” One touching scene was that of an old farmer. He “held his hands in front and kept bowing (*zuoyi*) to Liu, saying ‘we thank you; we thank you’ (*women ganxie ni; women ganxie ni!*)” All people were “clapping and crying hard with great agony.”¹¹⁰ Liu was definitely powerful in rallying the pride of Sichuan people. In several newsletters following the big meeting, Sichuan local literati overwhelmed the editors with letters, praising their great hero Liu Shengyuan. Moreover, if Qin Hui was the best way to describe Sheng Xuanhuai, then the historical figure analogous to Liu Shengyuan might be the supreme assassin of the Zhao kingdom, Jin Ke. Local literati drew parallels from the famous poem that Jin Ke wrote before he went to kill the Qin emperor to demonstrate Liu’s utter determination and courage to fight against the central government and break the treaty.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ “A seven-day cry in the Qin quad” is a famous story that happened in the Spring and Autumn period in China. As Chu Kingdom was attacked by Wu Kingdom, a Chu minister by the name of Shen Baoxu was dispatched to Qin Kingdom for reinforcement. Shen Baoxu cried in the Qin imperial quad for seven days, all day and all night. After the seven days, Qin Kingdom decided to send armies to help Chu.

¹⁰⁹ *Baogao*, no.8, July 5, 1911.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ Local literatus took Jin Ke’s famous poem, simply replacing “Yi shui” [Yi river], which flowed in Jin Ke’s hometown, with “Jin shui” [Jin river], which flows through Chengdu, so as to evoke a similar sense of heroism which was so famously presented in Jin Ke’s poem. *Baogao*, no.19, July 19, 1911.

Multiple examples demonstrate that old cultural symbols played a crucial role in helping evoke people's emotions. Anthropologist David Kertzer writes that "general knowledge of particular routines in a society's history helps movements to overcome their deficits in resources and communication."¹¹² Collective action is "not born out of organizers' heads" but is "culturally inscribed and communicated."¹¹³ The learned conventions of collective action are part of a society's public culture. In a similar fashion, sociologist Charles Tilly also observes that people cannot "employ routines of collective action of which they are ignorant; each society has a stock of familiar forms of action that are known by both potential challengers and their opponents—and which become habitual aspects of their interaction."¹¹⁴ Therefore, if we believe that individuals have available knowledge of history and previous outcomes of the forms of collective action in their societies, then we see that "leaders propose more than the abstraction of 'collective action.'" Rather, "they are drawn to a "known repertoire of particular forms of collective action."¹¹⁵

¹¹² David Kertzer, *Comrades and Christians: Religion and Political Struggles in Communist Italy* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 188. In Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 18. For example, workers know how to strike because generations of workers have struck before them; Parisians build barricades because barricades are inscribed in the history of Parisian contention; Sichuan peasants seized the tax collecting bureau and set prisoners free, carrying the symbols that their fathers and grandfathers used in the past.

¹¹³ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 18.

¹¹⁴ Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1978), Chapter 6. In Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 19.

¹¹⁵ Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement*, 19.

Public meetings like the one for Liu Shengyuan mobilized Sichuanese and helped build solidarity. Guo Moruo, a middle-school student at that time, attended the meeting sending off Liu. Guo reminisced, “All the crying and screaming has greatly stirred people.... Luo Lun was crying on the stage, railway shareholders were crying off stage, even the coolies and clerks working for the railway company were crying. Of course, all of us onlookers were crying too.” It was again an “earthshaking” gathering, wherein “the land trembled for twenty to thirty minutes.”¹¹⁶ What is significant about meetings like this is that it brought commoners and elite together in one organization for one purpose.

In the heat of political struggle, a new community of national citizens was formed, and the glue for the new community was the common purpose propagated by the movement’s elite. Now, everyone could relate to one another as equal political participants. Therefore, with such emphasis on the equality of citizenship, this new political rhetoric especially appealed to those who had no political stake in the previous political system, and in turn, the rhetoric depended on them for its further propagation. As both Guo Moruo and Li Jieren, who were both high-school students and who both participated in the movement, suggested, this might be the reason why it was students, small merchants, and young apprentices who had formed the majority of the participants in the movement in Chengdu. The power in the movement was gathering.

Conclusion

¹¹⁶ Guo Moruo, “Fanzheng qianhou,” 450-451.

It is true that the leaders of the Chengdu headquarters of the Chuan-Han Railway Company were only a small faction of the “Sichuan people” and to a certain degree, they did initiate the movement to serve their own economic interest. Nevertheless, their campaign was highly significant. They brought issues of nationalism, popular sovereignty, and the rule of law into public discourse, which had far-reaching implications and went far beyond the ownership rights of the railway.

The rhetoric of their propaganda was both to defend the rights of the people (*minquan*) and to stand up for the sovereignty of the nation (*guoquan*). These two concepts were inextricably linked together. *Guo* was the totality of *min* and the well-being of *min* determined the fate of *guo*: “If a nation’s citizens expire, then the nation cannot exist on its own; therefore, we citizens dare not give up our struggle so that the nation can be preserved.”¹¹⁷ Moreover, *min* possessed important political rights and held an important political stake in *guo*; the rights of *min* were protected by the law and were both legitimate and virtuous.

Concretely, to preserve both national sovereignty and people’s rights, the Sichuan movement leaders adapted and combined various forms of collective action to stimulate support from people. They created collective identities—*guomin* and *chuanren*—and a common goal—*baolu poyue*—to mobilize people together. During the process, the leaders drew people into collective action by invoking both the old and the new repertoires of contention. The old concepts—*hanjian*, loyalty, treacherousness—helped invigorate people’s emotions. The new rhetoric—*guoquan*, *minquan*, and

¹¹⁷ *Baogao* no.9, July 6, 1911.

constitutionalism—gave them a new common vision. And, the new repertoire—open speeches, public meetings, mass propaganda, and the emergence of the political theater—were first introduced to a wide ranging population in Sichuan. Once learned, these new repertoires would leave a deep mark in the minds of the Sichuan people and be used again in their later political struggles.

The transition from the old-style collective action to the new-style collective movement was, using sociologist Sidney Tarrow's words, a "sea change." The old action was the "inflexible and direct action" in conflicts over "bread, belief, land and death," where "ordinary people tried to correct immediate abuses or get even with those they hated, using routines of collective action that were both direct and inspired by their grievances." In other words, these were actions that could not "bring together broad coalitions of actors on behalf of general claims or create a general repertoire of collective action."¹¹⁸ On the contrary, the new movement was "general rather than specific; indirect rather than direct; flexible rather than rigid." It centered around "a few key routines of confrontation and could be adapted to a number of different settings and its elements combined in major campaigns of collective action. Once used and understood, it could be diffused elsewhere and employed on behalf of the broader claims of wider social coalitions."¹¹⁹ Here, in 1911, the Sichuan movement leaders, like their eighteenth-century counterparts in the national social movements in the west, also adopted the new repertoire to enable scattered groups of people, who did not know one another, to take

¹¹⁸ Sidney Tarrow, 36.

¹¹⁹ Sidney Tarrow, 39-40.

part in a sustained challenge to authorities. This new repertoire, once learned, would leave a deep mark in the minds of the people in Sichuan and would be used again in their later political struggles.

Chapter Six. The Mobilization, the Expansion, and the Violence of the Railway Movement

The rhetoric of the railway movement was elaborate and the repertoire powerful. Given the opportunity that the Chengdu leaders had in the summer of 1911, were they able to mobilize a crowd of supporters? How did the movement expand beyond the city of Chengdu to people in the outlying counties in Sichuan? How did the movement transform itself from a peaceful protest to a violent revolution? And, after the most important leaders were captured on September 7, 1911, how did the movement uphold a common purpose, maintain its solidarity, and sustain its challenges to the central government?

Unlike the 1911 Revolution in most other provinces, which took place in the cities and lasted only a matter of days, the Sichuan movement involved thousands of people and lasted more than seven months. The Sichuan movement was not something that existed only on paper nor was it confined to the cities; rather, it inspired real actions on the ground and encouraged thousands of people throughout the province to take up arms, even at the risk of death.

I. The Public Expansion: Local Branches of the Railway Association (June 17-August 24)

After June 17, besides developing a powerful rhetoric, the Sichuan Railway Protection Association also carried out new methods of organization. The forty thousand taels of silver that the leaders of the Railway Protection Association obtained from the Chuan-Han Railway Company was not only used to fund three newspapers, but also sustained young students who returned to their hometowns to mobilize people from

outlying counties in Sichuan.¹ It was the Division of Speech that was in charge of sending representatives to build branches of the association beyond Chengdu. The Railway Protection Association sent back to their hometowns ten to twenty native students from each department or county, who spread the principle of “protecting the railways and breaking the treaty” during the summer vacation months of June and July. The leaders selected those who were “eloquent in speech,” and equipped each with at least ten silver dollars (*yinyuan*) in travel money.² In their hometowns, they imitated the Chengdu leaders in giving speeches about preserving the railway, and used their family connections to set up branches of the Railway Protection Association. Assisted by extensive print media and eloquent orators, the same propaganda and collective action routine created by the elite of Chengdu began to be employed across wide territories.³

The Division of Speech laid out very concrete ways of setting up these branches. In the “ten points” directive that the Division of Speech distributed to its members in July 1911, the Chengdu leaders tried their best to maintain control so as to successfully mobilize a unanimous movement. The principle “to protect the railways and to break the treaty” (*baolu poyue*) proved to be an effective slogan in imparting to Sichuanese the ideas of nationalism (*aiguo*) and self-determination (*zizhu*). “Concrete Methods of Making Speeches and Organizing Local Branches” laid out the rules:

¹ Peng Fen, *Xinhai xunQing zhengbian fayuan ji*, 31. Peng Fen recollected, “In general, there were about 10 people in each prefecture....the average travel fund for these students was ten *yuan*.”

² Ibid.

³ *Sichuan difangzhi tongxun* [Newsletters of Sichuan Gazetteer Studies] no.3, (1984): 57. Special thanks for Dr. Gou Deyi from Sichuan University, who provided me with this issue.

First, the local professional associations (*fatuan*) should set up a regular organization to receive our Division of Speech messengers sent from Chengdu. This organization should then send people to distribute reports and daily newspapers to market towns and post them in suitable places.

Second, the Division of Speech members should send official letters to various market towns, addressing those who work in the local *tuanti*. We should invite those *tuanlian* leaders (*tuanzong*), academic gentry (*xuedong*), village leaders (*xiangyue*), *baojia* leaders (*baozheng*), native association leaders (*kezhang*), etc., by name, and ask them concretely and respectfully to attend our meetings.

Third, as for how to write the official letters, we should discuss that with the speakers (*yanjiangyuan*).

Fourth, in terms of where to deliver the speeches, we have to pick spacious public offices (*gongsuo*) and should never use the empty countryside ground stages (*kongkuo bazi*). It is important that everyone should register in order to attend those meetings. (Now, it is the time of year that local dramas are performed and also when bandits accumulate. If we convene our meetings at the country stages and those stupid people [who attend such plays] are there, it will cause great difficulties. Therefore, we should by all means have a registering place, so that fewer illiterate and unintelligent people, but more people with public duties and property, can come.)

Fifth, at each meeting, we should have a number of receptionists to treat the people we mentioned in the second point well. In addition, we should definitely hire a watchman, to make sure there is no chaos.

Sixth, as for the content of the speeches, we should first explain the transition of the railway company from an officially owned one to a commercially owned one. Then we should explain the nationalization policy. Last, we should elaborate upon the failures of Sheng Xuanhuai [the minister of posts and communications]'s treaty with the foreigners and explain the relation of the treaty to the future of our Sichuan. This order should be the one we use in delivering a speech.

Seventh, after the speaker of our Division of Speech has delivered his speech, he should immediately organize his Railway Protection Branch. The speaker should first explain that [creating further] branches of this association [are] our only means of action (*wanbu deyi*), and then he should discuss concrete methods of organizing it in conjunction with local leaders. (In doing so, first, our speaker should set up the regulations of his branch, which should be in accordance with the association in Chengdu. Second, he should always listen to the Chengdu association and wait for his orders. Third, he should carefully write that [the Chuan-Han Railway] is a commercially organized road and should not be given to the foreigners and that the treaty has to be abolished, and he should ask the local officials to forward these demands to their superiors. Fourth, he should submit the

same petition to the Sichuan Provincial Assembly. And fifth, he should report all the regulations to the association in Chengdu.)

Eighth, after making the speech and after finishing the organization of the local branch, the speaker should then continue persuading people of the association's principles, help the local officials keep order, and make sure to find a place where he can post all the regulations and the *Newsletters*.

Ninth, the two matters of speechmaking and branch organizing have to be done in consultation with the local officials. We have to invite local officials to attend the speech and the subsequent meeting and ask for local police and guards to keep order.

Tenth, it is important to both be independent of and rely upon the local officials at the same time.⁴

This detailed “ten points” directive sent by the Division of Speech of Chengdu shows a strong determination by the Chengdu leaders to control the movement. They made their best efforts to ensure that their message of “*baolu poyue*” got conveyed and conveyed in their specific way.

As we can see from the directive, the Chengdu leaders chiefly used local elites to carry out the mobilization. On the same day that they publicized the “ten points” directive, the Railway Protection Association sent out an official letter, pleading that all local *fatuan* leaders be ardent about their *guo* and be supportive in establishing local branches of the association.⁵ It is also clear (from points 9 and 10) that the Chengdu leaders hoped to use the power of local officials. The Chengdu headquarters repeatedly claimed that their principle was *not* being oppositional to the state. In July 1911, for example, the *Newsletter* published an open letter to “all prefecture, department, and county governments.” In this letter, they clarified their loyalty to the Qing: “It is all

⁴ *Baogao*, no.16, July 15, 1911.

⁵ *Baogao*, no.16, July 15, 1911.

because of Sheng Xuanhuai, the one person who was selling out the country [that our opposition arose]; it is not that our emperor had abandoned us.... [Our opposition] should not be construed as impugning the emperor.”⁶ This letter intended to assure that the railway association was not looking to make trouble, to create worries for the emperor, or to attack foreigners.⁷ Sichuan officials responded to the actions of the association with tolerance. Messengers from Chengdu could travel to local counties freely. And with vigilance, officials provided police or guards to ensure that meetings took place with order.⁸

With the Association meticulously organizing and with the support of elites and Sichuan officials (*zhengjie*), the railway movement expanded quickly.⁹ On June 29, the Chongqing Railway Protection Branch was set up. “More than four thousand people” showed up at the founding meeting.¹⁰ In the letter reporting its foundation to Chengdu headquarters, the Chongqing branch leader claimed that the Chongqing people supported

⁶ *Baogao*, no.5, June 30, 1911.

⁷ *Baogao*, no.5, June 30, 1911.

⁸ *Baogao*, no.9, July 6, 1911.

⁹ In addition, during the very exciting July of 1911, besides the powerful *Newsletters of Sichuan Railway Protection Association*, more newspapers were used to propagandize the views of the Chengdu headquarters. On July 26, 1911, the powerful *Xigubao* was set up. Later, there was Jiang Sancheng’s *Vernacular Newspaper (Baihua bao)* and *Enlightening Pictorial (Qizhi huabao)*. In addition to the official newspaper of the Sichuan Provincial Assembly, *Shubao*, all solely focused on the matter of the railway movement. Owing to the wonderful propaganda work that the movement leaders did and the enlivening stories they chose to depict in those newspapers, the sales of the newspapers kept going up. According to a contemporary statistic, the propaganda papers issued 160,000 copies all together.

¹⁰ *Baogao*, no.14, July 13, 1911.

the cause “not because of a dispute between the state and the people. Rather, it is because they do not want to mortgage the railways to the foreigners.”¹¹ Chongqing was actually the biggest contributor to the Chuan-Han Railway Company stock. Despite being sometimes at odds with Chengdu, for example, Chengdu and Chongqing’s different opinions in which section of the railway should be built first (as described above, p. 219), at this moment, Chongqing was supportive of the Chengdu leaders and exerted a strong effort to repel foreign encroachments and support the nationalistic cause. Nationalism enabled the Chongqing people to put aside their differences with the Chengdunese.

In July, the Chengkou Department Railway Protection Branch was set up. Its report to Chengdu claimed that “we are all furious and grieved about the behavior of Sheng Xuanhuai, who, in this time of constitutionalism, has been overbearing.... Our county magistrate also knows that [the railway matter] is extremely important, and creates no trouble for us as we set up our branch.... The only thing we worry about is that we are far away from Chengdu, and it is hard for us to hear news.... We decided to send people to Chengdu to learn about everything.”¹²

Chongning county offers us a particularly good example of how a branch was established on the ground. In his letter to Chengdu, Yang Ruirao, a messenger sent by the Division of Speech, wrote in great detail:

As soon as I went back to my hometown from Chengdu on July 9, I went to the county seat on July 10. I soon announced our principles to the local *shenshi*, the students, and all the other elites (*gejie zhujun*). They were

¹¹ *Baogao*, no.14, July 13, 1911.

¹² *Baogao*, no.18, July 18, 1911.

welcoming. Soon, we drafted a note and sent it to the county magistrate, Xu Shiqiao, who approved of our ideas wholeheartedly and promised to provide protection.

From then on, I started using the regulations issued by Chengdu to prepare and set up my own branch. After lengthy discussions with my comrades, ... my friend Zhang Shaoxian and I first posted all announcements and newsletters and regulations. We set up a meeting on July 19 in the Lianghu Guesthouse (Lianghu Huiguan), using their opera stage as our podium, and invited Magistrate Xu to supervise our meeting.

... More than a thousand people attended our meeting. And more than a hundred people joined us in the local branch and signed their names.

... We first talked about the sad situation of losing rights to the railways (*sangshi luquan de canzhuang*) and the principle of the Association, *baolu poyue*. We then talked about the crimes of Sheng Xuanhuai. Thirdly, we discussed the rights we have to keep this road commercially managed. Fourthly, we talked about the alliance that we have with three other provinces in fighting for the railway and how their movements are going. Last, we discussed the policies that we Railway Protection Association branches have in dealing with railway matters.

Indeed, all the important officials, such as our Magistrate Xu, the academic official Ma Jinchun, and the submagistrate (*dianshi*), Han Jinhua, all came to our meeting. In addition, important gentrymen Jiang Shaoxian (who helped post the propaganda materials), Liu Fulin, Yu Tianxu, and Deng Yangyan all attended. They all felt passionate about the railway matters and touched by our speeches. Several even cried.

The day after the speeches ... our founding meeting of the railway branch took place in the Institute of Self-governance (*Zizhi yanjiusuo*) located at the Literary God Temple (*Wenchang gong*). We invited Magistrate Xu to come over to see us, and we voted to elect the chairperson of the branch, the vice chair, and the secretaries of the four sections.... [Then] co-speakers Liu Fulin, Jiang Shaoxian, and Gao Zhaolin started their speeches. Gao, even though he holds only a military degree, composed a poem for the meeting and encouraged people's morale.¹³ Indeed, we compatriots were impassioned and we all were grieved and crying.

The second day after the initial speech, the local branch held its first meeting and the executive committee was established.¹⁴

¹³ Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*, 119-120. Gao was a crucial *paoge* member and also a *Tongmenghui* leader.

¹⁴ *Baogao*, no.22, July 23, 1911.

From this detailed depiction from Chongning county messenger Yang Ruirao, we see one of the characteristics common to the local branches. The branch in Chongning, like those throughout the province, was set up in almost exactly in the way that the Chengdu leaders wanted it to be: They were put under the leadership of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association in Chengdu. They took Chengdu as their leader, and established their own regulations to imitate those of the Chengdu headquarters. The organization of each branch was copied from Chengdu's.¹⁵ Also one report wrote, "We hope to form a big alliance between us and Chengdu."¹⁶

Another common characteristic was that election was a normal practice in dealing with the nitty-gritty procedures of managing public affairs. The Chongning branch, for example, though relying upon personal relations and depending on the local elites, also practiced a democratic way of conducting business.¹⁷

These branches had strong local bases. The messengers from Chengdu would first link up with *shenshi* in the local self-government organizations.¹⁸ These organizations, as we have shown in Chapter Four, had been booming after the Constitutional Reform. With these men acting as a social base, there was a wide range of preexisting organizations that already had sway in the local affairs and were ready to exert the power of mobilization.

¹⁵ *Baogao*, no.24, July 27, 1911

¹⁶ *Baogao*, no.25, July 29, 1911.

¹⁷ *Baogao*, no.22, July 23, 1911.

¹⁸ *Zugu* bureaus, *zizhihui*, *jiaoyuhui*, *nonghui*, *shanghui*, *quanxuesuo*, and various other organizations that were in charge of local public affairs.

The last characteristic common to all branches was the peaceful manner in which the movement was carried out. Indeed, most officials showed a supportive attitude toward the Railway Association. Magistrates were present at the meetings and sometimes provided protection; some even delivered speeches, concurring with the points that the elites made on nationalism.¹⁹ In E'mei, Fengjie, Yongchuan, Mingshan, Chongqing, and Mabian counties, the local officials' support for the branch helped to disarm oppositional attitudes toward the branches.²⁰ Thus, in the local people's minds, the Railway Protection Association branches were not a rioting group, but were legitimate and recognized by the local authorities.

With various levels of the Railway Protection Association established across Sichuan, the branches helped link all sorts of Sichuanese together into one political community that began to recognize alternative sources of authority. A Chengdu participant in the movement recalled, "At that time, we Sichuan people paid no attention to the grand announcements (*gaoshi*) issued by the Sichuan Governor-general, despite the fact that they carried his intrusive red stamp. On the other hand, we paid keen attention to the propaganda (*xuanchuan wu*) that was crafted by the Railway Protection Association. Even a small piece of paper (*xiao zhitiao*) with a few words on it, if posted in the streets, would gain enormous attention and attract a crowd."²¹

¹⁹ *Baogao*, no.26, July 31, 1911.

²⁰ *Sichuan jindaishi*, 481.

²¹ Yang Kajia, "Chuanlu fengchao zhi yanbian" [The development of Sichuan Railway Protection Incident] in *Zhonghua minguo kaiguo wushi zhounian wenxian*, 197. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 477.

The structure of the organization played an important role in linking people together across lines separating rural and urban, rich and poor, native and nonnative. In Chengdu, for example, branches affiliated with specific neighborhoods, occupations, social groups, and even gender mushroomed at an astonishing speed. The Children's Street Branch, the Women's Branch, the Students' Branch, the Mechanical Workers' and Printers' Branch, the Silk Guild Branch, and even the Beggars' Branch were all set up in less than a month's time. Chengdu residents eagerly joined the branches, attended public meetings, listened to speeches, read newsletters, and contributed money. Painters, elementary school children, sedan-chair carriers, rickshaw pullers, policemen, artisans, blind performers, and prostitutes all donated their savings.²² Though standing in different social statuses, their shared sentiment brought them together; at least at this moment, the gap between different social classes became less important.

In this environment, many people who had never been part of public affairs participated in politics. Elementary school students, for example, were an active part of the railway movement. In late June, Huang Xuedian and Huang Bin initiated the Children's Branch of Railway Protection Association, and three hundred elementary school students joined them as members.²³ In Jiading prefecture, a ten-year-old female student with the surname Ni donated her savings of five silver dollars, asking her teacher to mail the money to the Chengdu Railway Protection Association to support its

²² In Dai Zhili 1994, 695-729, 1015-1079.

²³ *Baogao*, no.12, July 11, 1911.

struggle.²⁴ In Huayang county, elementary school student Tang Shijun and Tang Shiqing brothers personally delivered their savings of five hundred cash to the secretary of general affairs, Jiang Sancheng, insisting Jiang take the money.²⁵

Women also participated in the movement. On June 28, 1911, the Women's Branch of Railway Protection Association was created. The initiator, Zhu Li (the wife of Zhu Shan), did a good job of imparting the original Association's principles to this branch. She called upon "all Sichuan women to be warmhearted about politics, and to contribute their power to the movement." These women claimed that "no matter how people would look at us and talk about us, we would swear not to change our principles."²⁶ In fact, it was raining hard on the day the Women's Branch was established. The female attendees, "covering their heads with their hands, wading through mud, their dresses soaked by the rain and dampened by water," insisted on attending the meeting. The meeting nominated representatives to Beijing and to Hunan, Hubei, and Guangdong to extend and mobilize more people. Zhu Li took the responsibility willingly and claimed that "whether going down to hot water or going across fire (*futangdaohuo*), I will definitely do the job without hesitation (*yiburongci*)."²⁷ After this, sub-branches of the Women's Branch kept growing.²⁸

²⁴ *Baogao*, no.36, August 20, 1911.

²⁵ *Baogao*, no.8, July 5, 1911.

²⁶ *Baogao*, no.24, July 27, 1911.

²⁷ *Baogao*, no.10, July 7, 1911.

²⁸ *Baogao*, no.31, August 10, 1911. On July 14, at the founding meeting of the sub-branch at the East District of Chengdu, a blind woman who heard about the news came to the meeting hall, asking others to write down her name. In Chongqing, the sub-branch of

The movement also crossed ethnic and religious boundaries. On June 28, more than four hundred Chengdu Muslims created their own branch. They claimed that “Chinese Muslims (*huimin*) are also national citizens (*guomin*) and the branch was formed out of our sincerest heart.”²⁹ A Qiang minority tribal leader (*tusi*) by the name of He Xiegong from Maozhou donated the revenue he obtained from collecting grain and taxes on horses, noting, “If we put all of our needles together we will have an ax.... If we feel strongly about this now, we will in the future avoid the fate of losing our country.”³⁰ In Hanzhou, after the nationalization policy was announced, Christians went to churches and prayed for Sichuan for more than a dozen continuous days.³¹ In Chengdu, Buddhist and Daoist monks had been earnest participants from the very beginning of the movement.³² In sum, Buddhist and Daoist monks, Christians, tribal leaders of the Qiang minority, and even Manchus, all participated with enthusiasm. A new political community was forming.

Lower-class people for the first time tasted the experience of being political activists. As noted above, working people of many occupations eagerly participated. A sedan-chair carrier donated his hard-earned money to the movement, proclaiming that

the Woman’s Branch had as many as four hundred people, many of whom donated their savings. In sum, for the first time in Sichuan, women who had been sitting in a household for their entire lives were awakened and became political activists.

²⁹ *Baogao*, no.29, August 6, 1911.

³⁰ *Baogao*, no.9, July 6; no.12, July 11, no.16, July 15, 1911.

³¹ *Baogao*, no.23, July 25.

³² *Baogao*, no.3, June 28; no.4, June 29, no.23, July 25, 1911.

“coolies are citizens too.”³³ Shopkeepers in Chengdu organized the “One Cash Association” (*Yiquan hui*), each member of which contributed one *wen* daily to the Railway Protection Association.³⁴ For *Yiquan hui*, one did not have to be a shareholder of the company, nor did one have to own property or have status. Rather, it was their common agenda that linked these people together. By way of common political ideas and activities, a new sense of sociability and political egalitarianism emerged.

Li Jieren in his novel *Great Wave* portrayed a small merchant, Boss Fu, who exemplified Foucault’s claims about movement as spectacle. Fu sold umbrellas in Chengdu for a living. Exhilarated about the movement, Boss Fu put his umbrella business aside in the summer of 1911 and eagerly followed the lectures given by movement leaders. Fu found that “those big gentry (*da laoye*), who had never been respectful to people like me, now stand side by side with me.” Previously, they “always used a language that was so opaque and incomprehensible. Now, they are talking to *us* in a way we understand! They treat us as equals!”³⁵ Boss Fu then joined the branch on his street and remained a solid supporter of the movement all the way through. Even though in real life, a small-time merchant like Fu was unlikely to have been a shareholder because railway tax was levied on land tax, Fu was passionate about the railway movement because it offered him an opportunity to exert his rights as a political citizen and offered him an occasion to be the *da laoye*’s equal. That sense of honor and empowerment would not soon be forgotten. At least during the movement, Boss Fu was transformed

³³ *Baogao*, no.33, August 14, 1911.

³⁴ *Baogao*, no.16, July 15.

³⁵ Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 290.

from a passive subject of the empire to an active citizen of a blooming new polity. The experience taught Boss Fu to pursue the ideas of “self-determination” (*zhu*) and “rights” (*quan*). It made him realize his equal citizenship status with those educated elite.

Therefore, in addition to the fact that the railway movement was a movement to protect the country’s sovereignty and to promote nationalism, it also seemed like a politically enlightening movement.

In sum, the ideas of the railway movement seem to have helped people see the world in different ways and helped to create a political solidarity among Sichuanese. An article in the *Newsletter* summarized:

After the establishment of the Railway Association, half a month has passed. Even though we have not heard anything from Sheng Xuanhuai, ... we have, on the other hand, successfully formed a coalition of thousands of Sichuanese (*shuren*). We Sichuanese could be gathered with one request from Chengdu. These days, all the nearby counties and prefectures have set up branches and visited Chengdu.

In these branches, passionate (*rexue*) people are numerous. There is one who swore to fight for the people until the day he dies, one who cut his fingers to show his determination, and one who traveled 1,100 *li* (550 kilometers) in five days just to attend a gathering. There is the sixty-year-old man who devotes himself entirely to the branch, the thirteen-year-old girl who volunteered to represent the people and go to Beijing, and the child who sacrificed his snack money to donate it to the railway association. There are those who gave up their official titles to join the association, and those who gave up their property to join. The enthusiasm abounded.

From June 25 to July 1, the Division of General Affairs received 226 letters and sent out 260 letters. Altogether, the four divisions received more than 1,000 letters and sent out 900. Of course, the enthusiasm and hot blood that our men had were infinite and not all of that passion could be expressed in those limited publications. In addition, if we consider those who could not write to express their feelings, we know that the impact of the movement is huge. It is not an exaggeration to say that in this half a month, not a single day went by without meetings. There was not a single meeting that was attended by fewer than a thousand people.... Men or women, youngsters or old men, rich people or poor people, smart

people or stupid people, virtuous people or bad people, outsiders or foreigners, they all expressed that they share one heart and have one goal. We know that the treaty is selling out the country and we must break the treaty and recover the railways! ... Though passionate, we have no rioting behaviors and are fair. We have kept order. Long live the nation! Now, the people of our country are finally the Great National Citizens of a Constitutional and Civilized State!³⁶

Exaggerated as it might be, this summary does give us a sense of Sichuan people's activist engagement. Historian Lynn Hunt, in analyzing the French Revolution, argues: "Unity or coherence in the revolutionary experience came from common values and shared expectation of behaviors and the new political class was formed by its relationship to revolutionary politics as much as it formed them.... The political culture of movement was made up of symbolic practices, such as language, imagery, and gestures.... In many ways, the symbolic practices—the use of a certain rhetoric, the spread of certain symbols and rituals—called the new political class into existence; talk of national regeneration and festivals of federation, for instance, gave the new political elite a sense of unity and purpose."³⁷

This quotation is helpful for us in understanding the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement. In Sichuan, rather than a notion of political class derived from preexisting economic interests in the Marxian sense, it was the common purpose that held people from all different walks of life together and brought them into a community. Even though the propaganda and revolutionary language did not reflect the *realities* of revolutionary changes and conflicts, still, they helped shape the Sichuan people's

³⁶ *Baogao*, no.7, July 2.

³⁷ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 13.

perception of their interests and hence it became a means of persuasion, a way of “reconstituting the social and political world.”³⁸

II. The Secret Expansion: Personal and Secret Linkages (June 17-August 24)

The Chengdu movement’s elite not only used propaganda and formal organizations to construct solidarity among the Sichuan people; they also sought support from Sichuan’s preexisting secret society network, *paoge*. It was not just the Revolutionary Alliance (*Tongmenghui*) that had connections with *paoge*, as historians have always argued.³⁹ The leaders of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association also had a close and direct relation with the secret society leaders.

In particular, Luo Lun, a chief leader of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association, was in linkage to the *paoge*. Luo, born in 1876, came from a powerful family in Xichong county. First educated as a Confucian scholar, Luo became a *jueren* at the age of 23.⁴⁰ Luo Lun was said to be a leader of *paoge* in his hometown and well respected by his *paoge* brothers. During the railway movement, Luo Lun’s passionate style of speech, sharp commentaries, and radical manner all gave him a reputation as a true hero in Sichuan.

³⁸ Lynn Hunt, *Politics, Culture, and Class*, 24.

³⁹ In fact in the Chengdu plain, where the railway protection movement was the most heated, the influence of the Revolutionary Alliance was both weak and scattered. Source?

⁴⁰ In December 1905, Luo Lun became a history and literature teacher in the local Shunqing Middle School. In this school, Luo Lun was exposed to *Minbao*, where he was exposed to the idea of both *minquan* and the idea of anti-Manchuism.

Besides making speeches and publishing articles, at a rather early stage of the railway movement, Luo Lun linked up with the *paoge* and local *tuanlian* leaders. Even though Luo Lun's secret linkage with *paoge* was not as well documented as his role as a public figure, there is enough evidence to suggest that Luo Lun was the true commanding force behind the extensive involvement of the secret societies in the railway movement. The famous *paoge* leader Wu Qingxi from Wenjiang county, for example, was excited after reading Luo Lun's speech at the founding meeting of the Railway Protection Association, which was published in *Shubao* in late June of 1911. Wu was determined to lead his troops to help Luo Lun and to fulfill his will in establishing "an independent Sichuan."⁴¹ Also, in July of 1911, Xiang Dizhang, a former student at the Sichuan School of Law and Administration (*Sichuan fazheng xuetao*), was ordered by Zhang Lan and Peng Fen back to his hometown in Shuangliu county to establish its branch of the Railway Protection Association and was asked to link up with all the possible *paoge* members.⁴² In Huayang county, it was the famous *paoge* leader Qin Zaigeng who set up that branch of the Railway Protection Association.⁴³ Again, in Chongning county, Gao Zhaolin, who made a public speech at the opening meeting of their branch of the Railway Protection Association, was also a famous *paoge* leader.⁴⁴

⁴¹ Viewed from <http://travel.mipang.com/bible/65226> (August 2009).

⁴² Viewed from <http://baike.baidu.com/view/2579671.htm> (August 2009).

⁴³ "Qin Zaigeng" [Qin Zaigeng] in *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu* [The Record of the campaigns of Sichuan martyrs] (Chongqing: Qiyu shuju, 1928), vol.2, 12b-13b.

⁴⁴ "Gao Zhaolin" [Gao Zhaolin] in *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu* [The Record of the campaigns of Sichuan martyrs] (Chongqing: Qiyu shuju, 1928), vol.2, 40a-40b. Also in Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*, 120.

The link of Chengdu's Railway Protection Association to the *paoge* was hard to deny. Even Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng sensed it. Zhao later claimed that he discovered a letter, written by Luo, in Pu Dianjun's home, indicating that Luo had linked up with the *paoge* and was prepared for rebellion. Later, explaining why the Chengdu elite had to be arrested, Zhao singled out Luo as the rebellious gentleman (*nishen*) who had connections to bandits. Zhao wrote, "All these rebel leaders claimed that they came over to Chengdu to save Luo Lun's life. Such a secret link [between Luo Lun and the bandits] is not known by people outside of Chengdu. Even some who are in the Railway Protection Association in Chengdu do not know. The reason I arrested Luo Lun is because he was rebelling against the dynasty.... He only uses railway protection as a cover-up."⁴⁵

Not coincidentally, Duanfang, the Imperial Commissioner of Yue-Han Chuan-Han railways, also believed that Luo Lun was a rebel against the dynasty. He noted that "Luo Lun was the true commander of the Railway Protection Association; Zhang Lan and Peng Fen and others were just assisting Luo."⁴⁶ Foreign accounts also documented Luo Lun's leadership over local *paoge* leaders in Sichuan. In a letter from the Chongqing customs officer to the Beijing customs tariffs officer, Luo Lun was named the leader of

⁴⁵ "Zhao Erfeng tongchi yanshuo daibu luo lun liyou zha fu quanmin ge" [The Zhao Erfeng explanation in capturing Luo Lun and the propaganda song] (September 19, 1911) in *Dang'an xuanbian*, 182-183.

⁴⁶ Duanfang, "Duanfang zhi neige," [Duanfang to the cabinet], in Dai Zhili 1994, 1113.

the rebelling force.⁴⁷ Another report, also sent from Chongqing Customs to Beijing Customs, reported that Luo Lun was “the most dangerous figure in the Railway Protection Association”.⁴⁸ In addition, Huang Shou, quoting from his interview sources of *paoge* leaders Sun Zepei and Wu Qingxi, stated that Sun and Wu “admired Luo Lun in particular” (*weidu fu Lun*).⁴⁹

Among the many *paoge* leaders that Luo Lun and the Railway Protection Association linked up with, the most crucial figure was Hou Baozhai, whose *paoge* network was a key resource for the Railway Protection Association leaders. Hou Baozhai was born in 1851. All his ancestors were peasants of Xinjin county; the Hou household had one room and ten *mu* (less than a hectare) of land. To make ends meet he had smuggled salt, sold tong oil (*tongyou*), and transferred timber. Eventually Hou became the leader of the swift hands (*kuaiban*) runners and the police (*buban*) runners. It was at this time that he first organized a *Gelaohui* organization called the “New West Leader” (*Xinxigong*). Hou Baozhai had a reputation for being righteous (*yi*) and generous (*zhangyi shucai*). “Whoever encountered a lawsuit, no matter if he was close to Hou or not, [could count on] Hou to offer him money as support.”⁵⁰ Hou was also warmhearted.

⁴⁷ “Chongqing haiguan daili shuiwu si shitelaoqi zhi Beijing haiguan shuiwu zongshu an’ge lian de xin” [Letter of the Chongqing Customs officer to the Beijing Customs officer] July 1911-November 1911. In *Dang’an xuanbian*, 311.

⁴⁸ “Chongqing haiguan daili shuiwusi cheng Beijing haiguan zong shuiwusi de baogao” [Report from the Chongqing Customs officer to the Beijing Customs officer] November 11-May 1912. In *Dang’an xuanbian*, 367.

⁴⁹ Huang Shou, unpublished memoir.

⁵⁰ Hou Lishi [Wife of Hou Baozhai], “Hou Baozhai fuzi can bei mouhai yuanbai” [The petition on the brutal murder of Hou Baozhai and his son], in *Xinjin dang’an*, [Xinjin county archival records] “Minguo” [Republican period] 138, no.12 (1911).

He was always willing to help others solve their problems and did not avoid responsibilities. In 1878, Hou became one of the chief *baozhangs* at the Xinjin county seat, and soon became the chief training officer of the *tuanlian* bureau of Xinjin. From this point until his tenure ended in the early 1900s, Xinjin “was always in good order.” Starting in 1904, Hou united nine groups of *Gelaohui* under his leadership called “the nine groups” (*Jiucheng tuanti*). Hou Baozhai became the chief leader of this allied association. In the fall of 1907, Hou was accused of “conducting rebellion,” but after the Sichuan Governor-general sent in troops to investigate, Hou was excused because of lack of evidence.⁵¹

In late June and early July of 1911, as the Railway Protection Movement extended to the outlying counties in Sichuan, Hou’s Xinjin group also formed a branch of the Railway Protection Association. In the historical novel *Great Wave*, novelist Li Jieren, though in an imaginative way, wrote that Luo Lun did send people as messengers from Chengdu to link up with the important west Sichuan *paoge* leader, Hou Baozhai from Xinjin county.⁵² Hou was quickly elected the chair of the branch and from then on, he became an adamant supporter of the railway movement. Xinjin county archival sources demonstrate that Hou Baozhai joined the railway movement because of his strong “anger” (*fen*) at the way the Qing court was treating Sichuan. Outraged at the Qing’s act

⁵¹ “Hou Bangfu” [Hou Bangfu, i.e., Hou Baozhai] in *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu*, vol.2, 41a-42a.

⁵² Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 320.

of taking away Sichuan people's "railway rights," Hou responded to the call of Luo Lun and formed his force out of "righteous anger" (*yifen*).⁵³

In mid-July, Hou Baozhai quickly took action. Using the excuse of celebrating his sixtieth birthday, Hou invited all *paoge* leaders from the nine groups to come. At this time, he and other important *paoge* leaders had already developed ideas about rebelling against the state. In particular, Qin Zaigeng, a *paoge* leader and a militia leader from Huayang county, was the most radical. After much discussion, they all agreed to go back to their home counties, to "be prepared and ready as called upon," and to "carry out the matter uniformly" (*yizhi jinxing*). If they "could not gather enough people to attack Chengdu at one time," they would first "occupy southern and eastern Sichuan, control this rich area, and then devise ways to get Chengdu later."⁵⁴ Also at this meeting, Qin Zaigeng became the leader who would be in charge of the attacking of eastern Sichuan, and Hou Baozhai in charge of the south.⁵⁵ In late August, when an illiterate person asked Hou Baozhai the meaning of Zhao Erfeng's announcement, Hou purposely misconstrued the meaning of the announcement, which in reality spoke simply about "keeping order." Instead, Hou told the illiterate man that Zhao was "about to kill people" (*kai hongshan*) in Xinjin. Even today, a local ballad from Xinjin rants, "Hou Baozhai looked at the

⁵³ Xinjin Jiucheng tuanti ji gejie tongbao [The Nine groups of Xinjin and other compatriots], "Da Han Chuannan baolu tongzhahui zhang Hou jun Baozhai ji zi Anting yunan gongbu" [Announcement of the murders of the leader of south Sichuan Railway Protection Association Hou Baozhai and his son Hou Anting], in *Xinjin dang'an*, [Xinjin county archival records] "Minguo" [Republican period] 138, no.13 (1911).

⁵⁴ "Hou Bangfu" [Hou Bangfu, i.e., Hou Baozhai] in *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu*, vol.2, 41b-42a.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

announcement, inauspicious, inauspicious, and inauspicious!” (*Hou Baozhai kan gaoshi: xiong xiong xiong!*)⁵⁶ Importantly, after September 7, it was in Hou’s base, Xinjin, that the most heated battle between the Qing armies and the Sichuan railway protection armies was fought.

The Railway Protection Association leaders had indeed formed a strong link with the local *paoge*. Although it is unclear how much these *paoge* leaders were influenced by the new ideas propagandized by the Chengdu leaders, they were at least exposed to them. Some, for example Wu Qingxi, were excited by the notion of self-determination hinted at in these publications. In any case, the railway association’s power was expanded and their collaboration with the local people developed. At the same time, they received increasing pressure from Beijing.

III. Pressures from Beijing and the Special Shareholders Meeting (June 17-August 24)

Pressures from Beijing

While the Chengdu elite were forming solidarity among the people in Sichuan (either via secret links or public organizations), their relationship with Beijing was increasingly strained. The June 1 Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang “Ge Telegram” (*Gedian*)—which ordered all Chuan-Han Railway capital to be nationalized and no shareholders to withdraw investment—had triggered Chengdu leaders to establish the Railway Protection Association. After the founding of the association on June 17, struggles between Chengdu and Beijing were intensified more than ever. Each side was

⁵⁶ Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi*, 114.

trying to rally people to advance its own cause. The court and the railway association competed with each other to gain support from the Sichuan provincial officials in Chengdu, the Sichuan metropolitan officials based in Beijing, and the Yichang Branch of the railway company.

First, the Railway Protection Association was successful in securing support from the acting Sichuan provincial governor-general, Wang Renwen. Wang, the former provincial treasurer during Zhao Erxun's tenure, became the acting governor-general of Sichuan in January 1911 after Zhao Erxun left for the post of Manchurian governor. A native of Yunnan who had served in Sichuan for a number of years, Wang was on good terms with the Sichuan elites. After the May 9 edict nationalizing the railways, Wang endorsed the Railway Protection Association leaders and continually helped transfer their petitions to the court. On June 17, when movement leaders Luo Lun, Deng Xiaoke, Wu Songsheng, Meng Gongfu, Zhu Shan, and others marched to the provincial government to present their petition, Wang received them and claimed: "My position as governor-general is to serve the people. As my people have a grief (*yin*), I shall address the problem to the court on my people's behalf. If I cannot succeed, I will resign!"⁵⁷ After the founding of the railway association, Wang Renwen started speaking up on behalf of the Sichuan elite even more aggressively. In his June 19 memorial to the court, he impeached (*tanhe*) Sheng Xuanhuai, asking the court to "punish him seriously, using the

⁵⁷ Peng Fen, *Xinhai xunQing zhengbian fayuan ji*. This quote is from Wei Yingtao and Zhao Qing, vol.1, 337.

most severe law of the dynasty.”⁵⁸ Wang argued that the treaty conceded to by Sheng Xuanhuai was one that “sells out both national sovereignty (*guoquan*) and railway rights (*luquan*).” In this treaty, “all benefits belong to the foreigners and all losses are to be assumed by us.” The loss was “so severe that any intelligent people, after reading the treaty, could not help crying bitterly.”⁵⁹ On June 27, Wang forwarded Luo Lun’s lengthy critique of the foreign loan treaty to the court. In the memorial sent along with the critique, Wang reiterated his position: “If the Department of Posts and Communications coerces Sichuan people to follow its orders, the only fate left for the Sichuanese is death.”⁶⁰

Of course, officials at the court in Beijing were not thrilled by what they received from Wang. The court criticized everything that Wang Renwen wrote and accused him of “continuously sending in bad memorials” (*yizai duzou*). It also threatened Wang that “if there were any chaos, you would be singled out to take the full responsibility.”⁶¹ At the same time, the court rushed Zhao Erfeng back to Chengdu from the Sichuan-Tibet border, both to “extinguish the people’s agitation” and to “severely punish the troublemakers.”⁶²

⁵⁸ Zhou Shanpei, *Xinhai Sichuan shibian zhi wo* [Me in the 1911 upheaval]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 487.

⁵⁹ *Sichuan baolu tongzhihui dianwen yaolu* [Key telegrams of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association], 1-9. In Dai Zhili 1994, 752.

⁶⁰ “Wang Renwen zhi neige dian” (Telegram by Wang Renwen to the cabinet), in *Xinhai geming qianhou*, 121. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 487.

⁶¹ *Xuantong zhengji*, vol.56. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 488.

⁶² “Ji Chengdu Zhao zhijun Erfeng” [Letter to Governor Zhao Erfeng in Chengdu] in *Yuzhai cunghao*, vol.78. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 488.

Beijing was also marshalling support for its nationalization policy. First, Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang made sure they got support from the Sichuanese metropolitan officials. In fact, the failure and mismanagement of the Chuan-Han Railway Company had disheartened those officials. Gan Dazhang and Song Yuren, for example, were two Beijing-based officials who supported the central government in taking over all the existing railway capital and transferring it to Beijing. In June, Song Yuren sent in a petition to the Department of Posts and Communications, stating that “the nationalization of the railway will bring benefits for both the state and the people” (*guo yu min gongli*). Again, twice in June, Gan Dazhang and Song Yuren issued two petitions, pointing out the heavy *zugu* burden borne by the Sichuan people and the lack of progress in railroad construction, asking the Department of Posts and Communications to take over its leadership. To mitigate the conflict between Beijing and Chengdu, the Sichuan metropolitan officials proposed that the seven million taels of silver that was now reportedly held by the Railway Protection Association be used to build the section from Chengdu to Kuizhou. In this way, at least some part of the railway would be “built with the people’s capital (*mingu*) ... and foreigners would thus have no chance to interfere with this section.”⁶³

Upon hearing the two petitions, the Association was angry and it acted quickly. They denied that Gan was “appointed by the Sichuan people” and argued that “the numerous Sichuan shareholders and their opinions could not be reduced to the selfish

⁶³ *Xinhai geming qianhou*, 102-103. In Dai Zhili 1994, 750.

words of a dozen people.”⁶⁴ Chengdu believed that Gan and his clique should be denounced by the Chuan-Han Railway Company and the shareholders.⁶⁵ Additionally, Chengdu marshaled support from other Sichuan-born metropolitan officials, Zhao Xi and Hu Jun, to condemn the Gan clique’s acts.⁶⁶ A campaign was launched labeling the supporters of Sheng Xuanhuai as “traitors” to Sichuan.⁶⁷

As relying upon on Sichuan metropolitan officials was not entirely successful, Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang soon focused on converting Li Jixun, the manager of Yichang Branch of the Chuan-Han Railway Company to their cause. Li Jixun was maybe the most useful figure in the railway company. Yichang in Hubei province, because it was below the gorges and easily accessible by the river, was the place from which the railway was being built—in fact, the only place where construction was actually happening. Therefore, Li’s work and achievement made him an important voice in the whole struggle.

⁶⁴ *Sichuan baolu tongzhihui dianwen yaolu* [Key Telegrams of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association], 9. In Dai Zhili 1994, 752.

⁶⁵ *Minlibao*, July 9, 1911. In Dai Zhili 1994, 759-761.

⁶⁶ *Baogao*, no.20, July, 20, 1911.

⁶⁷ Even more, their hometown associations (*tongxianghui*) decided to strip Gan, Shi, and Song of their membership. In fact, even Gan and Song realized that the hatred toward them was so strong that they asked the Department of Posts and Communications to order Wang Renwen to protect their homes and ancestral tombs. *Baogao*, no.4, June 29; no.9, July 6; and no.31, August 10. Also, “Letter from Gan Dazhang to Song Yuren”, in *Xinhai geming qianhou*, 113, in Dai Zhili 1994, 770.

On July 5, 1911, Li Jixun agreed to accept Beijing's proposal, that is, to take the seven million taels of silver in Chengdu to build the section from Chengdu to Kuizhou.⁶⁸ Duanfang and Sheng Xuanhuai quickly devised a number of methods to make sure that Li stayed on their side.⁶⁹ After Li Jixun made up his mind to support the nationalization

⁶⁸ At the beginning of the railway movement in early June, Li Jixun resisted the nationalization policy. On June 18, 1911, after receiving Chengdu's directive asking him "not to give up the railways" and to "continue the construction of the railways," Li accepted the order and urged Chengdu to treat the capital of the railway (*lukuan*) as something more important than the possession of the railway (*luquan*). Li argued that the bottom line for the struggle was to "keep the capital." In *Chuanlu shouhui guoyou wanglai yaodian*, 13-14. Li also got the people of Yichang to back him up. In *Yiju laidian* [Telegram from Yichang Bureau]. Original pamphlet found by the author at Sichuan Provincial Library, no page number. Also in Dai Zhili 1994, 740-743.

On June 27, Li sent a telegram to Chengdu, saying that he would personally go to Beijing and discuss the matter with the metropolitan officials from Sichuan. It was during this trip that Li Jixun changed his opinion. Throughout this time, Chengdu kept explaining to Li Jixun that "if we cannot break the treaty of foreign loans, there is no way that we can talk about the railway [and its capital]." In *Sichuan baolu tongzhahui dianwen yaolu*, 16. Also in Dai Zhili 1994, 743-744.

However, Li Jixun had a different take. Throughout the years, Li had felt rather constrained and somewhat unsupported by leaders at the Chengdu headquarters. As the manager of the only branch that was actually constructing rail lines for the Chuan-Han Railway, Li understood what it was like to have little power in allocating railway capital or appointing personnel, even for his own branch. Having suffered from the bureaucratic working style of the Chengdu headquarters for years, Li had had enough. Finally, on July 5, 1911, Li Jixun agreed to accept Beijing's proposal, that is, to take the seven million taels of silver in Chengdu to build the section from Chengdu to Kuizhou. "Ji Wuchang Duan dachen" [Sheng Xuanhuai Letter to Duanfang], on July 5, in *Yuzhai cungao*, vol.78, 11. In Dai Zhili 1994, 772.

⁶⁹ Duanfang proposed that Li Jixun remain the chief manager of the Yichang Branch of the company. Three days later, Duanfang followed up with another telegram, asking Sheng to support Li and his continuing construction of the Kuizhou-Zigui section. On July 27, Li's appointment was confirmed after Duanfang and Li met in person. In "Duan Dachen laidian" [Telegram from Duanfang] on July 13, July 16, and July 13, in *Yuzhai cungao*, vol.78, 18-19, 11, and 25-26. In Dai Zhili 1994, 773.

policy, he served as its proponent.⁷⁰ At this time, Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang, allied with Li Jixun and the Beijing-based Sichuan officials, were confident that the issue in Sichuan would be solved easily. Not only would they successfully nationalize the railways, but they would also transfer all the capital in Chengdu into the central treasury. Starting from early July, a systematic investigation of the accounts of the Yichang Branch was launched and Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang demanded that the accounts of all other branches of the Chuan-Han Railway Company be investigated. In sharp contrast, the future for the Chengdu leaders looked terrible.

It was at this moment that the Special Shareholder Meeting (*Tebie gudong hui*) took place. The decision to convene an “All Sichuan Shareholder Meeting” on August 5 had been made on May 22 after the Qing announced the decision to stop levying *zugu*, but as time moved to August and the situation became increasingly urgent, Chengdu

⁷⁰ On July 8, the Yichang Branch, led by Li Jixun, sent a telegram to Chengdu, asking Chengdu to give the railway to Beijing. Li urged his fellow Sichuanese to think of the option Beijing offered. “I urge you, my fellow men, to think this: if all stock of the Chuan-Han Railway Company is converted into national stock and every year we have a dividend of 6 percent and are allowed to share the profits (*fenhong*), and if the state takes care of everything—the used money, the lost money, and the remaining money, and even the money for sending students abroad to study—then this [nationalization policy] is only beneficial to shareholders.” In *Yiju laidian*, no page number.

Again, on July 15, being “willing to use the current *zugu* to build the section from Yichang to Zigui,” Li Jixun again sent a telegram to Chengdu, urging the Chengdu elite to think about the state’s offer. He wrote: “The state’s policy is adamant and it seems that we have no wiggle room.... The central government, besides being willing to repay us the construction money used in Yichang, is likely to give non-profitable stock for the money used in Chengdu, Chongqing and other Branch bureaus and the money spent in Yichang before the construction started. Whenever I wanted to say something [hoping to gain us a better deal], they always replied, ‘You guys opened construction late, wasted a lot of capital, and lost a great deal too.’” Under these circumstances, Li told Chengdu: “Striking a better deal is the key.” In “Ji Wuchang Duan dachen” [Sheng Xuanhuai Letter to Duanfang], on July 15, in *Yuzhai cunqao*, vol.78, 28. In Dai Zhili 1994, 775.

leaders were determined to take the opportunity of this meeting to recharge themselves and resist the court. The Special Shareholder Meeting was *the* turning point in the whole railway protection movement struggle.

The Shareholder Meeting

In the days leading up to the meeting, the Chengdu elite took great efforts to work out their rhetoric, which concentrated on constitutionalism. On July 31, the Chengdu leaders drafted “Our Opinions on Following the Previous Emperor’s Edict and Keeping the Railway Commercially Managed,” which served as the outline for the August 5 meeting. The outline enumerated the key reasons that Sichuanese had to fight for their railways.⁷¹ Importantly, the outline repeatedly emphasized that the treaty was violating the rights of the shareholders, which would eventually violate the rights of the nation and the national citizens as a whole. In addition, Chengdu leaders emphasized that if they gave up their fight for the ownership of the railway company, the treacherous treaty would never be abandoned. The outline also concretely proposed four matters that were to be discussed at the August 5 shareholder meeting. The first was to ask the court to let the Sichuan people commercially manage their railways. The second was to ask the court

⁷¹ First, it was because Sheng Xuanhuai paid no respect to the cabinet and no respect to the legislative branch (the organ that represented the people), which “directly destroys our constitutional politics.” Second, it was because the policy of nationalizing the railways betrayed the previous emperor’s edict, violated laws, robbed people of their properties, and thus was barbaric and presumptuous to a degree never before heard of by the people. Third, it was because Beijing’s method in dealing with Sichuan people was unacceptable: Sheng Xuanhuai and his people ignored the letters sent by the Governor-general [Wang Renwen], ignored the petition of the Sichuan metropolitan officials, and ignored the begging from the people. In Dai Zhili 1994, 806-807.

to stop levying the old and new “voluntary surcharge taxes” (*juanshu*) so that Sichuan could have money to help build the railways. The third was to propose to levy a “one cash tax” (*yiwen juan*) to raise money for building the railways, and the fourth was to set up a bureau to investigate and clear up the accounts of the company (*qingsuan jiguan*).⁷²

Obviously, Beijing would not let Chengdu go this easily. During the time when the Chengdu elite were trying their best to organize their forces, Sheng Xuanhuai and Duanfang were also marshalling a force to work against the Chengdu elite. On July 28, Duanfang telegraphed Sheng Xuanhuai, asking him to issue the order to Sichuan officials to prevent any “confrontational mass gathering.” Duanfang proposed: “We could secretly change the meeting time and postpone the meeting, to let the police department and the office of the Sichuan treasurer check the legitimacy of the meeting. If the meeting is the legal shareholder meeting, then it will be allowed to be convened. If the meeting is for the Railway Protection Association, which was well propagandized in newspapers and which would call upon ten or twenty thousand people to resist the government and threaten order, then we should strictly forbid it.”⁷³ In his second telegram to Sheng Xuanhuai on that day, Duanfang claimed that the Chengdu elite had sent out a number of pamphlets that were “unreasonable and rebellious” (*xiaozhang*). Duanfang then asked Sheng to rush Zhao Erfeng to Chengdu to control the elites.⁷⁴ Both telegrams were also sent to Prince Zaize, making sure that the cabinet and the court

⁷² In Dai Zhili 1959, 244-247.

⁷³ “Duan Dachen laidian” [Telegram from Duanfang], on July 28, in *Yuzhai cunqao*, vol.78, 37-38. In Dai Zhili 1994, 791-792.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

supported their stand. On July 30, the central government issued an edict, ordering Zhao Erfeng to arrive in Chengdu before the day of the shareholder meeting and declaring all meetings besides the shareholder meeting to be banned. If any of the illegal meetings were held, they should be quickly dispersed and all leaders arrested and punished severely.⁷⁵

All these attempts from Beijing to disrupt the meeting did not create much trouble for the Sichuanese. Well prepared and well organized, the Chengdu elite opened the Sichuan Shareholder Meeting on August 5 on Yuefu Street, where the railway company was located. Seven hundred people attended the meeting. They voted Luo Lun the chairperson and Zhang Lan and Yan Kai the vice chairpersons of the meeting. On the afternoon of August 5, the freshly arrived Acting Governor-General Zhao Erfeng also attended the meeting and gave his “speech” (*xunci*). Zhao, after having consulted with Wang Renwen and Zhou Shanpei (who were both supportive of the Chengdu elite) on the railway matter,⁷⁶ claimed that he would “do his best within his power to help sort things out.”⁷⁷ It seemed that things started moving in the direction that the Chengdu elite wanted.⁷⁸

After August 5, Chengdu leaders’ fights against the central state became even more intensified. On August 7, after Duanfang’s “Jia Telegram”—in which Duanfang claimed that “all the activists are the local troublemakers (*difang xishi zhiren*) and the fair

⁷⁵ *Xuantong zhengji*, vol.57, 6. In Dai Zhili 1994, 794.

⁷⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 784-787.

⁷⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 816.

⁷⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 811-815.

and righteous gentry managers (*gongzheng shendong*) are actually not supporting them”—was read out loud at the Shareholder Meeting, representatives were infuriated. At the meeting, Chengdu leaders quickly drafted a telegram to Duanfang, accusing him of “arbitrarily interfering with the operation of the shareholder meeting.” By using the rhetoric of constitutionalism, they claimed that only those such as themselves who were following public opinion (*yulun*) could be considered “righteous” (*gongzheng*). Notably, even Zhao Erfeng supported the railway leaders and agreed that Duanfang’s telegram was “truly unreasonable” (*cheng wuli*). Zhao agreed to forward the Chengdu elite’s rebuttal to Duanfang and stated that he personally disagreed with Duanfang’s stand in the Jia Telegram.⁷⁹

On August 8, a new site of confrontation emerged. On this day, Zhao Erfeng broke the secret that Li Jixun had already switched to the side of Duanfang and Sheng Xuanhuai. The reaction to this notice was, predictably, “huge anger” (*da fen*). The shareholders’ meeting refused to back down, but met Beijing head on. On August 9, the agenda was to discuss “the Li Jixun problem.” Luo Lun and seven others marched to Zhao Erfeng’s office and ask Zhao to forward to the court their letter for the impeachment of Sheng Xuanhuai and Li Jixun. As a collective decision by all shareholders, Li Jixun was fired. The shareholders then asked Zhao Erfeng to order Li to hand in all paperwork within ten days. After August 9, Li’s “betraying behavior” was widely publicized in propaganda newspapers in Chengdu. It also led the Sichuan people in an increasingly radical direction.

⁷⁹ In *Baogao*, no.31, August 10, 1911 and in Dai Zhili 1994, 824.

Next, the meeting took up another issue on which to challenge Beijing—the *juanshu* tax. On August 11, the shareholders discussed the matter of not submitting the old and new “voluntary surcharge taxes” (*juanshu*) in order to alleviate the financial pressure of the Sichuanese so that they would have money to build the railway: If the magistrate tells *shenliang* that they could not submit standard tax (*dingliang*) before submitting *juanshu*, the *shenliang* should then put their standard tax in the county and prefectual seats to demonstrate that they were not resisting tax or rebelling.⁸⁰ The Chengdu elite had devised ways to carry out an old type of protest—tax resistance—by using new organs—local assemblies—that had emerged in the Constitutional reform.⁸¹

On August 12, the shareholders discussed the matter of using local elite assemblies, urban and rural, to levy a “one cash tax” (*yiwén juan*) to raise money for the railway. “People..., no matter rich or poor, men or women, should voluntarily contribute one cash every day to help the railway construction.... In every city, town, and *xiang*, there should be a managing bureau (*jingshou ju*).... Once people contribute money, they will be considered shareholders.” The levy and collection responsibilities were assigned to city and town councils and, in rural areas, the countryside gentry (*xiangdong*).

Without doubt, the Special Shareholder Meeting was a turning point for the Railway Protection Association in the railway protection movement. The Qing officials tried to prevent it from happening, but the meeting went ahead anyway. The court’s attempt to interfere only led to increased anger from the Sichuan people. The elites in

⁸⁰ *Dang’an huibian*, 165-167.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

particular became more alienated from the court and they used new Constitutional organs of government to fight the state. The meeting became increasingly radicalized. With the meeting, the Chengdu elite succeeded in solidifying the unity that had formed and mobilizing the emotions of the Sichuanese to another level. After the Special Shareholder Meeting, Sichuanese were emboldened more than ever.

The Climax: Strikes and Taxes Resistance (August 24-September 7)

The struggles between Beijing and Chengdu continued. The shareholder meeting had decided to fire Li Jixun as the manager of the railway company's Yichang Branch, but Sheng Xuanhuai, Duanfang, and Huguang Governor-general Ruicheng argued otherwise. They asked the Qing court to keep Li Jixun in his position and asked the court to order Zhao Erfeng to suppress the agitation in Sichuan.

On August 23, as soon as Zhao Erfeng received the edict that ordered Li Jixun to remain in his post, he forwarded it to the Special Shareholder Meeting. After the vice chairperson Yan Kai announced it, people at the meeting were infuriated: they “cried, shouted, cursed, hit their chests, stamped on the floor (*dunzu*), and made speeches.... At that moment, there were people shouting about carrying out a market strike (*bashi*), some talked about letting students organize a school strike (*bake*), some shouted not to pay the commercial tax (*lishui*), and others argued to use the land tax to replace *zugu*. They cried bitterly, hoping the court would see their points.”⁸² At the end of day, the shareholders decided to carry out a market strike and a student strike.

⁸² “Duan dachen laidian” [Telegram from Duanfang] August 23, 1911. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 495.

Chengdu residents responded enthusiastically to the pamphlets, distributed around the city the next day, calling on people to strike. Commoners took part in the market strike; all shops were shut down and all trades discontinued in support of the movement, despite the heavy economic cost to the strikers. The city had never known such stillness:

The sound of gongs and drums in the Joy Teahouse (*Yuelai xiyuan*) and Elegant Garden (*Ke yuan*), the pure singing in other teahouses, the cries of business in Drum Tower Street, and waiters' voices in restaurants all disappeared. Even the noise of the weaving machines on Half Street (*Banbian jie*) and Horse Riding Street, and the jingling of hammers in the jewelry stores on Golden Ware Street (*Dajin jie*), which could be heard throughout the day, were stopped. The hawkers also stripped the goods from their sheds and stalls.⁸³

Even Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng commented that the people had formed a solidarity in the market strike and the school strike.⁸⁴

The Qing court, watchful of what was happening in Chengdu, ordered Zhao Erfeng to “effectively suppress the movement” (*qieshi tanya*).⁸⁵ Zhao and his subordinates did their best to persuade Chengdu people to open the market. However, because “the suspicion and misunderstanding of the people was already so strong, they could not be persuaded by any reasonable cause.”⁸⁶

⁸³ Shi Tiyan, “Yi Chengdu baolu yundong,” [Remembering the railway protection movement], in *Xinhai geming huiyilu* [Memoirs of the 1911 Revolution] (Beijing: Wenshi ziliao chubanshe, 1961), vol.3, 57. Translation quoted from Wang Di, *Street Culture*, 214.

⁸⁴ In Dai Zhili 1959, 277.

⁸⁵ *Xuantong zhengji*, vol.58. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 496.

⁸⁶ In Dai Zhili 1959, 281.

To protect themselves from being falsely accused of taking up rebellion, Chengdu leaders invented safe ways to conduct their movement. Commoners occupied the streets and with the elites' support built "altars to the Guangxu emperor" (*Xianhuang tai*), who, though dead since 1908, was considered an important proponent of local ownership of Sichuan railroads. The elite issued "memorial tablets" (*Shengwei pai*) for the deceased emperor, which were displayed in all households and shops within days. Also, matching couplets were pasted on commoners' doors, reading "national policies should follow public opinion; railways should be run by the local people" (*shuzheng gongzhu yulun; tielu zhungui shangban*)—a phrase taken from the Guangxu emperor's edict. On every street, people burned incense and worshiped at the altars day and night.⁸⁷ Officials did not dare show disrespect for the deceased emperor by traveling past them. As Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng acknowledged, "Any attempts to travel in sedan chairs and horses on the street will give the commoners an excuse to oppose their officials. They have the Guangxu emperor's tablets as their amulet."⁸⁸

Thrilled that the people were now mobilized, the Chengdu movement elites were careful to keep the movement peaceful. A public announcement was directed at restraining the masses. First, there was to be no gathering on the street, second, no rebellion, third, no attacking the churches, fourth, no humiliating officials and the government, and fifth, oil, salt, firewood, rice and all other basic foods should be sold as

⁸⁷ Wang Di, *Street Culture*, 215-216.

⁸⁸ In Dai Zhili 1959, 276-277.

usual. The elites tried to keep the movement rational and orderly, even when confronting state power.⁸⁹

Importantly, the market strike and student strike did not only happen in Chengdu; Sichuanese from other counties staged strikes as well. The Literary Circle (*xuejie*) Association on September 2 held a meeting in Chengdu that resulted in students from Fushun, Ziyang, Youyang, Hejiang, Neijiang, Santai and other counties going back to their homes to organize the movement, hoping to form a solidarity of all Sichuan people.⁹⁰ The Literary Circle and Commercial Circle decided that unless their goal—to protect the railways and break the treaty (*baolu poyue*)—was achieved, they would never go back to school or open their shops. Quickly, the strikes spread to Qiongzhou and Yazhou in the south, to Mianzhou in the west, to Shunqing in the north, and to Rongxian and Longchang in the east. For a radius of a thousand *li* (500 kilometers) from Chengdu, in market towns and county seats, shops were closed.⁹¹ In Xindu county, local militias were stationed in the county seat. Shops were closed and half of the people had joined the *Tongzhihui*. In Chongning county and Xinfan county, shops were all closed except for those that sold basic foods. Market strikes also occurred in Deyang, Suiding, Xuzhou, Jiading, Renshou, Ziyang, Chongqing, Wanxian, Qianwei, and Zigong.⁹²

⁸⁹ “Sichuan baolu tongzhihui gongqi” [Public notice of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association]. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 497.

⁹⁰ “Xuejie huiyi huizhi” [Collected transcripts of the meetings in the literary circle], *Xigubao* no.40. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 498-499.

⁹¹ In Dai Zhili 1959, 277 and 312.

⁹² *Sichuan jindaishi*, 498-499.

Xigubao published a commentary (*shiping*) praising the political consciousness and skill of Sichuanese in their formulation of a strong alliance and organization of strikes, and raved about their persistence, enthusiasm, and ability to keep order in such a dangerous time. The reporter argued that Sichuanese participated in the railway movement voluntarily even though “many have had to sacrifice their meager income for basic food and clothes.” Furthermore, he criticized the way in which the Qing government treated Sichuanese: “The government has always used the excuse that Sichuan is far away and its people are close-minded [to bully Sichuanese].... Now, the ability of Sichuan people in organizing such an orderly movement has even gained praise from Europeans [in Sichuan]. The quality of Sichuanese is thus by no means worse than that of the government. It is only because Sichuanese have suffered under autocracy (*zhuanzhi*) for too long that their true quality has never had a chance to be seen.”⁹³

As commoners were being mobilized to take part in the strikes, the leaders at the Special Shareholder Meeting also became increasingly radical. Even though the decision to not pay the *juanshu* was made on July 25, it was only after the strikes that this was truly implemented. The Chengdu elite again composed popular ballads to make sure the commoners understood the meaning of the *juanshu* resistance. In particular, one ballad titled “The Song about Stopping the Submission of *Juanshu*” (*Tingban juanshu ge*) was very revealing. It not only challenged the Qing government by exposing the Qing’s unreasonable taxation policy, but also explained why Sichuan people were so scared of officials. The writer first exposed the origin of *juanshu* as a “voluntary” surcharge, the

⁹³ *Xigubao*, no.37, September 2. In Dai Zhili 1994, 906.

levying of which started during the Tongzhi reign, as officials (*guan*) urged commoners (*minjian*) to submit money to suppress the Taipings. It should have ended once the Taipings were suppressed. However, in Sichuan, long after the suppression of the Taipings, its people were still made to pay *juanshu* and it was “not voluntary at all.” In this way, Sichuanese were “bullied by the untrustworthy government.”⁹⁴

The writer then analyzed the fear and suspicions that Sichuanese had and wrote: “The people who have suffered under the despotic system (*zhuanzhi*) are scared. And these scared men are naturally wary of an act that is seen as “resisting *juanshu*.”⁹⁵ On this point, the writer lamented: “To think in this way is truly deplorable.” He pointed out that the most important reason lay in “people’s eternal fear of officials (*pa guan*).”⁹⁶ To encourage people to participate in the anti-*juanshu* resistance, the author wrote:

We should not be afraid of officials, not be afraid of officials (*bupa guan, bupa guan*); we should shout this slogan thousands of times (*lanshuo yiqian ge bupa guan*).... The reason that we should not be afraid of officials is that we are in a constitutional state.... If we do not violate any laws, we should, with perfect assurance, not be afraid of officials. The law is on our side and we have sufficient reasons not to pay *juanshu*....

We thus have determined not to pay *juanshu*. In our last petition to the court, we already explained why we do not want to pay *juanshu*. If officials insist on levying *juanshu*, either by putting extra pressure upon us or even punishing us with imprisonment and torture, then those officials are bullying the good people and are actually violating laws. We will, by all means, use laws to question the justice of their actions. If they still decide to violate the laws, we will certainly rebel against them!

⁹⁴“Chuanhai tielu gongsi tebie gudong hui tingban juanshu ge” [The propaganda song on not submitting *juanshu* by the Special Shareholders Meeting of the Chuan-Han Railway Company] in *Dang’an xuanbian*, 168-169.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 170.

Why do we dare to exert such resistance? It is because we are national citizens in a constitutional state and we have the rights and freedoms of a citizen in a constitutional state has. Among the dozens of citizen rights that we have, one is to not accept any illegal arrest. That is to say, if we have not violated the law, we should not be arrested. We should seize this right! We should join forces and encourage ourselves by shouting the slogan “we are not afraid of officials” (*bupa guan*) another million times.

In fact, all constitutional nations have set us examples in dealing with similar issues. They have followed one principle: “No taxation without representation!” In contrast, the Qing government did not consult with the National Assembly or the Provincial Assembly in signing the foreign loan treaty and issuing the nationalization policy. Such an act violated the regulations of the National Assembly and the Provincial Assembly. If we still pay *juanshu*, the energy of the people (*minqi*) will never develop (*shenzhang*)!⁹⁷

The content of this song is truly mind-boggling. It successfully made tangible a key principle that was first set up by Liang Qichao, namely, sovereignty lies with the people. In the railway movement, that principle finally became a strong political cause to mobilize people. The notion of self-determination was expressed elaborately. In addition, the Chengdu movement leaders (such as the author of this ballad) relied heavily upon concepts that emerged in the constitutional reform to help them achieve their political goals. They took laws and legal procedures seriously, and used them as weapons to gain a new kind of legitimacy for their movement. Such legitimacy differed from the legitimacy the elites had under the Old Regime, which depended on collaboration with officials. In contrast, this song and the railway movement in general emphasized the notion of “*quan*,” used the principle “no taxation without representation,” and practiced the idea of a political citizenship.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 171-172.

At the shareholder meeting's August 29 session, Chengdu movement leaders made an even bolder decision: besides not paying the *juanshu*, they called upon Sichuan people to stop paying all forms of taxes and surcharges, including standard tax (*zhengliang*), in hopes of making the central government give up its idea of nationalizing the railways.⁹⁸ Luo Lun was again the mastermind of this idea,⁹⁹ which the leaders framed not as an act of rebellion against the dynasty, but as a way to recoup their loss in *zugu* interest—which they calculated as 600,000 taels per year (6 percent of 10 million taels' investment)—by withholding land tax and *juanshu*.¹⁰⁰ One shareholder rationalized such behavior, saying, “If the government insists on stealing our investment, in the end, we will stop paying any tax or surcharges.... As for other taxes, it is our decision (*quan zi wocao*) to pay them or not. For example, for the property transaction tax: if we Sichuanese do not buy or sell any property during the next year or two, the government will not be able to get that money.... As for the *juanshu*, we always have the right (*zhuquan*) to pay it or not....”¹⁰¹

Such a proposal was subversive. The movement elite were becoming more radical and they soon set up organizations to carry out tax resistance even though they

⁹⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 910. Evidence suggests that such a hotheaded decision was made because of the resentment over Beijing's retention of Sichuan's (and Hubei's) surplus capital, even though all of Hunan's and Guangdong's capital was returned to those provinces. The Chuan-Han Railway's Chengdu manager Zeng Pei said, “Of course, we Sichuan people would never agree to this policy.”

⁹⁹ “Wuchang Duan Dachen laidian” [Telegram from Duanfang in Wuchang], on September 8, in *Yuzhai cunqao*, vol.82, 1-2. In Dai Zhili 1994, 918.

¹⁰⁰ *Xigubao*, no.37, September 2. In Dai Zhili 1994, 906.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

were aware that the Qing court would consider “resisting standard tax” to be a “great disobedience” (*dani*). In contrast to the earlier, conservative attempts to collaborate with provincial and local governments, the movement leaders now became bolder. For example, at the August 29 meeting, one shareholder hinted that there was no need to pay so much attention to the Sichuan provincial government’s attitude. He commented on the action of officials in a rather presumptuous tone: “The officials (*xingzheng guan*) are supporting us and helping us to forward our petitions to Beijing. However, are they really touched by our patriotic passion? No. Are they really afraid of us conducting boycotts and student strikes? No.... What they are truly afraid of is our not submitting *juanshu* and taxes.”¹⁰²

On August 31, *Xigubao*, an important propaganda newspaper controlled by the Sichuan Railway Protection Association, published a forceful editorial openly advocating the decision to resist tax payments and *juanshu*. It stated: “These days we people are expanding our power and rights (*wumin jin wei quan zhi zhuzhang*). To do this, we have to fight against the government more forcefully.... Therefore, after we launched boycotts and student strikes, we decided to start resisting taxes and *juanshu* payments.”¹⁰³

The Sichuan elite’s new attitude was drastically different from the thankful attitude of “being grateful living on the ruler’s land and eating the grain growing on that land (*shimao jiantu*).” Rather than being a responsibility of all subjects, paying taxes or not now implied a “right we have” (*quan zi wocao*). For the first time, the commoners

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ *Xigubao*, no.35. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 501.

were told that it is *they* who had power. Such an attitude was empowering and prompted many Sichuan people to demand more rights. The movement leaders argued that rather than simply having to follow what the administration told them to do, people had the ability to act for themselves. Such an attitude, in Chengdu General Yukun's eyes, was subversive. Yukun wrote: "even though they are not rioting ... the intention of these organizations—the Shareholder Meeting, the Railway Protection Association, the Official-Gentry Allied Association, and the Order-keeping Organization—are extremely evil.... Taxes that were supposed to be submitted cannot be put into the provincial treasury. This is truly like a real rebellion (*zhen ru beini*)! The future rupture between the government and the Chengdu leaders will soon come."¹⁰⁴

On September 1, the announcement (*tonggao*) of the tax-resistance decision was posted all over the city.¹⁰⁵ The Sichuan Railway Protection Association also used newspapers and pictorials to launch the campaign to resist tax payment and *juanshu*. The writers for the *Xigubao* composed a rhyming ballad to help people memorize the principles:

¹⁰⁴ Yukun, Rongcheng jiashu, September 7. In Dai Zhili 1994, 916-917.

¹⁰⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 913. It stated: First, from now on, we will not pay land taxes. We will not pay *juanshu*. For those that have been collected already, we will not send them in. For those that have not been levied yet, we will stop levying them. / Second, our proposal will be sent to the railway company, to the Provincial Assembly, and eventually to the National Assembly. We will also ll levels of officials know about it. / Third, from now on, we will let the entire country know that we do not assume the burden of paying the interest on the foreign loans. / Fourth, all Sichuanese (*quan chuanren*) should not sell or buy properties. / Fifth, after we accomplish the above four goals, we will open the market and students will go back to school.

First, since we find our *zugu* interest nowhere, we deduct land tax. They rob us of money; we do not give them any. / Second, surcharge (*jintie*) and voluntary surcharge (*juanshu*), we do not pay them any more. Salt tax, to remove it sounds good. / Third, if we stop buying land and houses, members of the New Tax Bureau (*jingzhengju*) will have no food. / Fourth, all taxes are removed, we do not care if [the government] have huge debts or not. / Remembering these four, we have our song to resist the government.¹⁰⁶

Besides which, the writers maintained: “If the officials have no money, how can they be threatening? If they have no food to eat, how can they be repressive? If they are hungry, they will be afraid of us and they may rebel against the dynasty (*zaofan*). At that time, we Sichuanese will obtain our ‘human rights’ (*renquan*)!”¹⁰⁷

All this propaganda pointed its spears at the Qing government and was very effective in mobilizing the Sichuan people. An increasingly impassioned Sichuanese unity emerged, and they showed their very strong determination to “break the treaty and protect the railways.” The *Veritable Records of the Qing Dynasty in the Xuantong Reign* (*Xuantong zhengji*) recorded that “several dozen outlying counties participate in the movement collectively. They do not pay land tax and *juanshu*, and they all take part in market and school strikes.... People are not thinking about living a better life; rather, they are ready to die if they have to in order to achieve their goals. Sichuan is in great danger (*dajie*).”¹⁰⁸ Responding to Chengdu leaders’ calls to resist taxes, local people in outlying counties attacked *jingzhengju* bureaus and police bureaus to express their antagonism toward the Qing policies. On August 30 in Peng and Xinfan counties, on

¹⁰⁶ *Xigubao*, no.41. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 501.

¹⁰⁷ *Xigubao*, no.39. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 502.

¹⁰⁸ *Xuantong zhengji*, vol.59, Xuantong 3 year 7 month 19 day. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 502.

September 2 in Guan county, and in early September in Zizhou, Jintang, and Zhongjiang counties, emboldened local people rushed to express their anger against these much-hated bureaus that had appeared in the New Policies era.¹⁰⁹

In the face of this movement, Sichuan provincial officials, led by Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng and Chengdu General Yukun, at first chose to collaborate with the Chengdu movement elite in an effort to keep things under control.¹¹⁰ On August 27 and 28, Zhao Erfeng and other officials sent telegrams, drafted by Zhou Shanpei in consultation with Pu Dianjun, asking the cabinet to let the National and Provincial Assemblies determine the railway matter, to permit the railway to remain commercially managed, to abolish the loan treaty, and to fire Li Jixun.^{111 112}

In these telegrams, Zhao adopted the same reasoning that had been laid out at the August 26 Special Shareholder Meeting; soon Zhao went even farther in aligning himself with the railway movement, quoting and even adopting the rhetoric of constitutionalism in telegram to the cabinet on August 30: “Ever since the constitutional reform, in provinces the power of the officials (*guanshi*) has declined every day and the power of the people (*minquan*) has expanded.... Every time [the people] discuss a matter, as it concerns their rights (*quanli*), they will not want to compromise (*buken tuirang*). This trend has been there for a while.... The Sichuan people (*chuanren*) consider themselves citizens in a constitutional state.... The signing of the foreign loan treaty is a matter of

¹⁰⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 933-937.

¹¹⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 946-947.

¹¹¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 955.

¹¹² In Dai Zhili 1994, 948-949.

national importance. However, the decision to sign it was not made by the National Assembly and that violated the constitution.”¹¹³

However, the court did not respond favorably to the calls from these Sichuan officials. In exchanges of telegrams between August 30 and September 4,^{114 115} the court raised the specter of “foreign disputes” if the nationalization policy were to be abolished, and finally threatened Governor-general Zhao: “If you fail to suppress the chaos ... you will be severely punished! Be careful!”¹¹⁶

Indeed, by this point, it seemed that any kind of peaceful solution to the railway matter was out of the question. The Qing court had made up its mind in crushing the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement, mostly under Duanfang and Sheng Xuanhuai’s consistent pressure. Starting from August 27, Duanfang kept sending telegrams to Beijing (to Sheng Xuanhuai and Zaize), impeaching Zhao Erfeng for “allying with the Sichuan bandits.” Duanfang urged Sheng and Zaize to influence the court’s decision to send in other ministers to replace Zhao and solve the railway matter. Duanfang, Sheng Xuanhuai, and Zaize together urged the court to replace Zhao. As the court grew to disfavor Zhao Erfeng (mostly because Duanfang repeatedly badmouthed him), it decided on September 2 to appoint Duanfang to “help” Zhao suppress the Sichuan Railway Protection

¹¹³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 960.

¹¹⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 950.

¹¹⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 962-963.

¹¹⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 964.

Movement.¹¹⁷ On September 6, Duanfang was officially appointed, and also given command of all armies in Sichuan.¹¹⁸ The situation in Sichuan was out of control.

IV. Movement Turned Violent (September 7-November 22)

The Chengdu Massacre on September 7

What caused the movement to develop into a full-fledged movement against the Qing was the September 7 Chengdu massacre. The trigger occurred on September 5, 1911. Early that morning, an unidentified man showed up at the gate of the Special Shareholder Meeting hall, distributing copies of a printed pamphlet, “Suggestions to the Sichuan People in Preserving Themselves” (*Chuanren zibao shangque shu*). The pamphlet stated: “The [Qing] government is corrupt, engaging in bribery, and selling out the nation.... The only way for Sichuanese to survive is to truly stand up for

¹¹⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 996-1004. In fact, by this point, the Qing court had made up its mind in crushing the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement, mostly under Duanfang and Sheng Xuanhuai’s consistent pressure. Starting from August 27, Duanfang kept sending telegrams to Beijing (to Sheng Xuanhuai and Zaize), impeaching Zhao Erfeng for “allying with the Sichuan bandits.” Duanfang urged them to influence the court’s decision to send in other ministers to replace Zhao and solve the railway matter. Duanfang, Sheng Xuanhuai, Zaize and Ruicheng together urged the court to replace Zhao. On September 2, the court decided to send Duanfang in Sichuan to suppress the Sichuan movement. On September 3, Duanfang asked Zaize and Sheng Xuanhuai to speak for him in front of the court again, asking the court give him the power to command Sichuan armies and to get reinforcement from Hubei. On the same day, however, Duanfang changed his mind and asked not to be appointed to suppress the Sichuan movement. The court insisted in sending Duanfang to Sichuan. On September 5, Duanfang had no choice but accepted the offer. His official appointment from came on September 6. In his appointment letter, Duanfang was given the power to command Sichuan armies. Duanfang soon started getting ready on September 7, 1911.

¹¹⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1002-1003.

themselves.”¹¹⁹ The pamphlet named two things for Sichuanese to do: First, to utilize local assemblies (*zhen xiang yishihui*) to collect taxes, including land tax, meltage charge, *juanshu*, and all other charges, and keep the money in their assemblies; second, to rely upon local assemblies to select men from and organize them into a citizen army (*guominjun*) to defend Sichuan, and in addition, to call upon Sichuanese to manufacture weapons. Covering themselves with the claim that “we are simply assisting the government,” this pamphlet actually called upon Sichuanese to engage in defiant acts—resisting taxes and organizing armed forces. Even though using the term “preserving oneself” (*zibao*), Sichuanese were in the process of negotiating with the central government over the division of power locally. At the very end of the pamphlet, the writer stated: “Officials or members of the gentry, whoever is treacherous, we Sichuanese will treat them as the enemy, an enemy we would never reconcile with.”¹²⁰

Indeed, the principle in this document was clear—let Sichuanese rule Sichuan and let them decide on their own affairs (*zizhu*)—a sort of self-determination. Having already lost the favor at the court and suffered backstabbing from Duanfang, on receiving this pamphlet Zhao Erfeng lost his cool. He knew that he had to do something to preserve his position as acting governor-general and to redeem himself after the chastisement Beijing had given him. Zhao acted haphazardly, and his blunder caused the railway protection movement to develop into a full-fledged rebellion against the Qing.

¹¹⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1106.

¹²⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1107-1109.

On September 7, taking “Suggestions to the Sichuan People” as evidence of railway movement leaders’ “rebellious acts” (*mouni*), Zhao Erfeng claimed that the leaders were building a “republican government” (*gonghe zhengfu*). In the morning of September 7, Zhao arrested Railway Protection Association leaders Luo Lun, Deng Xiaoke, and Zhang Lan; the provincial assembly leaders Pu Dianjun and Jiang Sancheng; and the Chuan-Han Railway Company elites Yan Kai, Wang Mingxin, Ye Bingcheng, and Peng Fen. Zhao first invited them to his yamen, pretending to show them telegrams from Beijing. Right after they arrived, Zhao locked them in.¹²¹ After arresting the leaders, Zhao Erfeng quickly sent in police and guards to search the railway company. He also sealed the railway school and closed down the company’s guest house. In addition, he banned the *Newsletter of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association*, *Xigubao*, *Enlightening Pictorials*, and all of the movement’s propaganda publications.¹²²

The arrest of the railway leaders shocked the entire city. Upon hearing the news, groups of Chengdu residents immediately gathered at Zhao’s yamen to demonstrate, and they were soon followed by thousands of people, raising the same angry cry. Men, women, and children, “with sticks of lighted incense in one hand and yellow paper spirit tablets of the Guangxu emperor in the other, pressed toward Zhao’s yamen, weeping and wailing, all crying: “Give us back our Luo Lun; give us back our Luo Lun.” They petitioned for their leaders’ release. On the streets, policemen and guards were sympathetic to the petitioning commoners. Policemen led the way, followed by many

¹²¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1124-1125.

¹²² In Dai Zhili 1994, 1125.

gentry wearing long gowns, and behind them, enormous numbers of commoners in short jackets. On that day in Chengdu, elites and commoners together acted out a vital social drama on the public stage.¹²³

The demonstration ended tragically. Although the people presented their appeal by “begging and kowtowing,” Zhao ordered his soldiers to open fire in front of the governor-general’s yamen. The yard in front of the yamen was emptied except for more than twenty bleeding bodies and scattered debris that included the broken memorial tablets. Zhao had also sent his soldiers to guard street corners and prohibited people from coming and going. Most of the participants were laborers, artisans, and other members of the lower class. Twenty-six of the victims were identified: sixteen were weavers, carvers, apprentices, tailors, and peddlers.¹²⁴ To prevent rebellion and to cut off Chengdu’s communication with the outside world, Zhao Erfeng imposed martial law and shut the city gates.

Facing the governor-general, who had accused Pu and Luo as rebels, Sichuanese defended their heroes. Historian Wang Di translated from an eyewitness’s account: “The ferocious New Army depended on guns to maintain order, but this only made people so angry that they snatched the guns from them, fighting without fear.”¹²⁵

It is important for us to pause a moment and analyze the divergent positions that the Qing court and the ordinary Sichuan people held of the actions of the railway

¹²³ Wang Di, *Street Culture*, 217.

¹²⁴ “Zhao Erfeng tusha Chengdu shimin zhi chubu qingdan” [The list of people died in the Chengdu Massacre]. In Dai Zhili 1994, 1133-1134.

¹²⁵ Wang Di, *Street Culture*, 218.

movement leaders. As I proposed in the Introduction, a movement can be studied as a spectacle and it is important for us to try to understand its impact on those onlookers.

Let us first look at the attitude of the Qing officials and the Qing court. As early as on September 7, the day of the Chengdu massacre, Zhao Erfeng reported to the court that Sichuanese were openly confronting the dynasty. In Zhao's telegram to Duanfang on the same day, he quoted the reasons listed in the pamphlet, "to resist taxes" and "to build armed forces," as evidence of the railway movement leaders' rebellious acts.¹²⁶ The Qing court concurred with Zhao, quickly issuing two edicts, endorsing Zhao's decision and sending reinforcements (the Hubei Army) to him.¹²⁷ On September 11, Zhao posted an elaborate public announcement, enumerating the reasons why he had captured Pu Dianjun. The announcement was written in colloquial Chinese and was aimed at solidifying Zhao's authority among the antagonistic Chengdu subjects. According to Zhao, the railway movement leaders had done two wrong things. First, they had "resisted taxes," and second, they had "organized independent forces and freely moved about and enjoyed their freedom (*zizuo ziyou*)." In doing so, they have committed the biggest crime, rebellion (*moufan*).¹²⁸

In sharp contrast, Chengdu people saw this matter differently. Commoners supported their *shenshi* leaders and declared that these leaders had done nothing wrong. They argued that it was the government that was the guilty party. In fact, soon after Zhao posted his announcements in some backstreets and alleys, residents tore off the public

¹²⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1112.

¹²⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1111.

¹²⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1114-1116.

notices or spattered them with red paint. In one case, the entire announcement was marked up by the people; they vehemently criticized the Zhao's reasoning. When Zhao said that the leaders were truly rebels and were connecting with bandits outside of the city wall, the comment stated: "It is only because the kind people were killed by you, Zhao Erfeng, on September 7 and the righteous *shenshi* were captured that enraged commoners rushed to Chengdu on September 8, holding the view that the treatment of the *shenshi* was unfair!"¹²⁹ When Zhao said that the leaders "organized independent forces and freely moved about and enjoyed their freedom," the comment wrote: "If you claim that these behaviors were so rebellious, then you could have used other means to stop it. Why then do you have to use barbaric methods? Why do you have to snatch all evidence from the railway company and kill many ordinary people?"¹³⁰ "It was the government that made the common people rebel (*guanbi minfan*)!"¹³¹ "All disasters and wrongs were done by officials! Starting with Sheng Xuanhuai, Li Jixun, and Duanfang! And today's disaster should be imputed to Zhao Erfeng, Zhou Shanpei, and Tian Zhengkui!"¹³² This rebuttal demonstrated an alternative legitimacy in looking at the political struggles. The writer raised the issue: Who had the legitimacy here? And in the eyes of the writer, it was the government who had violated people, not the other way around.

¹²⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1116.

¹³⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1115.

¹³¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1114-1116.

¹³² In Dai Zhili 1994, 1117.

Of course, Chengdu people's public opinion did not change the court's decision. On September 12, the court issued another edict, saying that the railway matter and the rebellion were two different things. The Qing court ordered Zhao Erfeng to suppress the movement. As for the railway matter, the Qing court stated that the nationalization policy should continue.¹³³ On October 5, Zhao sent the cabinet another telegram, saying that he had already found hard evidence to prove that Luo Lun and Pu Dianjun were in rebelling mode. A letter he found in Pu's home, written by Luo Lun, stated that "it is now time for us to raise the great righteousness and I hope that you can support us by giving us two thousand guns."¹³⁴ The confrontation became open and violent now.

Encircling Chengdu and its Repercussions

Starting from the early morning of September 8, local militias and other forces from the neighboring counties gathered outside of Chengdu, ready to capture the city (Map 3). Most of the rebels were members of *paoge*. Carrying swords, spears, and red flags, they came from the counties near Chengdu in groups as large as several thousand. The city was anxious and restless, and panic spread like wildfire.

A foreign observer believed that the fact that large hordes of people, organized, showed up at the Chengdu city gate so quickly from 30 kilometers away did indicate that Zhao Erfeng might be right to have accused the Railway Protection Association leaders

¹³³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1117-1118.

¹³⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1119.

of plotting rebellious acts.¹³⁵ Whether it had been well planned ahead of time or if something suddenly stirred up out of people's anger, the fact was that thousands of people rushed to Chengdu and encircled the city. The Chengdu massacre resulted in a further confrontation between the people and the government.

At this point, the initially peaceful railway protection movement exploded into violence. Zhao Erfeng reported: "Outside of Chengdu city, there were militias (*mintuan*) of about several thousand people."¹³⁶ "Right outside [east] of the city at Damianpu and Niushikou there were more than a thousand militia members who claimed to have been called by the Railway Protection Association to come to Chengdu.... Among those people who had arrived at Chengdu from the west, there were militias of Wenjiang, Pi, Chongqing, and Guan counties. Coming from the south, there were militias from Chengdu, Huayang, Shuangliu, Xinjin, Qiongzhou, Pujiang, and Dayi counties."¹³⁷ A contemporary foreign diplomatic account gives a similar depiction, which demonstrates that the attacks from Chengdu were from three directions: west, south, and east. Its author wrote: "Outside of Chengdu City, on all main roads of the southwest, south, and southeast, rebelling people were fighting against the Qing armies...."¹³⁸

One reason for their quick gathering was that people inside Chengdu had invented a new tool, "the river telegraph," to communicate with the outside world. On the evening

¹³⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1166.

¹³⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1182.

¹³⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1182.

¹³⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1166-1167. The report also helps us identify several key battlefields: the area from Pi county to Wenjiang county in the west, Shuangliu county in the south, and Longquanyi in the east.

of September 7, tens of thousands of small wooden boards, on which were written accounts of what happened in Chengdu, were put into the rivers. These “telegrams” were found all over Sichuan, owing to Sichuan’s good waterway system. The river telegrams stated: “Zhao Erfeng first captured Pu and Luo; Zhao would then crush all Sichuan. All comrades around Sichuan quickly get organized and save ourselves!”¹³⁹ Another river telegram stated: “The railway protection representatives in Chengdu were captured. Now, compatriots, brothers, people from all walks of life, heroes, should all prepare arms and quickly rush to Chengdu to save [them].”¹⁴⁰ Amazingly, hundreds of these river telegrams reached Sichuan’s outlying counties. In some places, after people read them, they put them back into the river so that more people could see them. In other places, people imitated the original river telegrams and wrote their own and then put them into the rivers. These numerous river telegrams, hailed by foreign observers as a “smart” invention, played a crucial role in sending messages from Chengdu to all of Sichuan. Therefore, even though Zhao had shut the city doors of Chengdu and people were not allowed to use telegraph lines to talk about the railway issues, the message was out.

Important as they were, river telegrams were not the only medium that called on people to rush to Chengdu. As I have mentioned above, secret society leaders like Hou Baozhai had already been mobilized and linked to railway movement leaders.

Organizationally, they were ready. Indeed, it would have been nearly impossible for those militias located far from Chengdu to first organize themselves, form an army, find

¹³⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1137.

¹⁴⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1138.

provisions, and then travel all the way to Chengdu only after they had heard the news about the Chengdu massacre.

Who then were the attackers of Chengdu, beginning on the early morning of September 8? Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng observed, “Among the people who rushed to Chengdu, local militias and bandits were mixed (*min fei hunza*).... Even those who came from one county belonged to different leaders (*yixian zhizhong, you duofen shuqi*).” Some were ordinary militias; some were *paoge* bandits. Zhao tried to identify their origins: “Some said that they were called upon by leaders in the Sichuan Railway Protection Association. They had started mobilizing themselves before September 6. There were also others who claimed that they came after they received the river telegrams, which directed them to come to Chengdu and save Luo Lun and Pu Dianjun.” Therefore, in Zhao’s eyes, among those September 8 attackers “there were rebels and there were the ‘stupid commoners’ (*yumin*).” Zhao in fact released the “stupid commoners” and “sent them back home.”¹⁴¹ In accordance with Zhao Erfeng’s judgment, foreign accounts also hinted at these two different types of attackers, the local militias, who, after hearing the news or reading the “river telegrams,” gathered to save their leaders Pu Dianjun and Luo Lun; and the pre-organized “bandits,” who had been linked to the railway leader Luo Lun and already were organized and held ideas of “rebellion.”¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1183. Zhao Erfeng insisted that the elites captured in Chengdu were “guilty.” He urged officials and *shenshi* in Peking and in other provinces “not to be tricked by these people and misunderstand their intentions,” because they simply were “talking lies” (*diandao heibai*).

¹⁴² In *Dang’an xuanbian*, 311.

The earliest attackers on Chengdu came from the east, led by the famous *paoge* and militia leader Qin Zaigeng. After he heard about the massacre and led his militia to Chengdu, on September 7, the “East Rough Railway Protection Army Qin” and Zhao’s army fought at the city’s east gate, in what was considered the first “battle” of the railway protection revolution. Owing to their shabby weapons, Qin’s men were defeated, but they soon retreated to Longquanyi, where, according to foreign accounts, they remained a real, persistent threat for Zhao.¹⁴³

Qin Zaigeng himself carried two identities. First, he led a powerful local militia, the Anji Militia, in Huayang county. Second, Qin was an influential *paoge* leader as head of “the Civilized Gentlemen” (*Wenminggong*).¹⁴⁴ In 1911, he joined the nine groups (*Jiucheng tuanti*) initiated by the famous Xinjin *paoge* Hou Baozhai. In mid-July, Qin also was elected the Railway Protection Association branch leader of Huayang County. At this time, Qin also participated in Hou Baozhai’s sixtieth birthday celebration in Xinjin (also called the Xinjin meeting), which set up the principle for *paoge* leaders to organize their brothers, collect weapons (Qin actually manufactured guns), and get ready for their rebellion. In addition, being a good friend of the Revolutionary Alliance member Long Minjian, Qin was always sympathetic to the revolutionary cause and later joined the Revolutionary Alliance.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1167.

¹⁴⁴ Because of Qin’s wealthy family background, his *paoge* belonged to the Benevolence Branch.

¹⁴⁵ “Qin Zaigeng” in *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu*, vol.2, 12b-13b.

Attackers from the south were led by others with joint militia/*paoge* identities: Xiang Dizhang from Shuangliu and Hou Baozhai from Xinjin. Despite the extremely heavy rain that was pouring on September 8, Hou led his troops rush to the southern suburb of Chengdu, being “totally soaked and dampened with dirt.”¹⁴⁶ Hou and Xiang quickly combined forces and then launched a number of battles against the Qing, and on September 17, they attacked Chengdu again. In the following days, they occupied the area around Muma Mountain and fought against the Qing armies.

Both of these *paoge* leaders had close connections with the Railway Protection Association. We have already discussed Hou Baozhai in detail. As for Xiang Dizhang, he came from a wealthy household of Shuangliu and had been educated in several Chengdu schools before 1911—first in the Teachers’ Normal School, then in the Commercial School, and at last, in the School of Law and Politics. After the railway movement erupted, Xiang went back to his hometown and linked up with the gentrymen and also the *paoge* leaders according to the directives he got from the Railway Protection Association leaders (Zhan Lan and Peng Fen specifically). Xiang soon set up the Shuangliu branch of the Railway Protection Association, and started socializing with *paoge* leaders in west and south Sichuan.

The third major force attacking Chengdu, those coming from the west, also included *paoge* bandits and local militias. Of the local militias, those from Wenjiang, west of Chengdu, were the most important. On September 8, early in the morning, despite the heavy rain, militia leaders Huang Maoxun and He Zuyi, carrying their banner

¹⁴⁶ “Hou Bangfu” [Hou Bangfu, i.e., Hou Baozhai] in *Shuzhong xianlie beizhenglu*, vol.2, 41b-42a.

inscribed “Wenjiang Railway Protection Army,” gathered their militia members and arrived at the Chengdu city gate.¹⁴⁷ A similar group was that of Li Qianzhou, a militia leader from Heshengchang, who on September 9 led local armies from eight *bao* to Chengdu.¹⁴⁸ These militia leaders were what Zhao Erfeng called “the local militia” (*mintuan*). Others attacking from this area included a long-time *paoge* ally of Luo Lun, the reputed “great bandit” (*jufei*) Wu Qingxi, and other *paoge* leaders, all of whom the *Pi County Gazetteer* identified as being leaders of the West Sichuan Railway Protection Association (*Chuanxi tongzhihui*).^{149 150 151 152}

¹⁴⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1143-1144.

¹⁴⁸ Li Qianzhou, in *Sichuan jindaishi*, he was called Li Tingzhou. Also, in a different place in *Wenjiang xianzhi*, he was called Li Xianzhou.

¹⁴⁹ If Huang Maoxun, He Zuyi, and Li Qianzhou rose up mainly in response to the Chengdu massacre and mainly to save their Chengdu leaders, the reason that their fellow Wenjiang county man Wu Qingxi rose up was more complicated. Wu was a famed *paoge* in Wenjiang. In some records, he was a “great bandit” (*jufei*). Long before the Chengdu massacre, Wu had formed an alliance with Luo Lun. On September 8, upon hearing the news of the Chengdu massacre, Wu Qingxi and his cousin Wu Zhisun (Wu Congying) rushed to Chengdu. On September 11, the Wus combined militias from Wenjiang. On September 18, Wu Qingxi joined Sun Zepei in Wenjiang county; they attacked the Qing New Armies in an ambush at Sandushui, and snatched hundreds of guns and numerous bullets. In addition to Wu Qingxi, there were other leaders attacking Chengdu because of the preexisting *paoge* linkage. Zhang Zun, a *paoge* leader from Pi county, was among these who had already been mobilized ahead of time. The *Pi County Gazetteer* states that Zhang Zun from Pi, Sun Zepei from Chongqing, Wu Qingxi from Wenjiang, and Zhang Xi from Guan county were the *paoge* leaders of the Sichuan Railway Protection Association of West Sichuan (*Chuanxi tongzhihui*).

¹⁵⁰ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 527.

¹⁵¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1187.

¹⁵² In Dai Zhili 1994, 1144. Originally from *Pi County Gazetteer*, vol.6 “The Complete Story of Railway Protection Association and Citizen Army.” Compiled by Li Zhiqing and Dai Chaoji, published in 1948.

How should we understand the nature of the attacks on Chengdu launched by this mixture of forces? According to Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng, in his September 10 announcement to the Chengdu people, the local militias were tricked by the Railway Protection Association leaders, who, taking the railway matter as an excuse, were actually rebelling against the dynasty. It stated: “The leaders are only sacrificing the lives of the ordinary Sichuan people for their own sake.”¹⁵³ On September 14, Zhao posted another announcement, urging local militia to stay away from the rebels: “All your militia leaders (*tuanbao toumu*) should not in the first place have gathered people and instigated disturbances. On the other hand, [your behaviors] are understandable. First, you were tricked by Luo Lun, who was conducting a rebellion but called it protecting the railway.... In addition, some of you were coerced to join.”¹⁵⁴

Indeed, the militias might have been “tricked” by the leaders to join the rebellious group. Still, what is interesting is why they were “tricked” so willingly. They, who used to be supporters of the Qing in local society in the Old Regime, became the fighters against the regime. How, then, did Luo Lun and his men touch the hearts of these militia leaders? Why did so many Sichuanese want to protect Luo? Why were they full of “righteous anger” (*yifen*)?

In fact, Qing officials attributed the people’s sympathy toward the rebels to various causes. Chengdu General Yukun, blaming it largely on tax policy, wrote on September 20:

¹⁵³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1147.

¹⁵⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1157-1158.

The Sichuan rebellion this time could be thought of as “officials forcing people to rebel” (*guanbi minfan*). In recent years, the state had taxed the Sichuan people so heavily it was like sucking the blood from their body. The Sichuan people became poor and their wealth emptied. Therefore, they formed a strongly unified antagonism against the administrative officials (*xingzheng zhugong*). Merchants, peasants, gentry, and commoners all hate these people.... The New Policies reform of recent years has led to the establishment of many bureaus and all sorts of taxation. All had to be paid by the people, which of course led to their rebellious hearts.¹⁵⁵

At the same time, unlike a simple tax resistance riot, this time around the idea of *minquan* also played a role in mobilizing the emotions of the people. Chuandong *daotai* Zhu Youji wrote to the Ministry of Posts and Communications on September 19:

This rebellion was something first initiated by the *shenshi* and the literary circle (*xuejie*), infiltrated by bandits, and joined by stupid commoners. Even though it was triggered by the railway matter, it was something that was actually beyond that.... The lectures made by those leaders, all about resisting officials and disrespecting the emperor, were planted like seeds in the hearts of the people. [Therefore], easily, ten thousand people gathered to attack the official yamen. The officials were even constrained by their behaviors, and could not say a word about this.... In recent years, the talk about *minquan* became so prevalent. It is something that not only Sichuan people, but all people, have picked up.¹⁵⁶

Therefore, from the Chuandong *daotai*'s depiction, it seems that the idea of *minquan*, widely spread by the Sichuan Railway Protection Association leaders, was a key element in this insurgency. The Chongqing customs officer recognized the association's role in organizing the movement, reporting to his superior in Beijing: “The attackers of Chengdu were not just bandits, they were held together by a certain

¹⁵⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1285.

¹⁵⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1162.

authority.... The attackers were under the leadership of local gentry members.... Even though it is extremely hard to unify all the conflicting phenomena, I believe that the movement was supported by Sichuan's public opinion and dominated by one authority, namely, the Sichuan Railway Protection Association."¹⁵⁷

Despite the movement's ideas, organization, and propaganda, the shabby weapons the rebels held could not compete with Zhao's professional fighters.¹⁵⁸ After September 15, all rebels were repelled from Chengdu.¹⁵⁹ The attackers went back to the neighboring counties and continued their fight, seizing county seats and letting prisoners out.¹⁶⁰ The rebellion expanded.¹⁶¹

Although the court had ordered armies from Shaanxi, Yunnan, and other provinces to reinforce Chengdu, they had not yet arrived. In the second half of

¹⁵⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1171.

¹⁵⁸ Quickly, the rebels were dispersed. The Qing court seemed to realize how grave the situation was and quickly, it sent out a series of orders, dispatching soldiers to Chengdu. Starting from September 8, the Qing navies, Chuannandao's green standards, and the Shaanxi Army were all ordered to Chengdu. Again, on September 13, Sheng Xuanhuai asked to send more of the Hubei Army to Chengdu. On September 14, the Patrol and Defense Forces was ordered to rush to Chengdu from Jiading (today's Leshan). Also on the same day, the Yunnan and Guangxi Armies were ordered to Sichuan.

¹⁵⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1185.

¹⁶⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1171.

¹⁶¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1189. In Hanzhou, *paoge* leader Hou Juyuan and his army successfully attacked the Qing soldiers. Other Hanzhou militia leaders organized a railway protection army of two thousand people; they rushed to Chengdu, hoping to enter from the north gate. In Pi, Xindu, and in fact the entire West Sichuan Plain, the rebellion was expanding. In Wenjiang, Wu Qingxi joined the famous Chongqing county *paoge* leader Sun Zepei and together they ambushed the Qing army and killed eighty of them. This ambush also gained them a great amount of ammunition.

September, Chengdu Plain turned into a battleground for the rebels.¹⁶² As the foreign report stated: “The entire area west, south, and north of Chengdu was occupied by the rebel armies.”¹⁶³ These rebels cut down telegraph lines, seized important intersections, and stopped mail delivery. In doing so, they successfully halted the entire communication system of the Qing rulers. Also, in south Sichuan, Ya’an for example, the angry people attacked Qing officials and abolished taxes and *juanshu*. These rebels collectively put Zhao Erfeng’s Sichuan province into great chaos.

Dangerously for Zhao Erfeng, these rebels won the sympathy of the Sichuan people. As Zhao himself stated, “the stupid commoners, lacking judgment, take the rebels as the righteous ones. When they see the rebels, they offer them provisions. When they see the Qing army soldiers, they treat them like enemies, even to the degree that they refuse giving soldiers water and heat!.... The hearts of the people lie with the rebels; when they hear that the soldiers win, they become angry. When they hear that the rebels win, they are happy.... The situation outside of Chengdu is now uncontrollable (*dashi yicheng liaoyuan*)!”¹⁶⁴

Even more dangerously, the New Army soldiers were sympathizing with the “rebels.” Sheng Xuanhuai on September 12 wrote to the Huguang Governor-general Ruicheng, saying that the New Armies stationed in Chengdu were not following orders. “Among the soldiers in the New Army, there are only three battalions that followed

¹⁶² In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 527.

¹⁶³ In *Dang’an xuanbian*, 305.

¹⁶⁴ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 528.

orders. All the rest have their hearts with the rebels.”¹⁶⁵ In self-defense, Zhao set up a new bureau on September 12, trying to recruit his own militias in Chengdu. This act, however, was to no avail.¹⁶⁶

On September 15, as soon as Chengdu’s situation was stabilized, even the lofty governor-general was forced to employ the political repertoire of the constitutionalists and the Railway Protection Association, using public lectures and newspaper propaganda to convey his points. Zhao Erfeng ordered the Sichuan *tuanlian* headquarters in Chengdu to take up the job of propagandizing his rationale, spreading his messages to the numerous *tuanlians* in various counties, urging them “not to believe the rumors ... and not to be tricked by the rebels’ words.”¹⁶⁷ As Zhao issued this order, he also provided the headquarters with four thousand copies of his colloquial posters, explaining his message to militias and people in general.¹⁶⁸ In addition, the *tuanlian* headquarters particularly urged the local elite and militia leaders to “truly understand the right and the wrongs, to join the officials to rule together with them and to bring out the happiness of the people.”¹⁶⁹ Another poster, again in colloquial Chinese, told Sichuan people that “the matter of protecting the railway” (*lushi*) and “the matter of rebelling” (*luanshi*) were two

¹⁶⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1148.

¹⁶⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1149-1154.

¹⁶⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1195-1196.

¹⁶⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1199.

¹⁶⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1196.

different things, and urging the Sichuan people not to be tricked by the Railway Protection Association.¹⁷⁰

On September 16, Zhao adopted another of the movement's repertoires, issuing an elaborate "exhortation song" (*quanmin ge*). In this song, Zhao explained the "evilness" of the Railway Protection Association leaders, Luo Lun and others, for exploiting people's trust to convince them to betray the court. He chastised Luo Lun's subversive notion of "not respecting the emperor and the elders" (*wufu wujun*) and criticized the idea of establishing the "one cash tax" as only satisfying Luo's own self-interest.¹⁷¹ Zhao followed up this musical effort by ordering county officials near Chengdu to organize lectures to explain why Zhao had captured Luo Lun.¹⁷²

To carry out this order, Chengdu County Magistrate Shi Wenlong reported to Zhao, he had sent eight *shenshi* (also holding official ranks) to eight local markets to explain to the people Zhao's directive:¹⁷³

On September 14, 16, and 26, I personally went to various *xiangs* in Chengdu county, I ask the reputed and righteous *shenshi* to join me, and we went to various *bao* to conduct our lectures. We explained to the people the leniency of the dynasty and the kindness of the governor-general. We explained to them the origin of the riot and the methods of

¹⁷⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1200-1202. If the Sichuan militia leaders and other commoners insisted on supporting the rebel leaders, Zhao wrote in another colloquial poster, he "would then punish them just as he punishes the rebel leaders." Zhao explained, "This is because on the real battlefields, it would impossible for him to discern the ordinary militias and the bandits." It seemed that Zhao, after his numerous exhortations went to no avail, started threatening the local people at the same time.

¹⁷¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1197-1199.

¹⁷² In Dai Zhili 1994, 1186-1188.

¹⁷³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1203-1204.

dealing with it. We also explained to the people the difference between the railway protectors and the rebels.... On those days, people all understood our intention and all the taxation was levied just as before.... The people of Chengdu county had always been obedient. On September 8, there were only people from two or three *baos* who joined the attack and they have now gone back to their hometown.¹⁷⁴

Effective as it sounded, however, Shi Wenlong admitted that it was rather hard for the *shenshi* to convince local people, saying: “I feel that it is easier for the officials than the *shenshi* to make those lectures.”¹⁷⁵ He then made the suggestion, which Zhao Erfeng accepted, that those lectures be carried out mainly by officials and that *shenshi* should only be their assistants.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, Zhao ordered county magistrates to personally give lectures, spreading the “kindness of the dynasty.”¹⁷⁷ Other officials, like local policemen, local academic officers, also went to the locales themselves or sent *shenshi* there to conduct lectures.¹⁷⁸ On October 15, the anxious Zhao Erfeng again sent a directive, ordering the lecturers to make one point particularly clear, namely, that he would differentiate the local militias from the rebels and would not punish the militias and the local people severely.¹⁷⁹

Zhao Erfeng also used newspapers for his propaganda campaign, having witnessed how successful the Chengdu movement elites had been with their newspapers.

¹⁷⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1205-1206.

¹⁷⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1206.

¹⁷⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1206.

¹⁷⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1207.

¹⁷⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1210-1213.

¹⁷⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1214.

In his official *Chengdu Daily*, using colloquial language, Zhao repeatedly spread his views.¹⁸⁰ In addition, Zhao Erfeng established a vernacular language newspaper, *Zhongsu xin baihuabao*, as his propaganda weapon. But although the medium was adopted from the movement's repertoires, the message was reminiscent of Zhao's "statist" lecture to the 1909 Provincial Assembly. Starting from issue number one, the newspaper consecutively serialized one lengthy article called "The Relations of the Emperor to the Minister and the People." The article maintained: "All people under Heaven, gentry, peasants, artisans, and merchants, should fulfill their duty and do their own job. As for the public matters (*tianxia de shi*), the emperor and the officials will deal with them."¹⁸¹ In other words, Zhao asked people to stay away from politics and take the management of public affairs as the monopoly of the emperor and officials.

Despite Zhao's imitation of the political repertoire of the constitutionalists and the Railway Protection Association, the people of Chengdu were "very suspicious of Zhao's words [and] were not willing to buy the newspapers that Zhao put out."¹⁸² His announcements suffered an even worse treatment. Soon after Zhao posted his announcements, in some backstreets and alleys residents tore off the public notices or spattered them with red paint, just like the ones he had posted on September 11. Zhao realized that the sympathy of the people was indeed a powerful force and he had to devise ways to make sure that the people were on his side; but it was too late. The people's

¹⁸⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1166.

¹⁸¹ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 529.

¹⁸² In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 529.

political energy was unleashed and it was impossible for Zhao to reestablish his authority and legitimacy that easily.

What is remarkable among these oppositions to Zhao's authority were the denunciations by the local rebels. In October, rebels fighting near Chengdu issued "The Denouncement against Zhao Erfeng by the Sichuan Railway Protection Association." It stated:

Nowadays, the court has set up the principle of constitutionalism. All people under Heaven should follow it. However, some officials did not follow the imperial directive of constitutionalism and killed earnest people. They then were the true traitors and should be killed. If we take a look at all European countries, we see that there is no way that a parliamentary representative can be arrested, not to mention that the chairpersons of the parliament. Today, Sichuan Provincial Assembly leaders Pu Dianjun and Luo Lun were captured, only because they were trying to save the country and protect the railway. Acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng committed barbaric acts against them.

It was only after this that Sichuan people invited the railway protection militias to come to Chengdu. However, all these people were vilified as being "bandits."... The Governor-general also sent out armies and fired at people, killing many ordinary obedient people.... Therefore, the hatred against Zhao Erfeng could not be resolved.¹⁸³

Another denunciation, written in colloquial Chinese and issued by the Sichuan Railway Protection Association, is equally revealing:

In October, we attack Chengdu. We have militias of several ten thousands and local secret society members (*huidang*) numbering several thousands. We do not want to disturb the local people (*minjian*), do not rob, do not rape, do not attack churches or take money.

The reason that we rise up is that we do not wish the demise of our country. We fight for our railway rights. After the governor-general put out the cruel announcements, threatening to kill our militias, ... to protect our people, we decided to fight against him.

¹⁸³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1138-1139.

We, unlike the *Tongmenghui* revolutionaries, do not want to change the dynasty. It is officials who have let us down and forced us to rebel.... We are not rebelling against the dynasty; we are still loyal people.... If the officials did not capture Pu and Luo, how is it that our militias could be gathered so quickly?

Indeed, our Sichuan was a civilized province and we Sichuanese were righteous people. Every time *juanshu* was increased, the local people simply paid our taxes obediently. But such taxes were exploited by officials.... Officials treated people worse than they treat sheep and cows.¹⁸⁴

What is notable in these two documents is that people did not simply resist taxes.

In fact, they at one point stated that they would submit their tax, if it were proper and legitimate.¹⁸⁵ The fights in Sichuan were not simply fights over money; rather, they were also fights about the issue of rights. These documents demonstrated that people started contemplating the reasons they were ruled like this. They had learned to be critical. People held the view that they had rights, and when their rights were violated, they decided to punish the guilty party who should take responsibility. They presented an alternative way of conducting politics.

Meanwhile, Chengdu elite kept challenging Zhao. On October 4, the Chuan-Han Railway Company Shareholder Meeting sent in a petition to Zhao, disputing with Zhao the charges that he had lodged against their chairman, Yan Kai.¹⁸⁶ On October 20, the *shenshi* of Sichuan became stronger in their stand in demanding Zhao publish an explanation, demonstrating his reasons for arresting the railway movement leaders. This

¹⁸⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1139-1140.

¹⁸⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1140.

¹⁸⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1224-1226.

petition letter was printed as a flyer and circulated around Chengdu.¹⁸⁷ Facing these rather powerful people of Sichuan, Zhao responded. Again, he stated that the leaders of the Railway Protection Association and Luo Lun had been propagandizing rebellious thoughts, which filled their publications and lectures. Their spirit was not just “loving one’s country” (*ai guojia*) any more. They simply took the name of patriotism but were actually harming the country.¹⁸⁸

Beyond Chengdu, Sichuan elites all over the empire used both traditional imperial channels and new constitutional organs to condemn Zhao Erfeng’s action. In Beijing a Sichuan metropolitan official, Zeng Jian, a secretary from the Ministry of Justice, sent a petition to the Censorate (*Duchayuan*), asking it to forward this petition to the court. Zeng claimed that Sichuanese had been always obedient to the dynasty yet had been crushed unfairly by Zhao Erfeng. Zeng asked the leaders to be brought to the court and tried in Beijing, rather than to be left in the hands of Zhao Erfeng.¹⁸⁹ The court quickly ordered Duanfang to investigate the matters that Zeng had mentioned.¹⁹⁰ In addition to using the *Duchayuan*, metropolitan officials also used the National Assembly (*Zizhengyuan*) to make their voice heard. In September, a Sichuan gentryman called Yi Changji sent the National Assembly a persuading petition (*shuotie*), which enumerated ten crimes that Zhao Erfeng had committed against the Sichuan people.¹⁹¹ A Sichuan

¹⁸⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1227.

¹⁸⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1228.

¹⁸⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1237.

¹⁹⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1238.

¹⁹¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1240-1244.

metropolitan official, Ran Yongmao, did the same.¹⁹² It is obvious that by this time, elites in China knew that they could resort to the National Assembly for help. The National Assembly became an alternative authority they counted on.

Additionally, Sichuanese scattered in other provinces also hammered at similar points via the press. They wrote articles for important newspapers such as *Shibao* and *Minlibao*, making the story of Sichuan known in the entire nation. On October 13, *Minlibao* published an announcement, accusing Zhao Erfeng of killing their Sichuan fellow men and violating the Outline of Constitution. The article stated: “The constitution offered protection for the rights of the people.” By doing what he did, Zhao had violated the principle of constitutionalism and thus he was the guilty one.¹⁹³

Revolutionary leaders from other provinces found inspiration in the Sichuan people’s struggle. Song Jiaoren, a sharp commentator far away from Sichuan, praised the strong-willed Sichuanese for their fearless opposition to autocracy fearlessly, and for their strong desire to participate in politics, to constrain the overbearingness of the Qing government, to extend the power of public opinion, and to protect people’s rights (*quanli*).¹⁹⁴ Song praised the action of all Sichuan people, claiming they was “helping out all the people of China.” In this commentary for the September 14 *Minlibao*, Song Jiaoren also encouraged Sichuan people to liberate their thoughts and go beyond the matter of the railway. In Song’s eyes, Sichuanese should truly raise the banner that “politics should be decided by public opinion” and fight against autocracy more

¹⁹² In Dai Zhili 1994, 1244-1249.

¹⁹³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1255-1258.

¹⁹⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1260-1262.

completely.¹⁹⁵ On September 20, Song published a special issue on the Sichuan railway matter and claimed that the Sichuanese had the absolute right in rebelling against the Qing and encouraged all people in China to follow in the steps of the Sichuanese to establish a real democratic polity for China.¹⁹⁶

In the events in Sichuan in 1911, the key conceptions such as sovereignty, constitutionalism, and rights had become a mobilizing force and something that people picked up in their struggle. Sichuan people wanted to take things into their own hands and they did not want to be ruled as they had been ruled, like sheep and cows. Even though the Qing was winning on the battlegrounds, still, on the front of winning people's hearts, the Qing was losing every day. In addition to the heavy tax and grief that Sichuanese suffered from the Qing rule, the spirit of *minquan* was encouraging people to take up arms and fight against the Qing in counties all over Sichuan.

The Railway Protection Armies and Various Riots

In the great chaos that Sichuan experienced, one still can discern four major groups of organized rebels who composed the majority of the rebels in Sichuan from late September to early November.¹⁹⁷ These groups created serious threats and engaged in

¹⁹⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1262.

¹⁹⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1264.

¹⁹⁷ By September 16, the attackers of Chengdu were dispersed by Zhao Erfeng's armies. Soon after that, they went back to their home counties and continued their fight. Following the Chengdu massacre, all sorts of people—*paoge*, *Tongmenghui* members, progressive students, and other local bandits—emerged to challenge Qing rule. The entire province drifted into a state of great disorder. Zhao Erfeng was in the hot seat. Since September 8, Zhao had been demanding that reinforcements from other provinces be sent

heated battles against the Qing armies. They all shared a similar social network, their *paoge* link. Even though it was hard for observers to differentiate them from the bandits (*fei*), acting Governor-general Zhao Erfeng often identified them as “Railway Protection Association” (*Tongzhihui*), indicating a sense of commonality and purposefulness among these people.

Concretely, the first group was the South Route Railway Protection Army (*Nanlu tongzhijun*) combined with the West Route Railway Protection Army (*Xilu tongzhijun*). They centered on Xinjin, spread widely in the sixteen counties of the Chengdu prefecture, and sometimes extended to Qiongzhou, Meishan, Qingshen, and Meizhou. The leaders of this group were Hou Baozhai and Zhou Hongxun from the South Route and Wu Qingxi, Sun Zepei, Zhang Zun, and Zhang Xi from the West Route. Being close to Chengdu and being very much connected with their common *paoge* identities, this first group of fighters created the most dangerous threat for Zhao Erfeng.¹⁹⁸

The second group was the East Route Railway Protection Army (*Donglu tongzhijun*). They occupied Fushun and Ziliujing, the rich salt production region of southeastern Sichuan. They also initiated the Rong county riot. The leaders of this group were Qin Zaigeng from Huayang county and Wang Tianjie and Long Mingjian from

to Chengdu. The Qing court seemed to realize how grave the situation in Sichuan was; quickly, it sent out a series of orders, dispatching soldiers from all Sichuan’s neighboring provinces to save Sichuan. Beginning on September 8, the Shaanxi Army were ordered to Sichuan. Again, on September 13, the Hubei Army was once again requested to rush to Chengdu. On September 14, the Patrol and Defense Forces were ordered to rush to Chengdu from Jiading. On the same day, the Yunnan and Guangxi Armies were ordered to Sichuan. However, being far away, those armies could not save the situation in Sichuan. The rebellion expanded as these defenders were still en route.

¹⁹⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1323-1350.

Rong county. Notably, Long Mingjian was a radical member of the Revolutionary Alliance and he had influenced both Qin and Wang in joining the Alliance, which gave the East Route Railway Protection Army something more than the aforementioned South and West Route Railway Protection Armies.¹⁹⁹

The third group was the Railway Protection Army in southern Sichuan (*Chuannan tongzhijun*). Led by Hu Tan (Hu Chongyi), this group combined forces of the railway protection army from Ya'an County and a division of the South Route Railway Protection Army. Together, they launched fights against the Qing armies in Xufu and Jiading in southern Sichuan.²⁰⁰

Finally, the fourth group was the railway protection armies in Ya'an and Yingjing counties. Led by *paoge* leader Luo Rizeng of Ya'an and local militia leader Li Yongzhong of Yingjing, they successfully prevented Zhao Erfeng's Patrol and Defense Forces from rushing back to Chengdu from the Tibetan Border.²⁰¹ Calling themselves the "Railway Protection Army," they diminished Zhao Erfeng's dominance of Sichuan.

People do not risk their skins or sacrifice their time to social movement activities unless they think they have good reason to do so. To understand the nature of the 1911 Revolution in Sichuan, we need to examine: Why did people fight against the Qing after being dispersed away from Chengdu? How did rebel leaders sustain collective challenges in the face of social disorganization and state repression? What kinds of arguments did they use and how did they rationalize their actions? How were local

¹⁹⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1351-1373.

²⁰⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1373-1393.

²⁰¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1402-1427.

Sichuan people influenced (or not influenced) by them? What notions and ideas did onlookers pick up from these fights?

Let us first look at the four major organized rebel groups, starting with the first group and using Xinjin as an example. In the Railway Protection Movement, it was in Xinjin where the most stubborn railway protectors got together, marched to Chengdu, and threatened the Qing army. Xinjin's railway protectors were led by Hou Baozhai, the influential *paoge* leader, who had actively participated in local public affairs in the past. After the nationalization policy, Hou decided to take things into his own hands. At the Xinjin Meeting, Hou and others discussed a polity in which Sichuanese would have stakes. In August, Hou, already linked up with his fellow *paoge* members, unified *paoge* on the Chengdu Plain.²⁰² After marching to Chengdu and fighting with the Qing soldiers, Hou went back to Xinjin.

Upon returning to Xinjin, Hou was joined by Zhou Hongxun, a fellow Sichuanese *paoge* leader and a Qing Patrol and Defense Forces officer who had just been converted to the rebel cause. Having served as a policeman in Chengdu, Zhou had been forced to flee to Yunnan after having violated rules and caused trouble. In Yunnan, Zhou had been deeply offended by the way that Frenchmen treated Chinese.²⁰³ After returning to Sichuan, Zhou joined the Patrol and Defense Forces (*xunfang jun*), became an officer,

²⁰² Xinjin Jiucheng tuanti ji gejie tongbao [The Nine groups of Xinjin and other compatriots], "Da Han Chuannan baolu tongzhihui zhang Hou jun Baozhai ji zi Anting yunan gongbu" [Announcement of the murders of the leader of south Sichuan Railway Protection Association Hou Baozhai and his son Hou Anting], in *Xinjin dang'an*, [Xinjin county archival records] "Minguo" [Republican period] 138, no.13 (1911).

²⁰³ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 530.

and recruited his subordinates and fellow soldiers into the *paoge* organization. From then on “the soldiers in the Eighth Battalion of the Patrol and Defense Forces all regarded Zhou as their absolute leader.”²⁰⁴ When the Railway Protection Movement took place in Sichuan, he urged his *paoge* brothers to support the cause of the railway protection army, and finally, on September 12, led his 160 brothers against the Qing. Zhou killed the commander of the Eighth Battalion in Qiongzhou, and took over leadership. Zhao Erfeng had thought that the Patrol and Defense Forces was supposed to be one of the few reliable armies that he could control. But in the battles that took place close to Chengdu, it was the Patrol and Defense Forces that took the lead against the Qing.

Hou and Zhou soon made Xinjin the vital stronghold for rebels in Sichuan. On September 30, Hou and Zhou launched attacks on the New Army base in Xinjin, grabbed their weapons, and set prisoners free. On October 1, Zhao Erfeng ordered a counterattack, and on October 13, the railway army fled to other places in Sichuan. Lasting for more than ten days, the Xinjin Battle had attracted the strongest force that Zhao Erfeng could deploy at the time and the resulting absence of troops from other parts of Sichuan was a great benefit to the rebellions in the rest of the province.

Looking at Zhou Hongxun and Hou Baozhai reveals why local military leaders in west Sichuan resorted to violence. Hou Baozhai, the powerful *paoge* leader who followed the leadership of Luo Lun, was angry with the Qing state because of the nationalization policy and combined forces to protect the railway rights.²⁰⁵ In a sense, it

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Xinjin Jiucheng tuanti ji gejie tongbao [The Nine groups of Xinjin and other compatriots], “Da Han Chuannan baolu tongzhihui zhang Hou jun Baozhai ji zi Anting

was the spirit of patriotism and the responsibility Hou had for the Railway Protection Association leaders that caused him to rebel. Hou issued an announcement in October:

The traitors to us people, / will soon be captured. / We only want Zhou Shanpei and Zhao Erfeng; / we do not want others. / The great matter is settled; / do not listen to scandals. / All we Sichuan people / should happily lead our lives.²⁰⁶

Thus, in addition to a sense of responsibility for the railway rights, Hou was targeting his grievance against Zhao Erfeng and Zhou Shanpei. Zhao, who had captured the Chengdu leaders and killed Sichuanese, and Zhou, who was rumored to have helped Zhao trick the Chengdu leaders to the provincial yamen on September 7, were singled out. In Hou's eyes, it was Zhao Erfeng and Zhou Shanpei who were the "traitors to the people."

As for Zhou Hongxun, he was exposed to the notion of *minquan* in late October and joined the Revolutionary Alliance. Something changed in Zhou's thinking during the revolutionary process. During the movement, Zhou also issued a number of public announcements. One stated: "We should all join forces, so that no one dares to bully us Chinese. We also should establish a new polity, a republic, where all people enjoy equality. Let us destroy their [the Qing's] power and enjoy true freedom!"²⁰⁷ The idea of *minquan* was deployed even more boldly in another public announcement, in which Zhou encouraged Sichuanese to rely upon themselves but not to trust the old officials:

yunan gongbu" [Announcement of the murders of the leader of south Sichuan Railway Protection Association Hou Baozhai and his son Hou Anting], in *Xinjin dang'an*, [Xinjin county archival records] "Minguo" [Republican period] 138, no.13 (1911).

²⁰⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1327.

²⁰⁷ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 530.

The reason that we comrades set up the Railway Protection Association to protect the railway and to protect Sichuan was all because of *minquan*. The slavish officials and gentry not only did not have anything to do with us, but also betrayed us comrades. Some took over our militias cunningly. If the commoners were making good progress, they sided with the commoners. If the Qing armies were winning, they supported the Qing. Here, I urge all us Sichuanese to be independent and not to rely upon officials. The loyalty of those officials is as thin as a piece of paper.... Zhao Erfeng is going to kill us all. We can only kill those betrayers so as to win our *minquan*, and to protect us people's safety.²⁰⁸

We see that Zhou's anti-autocracy feeling was particularly strong. Zhou encouraged commoners to free themselves from the yoke of the Qing officials, who used to be so powerful in the Old Regime. He asked people to use their own rationality and their power to protect themselves. Zhou Hongxun displayed a new kind of legitimacy. In a sense, the Xinjin leaders tapped into both the old virtues and new repertoires and languages to persuade people. Old ideas such as loyalty (*zhong*) and new ideas of popular rights (*minquan*) were combined and they both became useful rhetoric that leaders used in organizing their forces.

This mixture of old and new symbols appeared in Sichuan's other fighter groups too. The East Route of Sichuan, for example, was both similar and different. On the one hand, the matter of "Sichuanese self-governance" was a chanting slogan for Qin Zaigeng and he called for Sichuanese self-determination. In the announcement that Qin put out, he stated, "All Sichuan rose up to protect the railway, peacefully at the start. However, Zhao Erfeng put aside the big picture and put us people to death. His act incurred public anger (*gongfen*) against him. Our Railway Protection Association considered protecting our locale the most important principle.... The reason that we rose up was to protect our

²⁰⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1141.

Sichuan. We do not want to rob people or disrupt the public order.... If bandits come out, we will also punish them severely.”²⁰⁹ On the other hand, Qin Zaigeng was also a Revolutionary Alliance member and the East Route Army included *Tongmenghui* members, some of whom were very influential. The Revolutionary Alliance leaders who had joined the East Route Army, such as Long Minjian, were particularly attentive in talking about “extending the energy of the people” (*shenzhang minqi*), in order to make the matter of popular sovereignty again enter the minds of the local people.²¹⁰ In addition, the revolutionaries propagandized thoughts of repelling the Manchus.

As for the other two routes, the West Route and the Railway Protection soldiers in Ya’an and Yingjing, both carried *paoge* identities and mainly rose up to protect the railways. The West Route leader Sun Zepei issued an announcement in November: “The reason that we have the Railway Protection Army is to recover our railway and to protect our people. We have rushed to Chengdu, hoping that Zhao Erfeng would release Luo and Pu.... We do not want to disturb the locale.”²¹¹ Thus, “to protect the railway” was a most popular slogan that linked these leaders into one force. Indeed, it seemed that a common goal, a common identity, and a sort of solidarity did exist among them. It was via movements like these that such a political solidarity was first introduced to the people of Sichuan.

A movement as large as this one, though, seldom remains under the control of a single leader or organization. At this rather late stage of the game in October, many

²⁰⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1355.

²¹⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1352.

²¹¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1346.

rebels carried out their own battles for their own interests and motives, some of which were not even political.²¹² Still, a common attribute of all these riots and rebellion was a sense of self-determination and a notion of self-reliance. They were not happy about the old way of ruling and for the first time they asked for Sichuan to be ruled by themselves. They decided to throw away the yoke that the Qing had put on them.

In writing of the 1911 Revolution in Sichuan, many scholars have emphasized the leadership role of the Revolutionary Alliance. However, what I argue is that whether one belonged to the Revolutionary Alliance was not the most crucial matter. The reformers, the railway movement participants, the *paoge*, the local militia leaders, and the Revolutionary Alliance all paid their dues by protecting their political and economical rights. In the process of the movement, they practiced the notion of self-determination. They wanted to take things into their own hands and take control of their own destiny.

After understanding the actions, motives, networks, and claims of the rebels, we can now look at the impacts that the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement had on the people in Sichuan. Notably, a revolution's impacts are not confined to the revolutionaries. A revolution, to me, is also a spectacle, and when we study revolution, it

²¹² Besides these four major groups, there were also separate riots in a number of local counties, for example, the famous Xichang county riot by led Zhang Yaotang and Wang Guobin, and the notorious Dazu county riot led by Li Shaoyin in northeastern Sichuan. Locals decided to claim independence from Qing rule. At this rather late stage of the game in October, rebels were less organized and many carried out their own battles out of their own interests and motives. A rebellion or movement as large as this one is seldom under the control of a single leader or organization and the solidarity and uniformity of the movement was hard to maintain. As the situation grew to be more chaotic, bandits, many self-serving and having no political motives, joined the movement too. For example, the famous Xichang county riot by led Zhang Yaotang and Wang Guobin, and the notorious Dazu county riot led by Li Shaoyin in northeastern Sichuan.

is important for us to investigate how people viewed and remembered the revolution, and what people retained from watching the revolution. On this, we actually have a number of materials—some local literati writings, some missionary records, and some Qing officials’ writings, all of which recorded in wonderful detail local people’s impressions of this movement.

Records and reports created by Qing officials in fact give detailed analyses of the railway movement. They also record the feelings and understandings of contemporary people about the movement. For example, as we have noted, Chengdu General Yukun on September 20 opined that the reason for the rather sturdy resistance was excessive taxation, and that “it was actually the officials who had forced people to rebel against them (*guanbi minfan*).”²¹³ This suggests that the railway movement actually tapped into an “old hatred” that had been accumulating over a longer period of time. On October 30, Yukun repeated his view that it was the officials who had traumatized people and made them into bandits.

Even a less sympathetic official, Zhao Erfeng, for example, noted on October 12 that the Chengdu prefecture’s people overwhelmingly supported the rebel groups. Zhao recognized that the “the trend of rebellion in Sichuan was like a fire burning.... People, especially those from west and south Sichuan, excited by the maxim that ‘the loss of the railway shall lead to the demise of Sichuan,’ joined the rebel groups. As for the people from east and south Sichuan, there were also serious talk about setting up an independent

²¹³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1285.

regime and taking matters into their own hands.”²¹⁴ Zhao noted that many Sichuan people took the Railway Association as their authority and openly “intended for independence” (*huai duli zhizhi*). As Zhao said, this time around, the rebels were “drastically different from ordinary robbers.” Rather, “they hold great determination (*biehuai dazhi*) and have contemplated their plans for a long time.” Facing them, the only thing Zhao could do was to ask Beijing for more reinforcements. On October 19, Zhao asked Beijing to send the Hunan Armies to Sichuan. On October 21, he asked that the Shaanxi Army be sent to Sichuan. On October 28, the court offered military funding of one million taels of silver, specifically for suppressing rebellions in Sichuan.

Besides the official documents, foreigners’ accounts also did a good job of capturing the spirit of the Sichuan people during this movement. When writing on the market strike and student strike in counties around Chengdu, the British ambassador reported to London: “The students and merchants of Chengdu were determined in resisting the Qing’s orders, and their announcements showed that fearless resisting spirit.”²¹⁵ As for the situation in south Sichuan, a Catholic priest in Qianwei county noted that the Railway Protection Army was well supported by the local gentry and landlords. “The army was initiated by *shenliang* and militia leaders, and in Qianwei, in almost every market town there was a Railway Protection Association Branch.”²¹⁶ They “demanded Luo Lun and his comrades’ lives be preserved.”²¹⁷ The correspondence of

²¹⁴ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1290.

²¹⁵ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1300.

²¹⁶ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1302.

²¹⁷ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1304.

the Bishop of Chuandong Episcopate also revealed that Zhao Erfeng was losing control of his armies: “Among the nine thousand soldiers that Zhao commanded, half of them were stopped by the Railway Protection comrades and could not rush to save the situation.”²¹⁸ In another letter, the Bishop reported that from Jiading to Chengdu, all areas were controlled by the rebel groups. Again, as the Chongqing customs officer reported to his superiors in Beijing, “in Sichuan, public opinion was clearly on the side of the rebelling gentry.”²¹⁹ The British consul, meanwhile, wrote to the British ambassador in Beijing and reported that “the real power over Chongqing municipal politics was in the hands of local people. The local officials were helpless.”²²⁰ In these foreigners’ depictions, we see that the authority of the governor-general was lost, as was that of many local county officials in the areas from Qiongzhou to Chengdu. On November 1, the Chongqing customs official made the prediction that “overthrowing the Qing rule of Sichuan is only a matter of time.”²²¹

Of course, as the movement expanded, bandits were involved on the side of the Railway Protection Armies, and often it was impossible to differentiate the rebelling Railway Protection soldiers from the rampaging bandits. Still, most Sichuan people chose to support the rebelling Railway Protection soldiers. Even when the bandits created chaos and problems for the local people, people still sympathized with them.²²²

²¹⁸ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1306.

²¹⁹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1311.

²²⁰ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1312.

²²¹ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1316.

²²² In Dai Zhili 1994, 1317-1318.

²²³ Even though the Railway Protection Army sometimes engaged in barbarous behavior, beyond just viewing them as bandits, people looked at them as an important force with a true political stand that they considered righteous. There was a spirit of self-determination, a sense of taking things into their own hands, and a sense of democracy. After the movement, with people having been thoroughly exposed to these ideas and having practiced some of them, the politics in Sichuan would never be the same again.

Conclusion

Going back to the questions we asked at the beginning of this chapter, given the opportunity that the Chengdu leaders had in the summer of 1911, were they able to mobilize a crowd of supporters? How did the movement expand beyond the city of Chengdu to people in the outlying counties in Sichuan? How did the movement transform itself from a peaceful protest to a violent revolution? And, after the most important leaders were captured on September 7, 1911, how did the movement uphold a common purpose, maintain its solidarity, and sustain its challenges to the central government?

Indeed, bringing people together in coordinated collective action at strategic moments of history against powerful targets requires a *social* solution because organizers need to solve the *social transaction cost* of collective action. This involves drawing upon a common purpose, building solidarity, and sustaining collective action. At the base of the movement are the social networks and cultural symbols through which social

²²³ In Dai Zhili 1994, 1320.

relations are organized; the denser the former and the more familiar the latter, the more likely movements are to spread and be sustained.

People do not risk their skins or sacrifice their time to social movement activities unless they think they have good reason to do so. Economic interest is no more than a subject category imposed by the observer; I believe that it is the participants' recognition of their common interests that translates the potential for movement into collective action. The Chengdu headquarters leaders did a great job in stimulating a consensus and helping participants identify their challenge to the Qing.

We see that the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement kept expanding when leaders tapped into the more deep-rooted feelings of the Sichuanese. Besides the suspicion against foreigners, another matter that leaders kept talking about was taxation. Movement leaders particularly picked up the issue of *juanshu* and used it to get local elites' and local militia leaders' attention. Rather than simply resisting the amount of taxes, the movement leaders took pains to urge people to think about the matter of legitimacy behind the act of levying taxes. The leaders imparted to people that they were the masters of the country and they could choose whether to pay taxes or not. In doing so, they spread the notion of popular sovereignty. In Sichuan, the magnitude and duration of this collective action depended on mobilizing people through social networks and around identifiable symbols, such as the slogan "to protect the railways and to break the treaty."

The Ending

Like all great movements, the Sichuan Railway Protection movement also had its ending. For the movement leaders, the ending was not a happy one. In October, while battles were taking place in Sichuan, the Qing officials and the court realized that the Sichuan case was tough to deal with. A change in strategy occurred. Duanfang, who had been sent by the court on September 2 to “quickly exterminate” the movement, after arriving in Chongqing on October 13, changed his stand. By then, the Wuchang Uprising had taken place. From “exterminating the rebels” Duanfang changed his method to “pacifying them.”¹ In addition, after having some in-depth interactions with the Sichuan elite, Duanfang realized that it was impossible to crush the movement of the Sichuan people. In particular, he realized that despite the fact that Railway Protection Association leaders had been held for over a month, their authority and influence on people remained. The court took Duanfang’s advice. In mid-October, Duanfang impeached Zhao Erfeng, accusing him of “conducting matters unfairly” (*goucheng yuanyu*) and asking that Pu Dianjun, Luo Lun, and other leaders be set free. Duan also pasted announcements across Chongqing; however, at this time, the reputation of officials had deteriorated to such a low point that his announcements suffered a fate similar to those of Zhao Erfeng’s. One extremely defiant commentary ran:

I shall set Pu, Luo, and all nine people free—not likely!
I shall punish Tian, Zhou, Wang, and Rao for their crimes—you’d better!
I do this because you have earnestly asked me to—we never did!
If the will of Heaven finally is the same as yours—nonsense!
You kind people should all go back to your homes—only in your dreams!

¹ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 560.

Bandits should all be dispersed quickly—will not!
 If there are still people conducting armed fights—there sure will be!
 Official soldiers will come and kill you; don't complain then—just come,
 whatever!²

Indeed, at this point in time, the credibility and authority of the Qing rulers had reached a nadir and there was no chance for the Qing officials to “pacify” the movement. On November 26, in Zizhong, the Hubei New Army officers launched a mutiny and killed Duanfang.³

In Chengdu, Zhao Erfeng's situation was no better. On October 26, because of Duanfang's impeachment, the court chastised Zhao Erfeng for “being incapable of curbing [the rebels'] power before the rebellion and incapable of exterminating it afterwards.” The court ordered Zhao to let the cabinet decide on the fates of Pu Dianjun, Luo Lun, and the other leaders. At the same time, the court asked Zhao to “persuade the railway protection armies to dissolve themselves.”⁴ On November 6, the court ordered Duanfang to replace Zhao Erfeng to become the new Acting Governor-general of Sichuan once Duanfang would reach Chengdu.

At this time, after knowing the situation in Wuchang, and in particular, after having suffered the severe backstabbing from Duanfang, Zhao decided that it was time

² *Xinhai geming huiyilu*, vol.3, 104. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 561.

³ At that time, all neighboring counties of Zizhou—Longchang, Rongchang, Zizhou, Ziyang, Jianzhou, and Weiyuan—have all been occupied by East Route Railway Protection Army. On November 18, Duanfang arrived in Zizhou and got stuck there. Chengdu was hard to get to, and Chongqing, where its elites and Revolutionary Alliance members had also been fermenting regime change, was not returnable. The news of Wuchang Uprising had been spread to the Hubei New Army soldiers.

⁴ In Dai Zhili 1959, 472.

that he “think for himself.”⁵ On November 14, Zhao released Pu Dianjun, Luo Lun, and the others. After being released, Pu Dianjun and Luo Lun made the decision to cooperate with Zhao. On November 17, Pu and Luo issued a public announcement named “Humbly Telling Our Brothers of Sichuan.” In the announcement, the writers stated that because both purposes of the movement—to protect the railways and to break the treaty—had been achieved, there was no point for Sichuanese to continue their struggle. The more important matter for the people in Sichuan at this point was to maintain peace and get ready to build a happier future. They asked Sichuan people to put down the weapons, go back home, and till their lands.⁶

However, after people were mobilized, the movement was out of the hands of the constitutional leaders. It is true that a good part of the power of the railway movement came from the fact that the movement leaders activated people over whom they had no control. And, the power to trigger sequences of collective action is not the same as the power to control or sustain them. Pu and Luo’s power only allowed the movement to mount collective action but they did not possess the resources to control its fate. This time, the orders of the leaders were not taken well. In fact, on the contrary, in late November in some parts of Sichuan, an escalation of fighting occurred.⁷

The leaders continued to cooperate with Zhao Erfeng. On November 22, Zhao led Sichuan officials to reach an agreement with Pu Dianjun and other movement leaders. This agreement, the “Thirty Regulations on Sichuan’s Independence,”

⁵ *Xinhai geming ziliao*, vol.4, 429-430. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 564.

⁶ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 563.

⁷ In *Dang’an xuanbian*, 311.

proclaimed Sichuan's independence from the Qing. Several things were important in the document: First, the Sichuan people have independence in deciding on all political affairs in Sichuan, with Pu Dianjun temporarily taking charge. Second, Zhao Erfeng is to go to the Sichuan-Tibet Border and continue his job in defending Sichuan. Third, except for the Patrol and Defense Forces (*xunfang jun*) led by Zhao Erfeng, all other armies are under the control of the New Army Commander Zhu Qinglan.⁸ Pu Dianjun became the new Sichuan governor-general and Zhu Qinglan was the new vice governor-general.

On November 27, following the agreement, Zhao Erfeng issued a public essay, "Declaring Self-Governance in Sichuan" (*Xuanshi Sichuan zizhi wen*), where he stated that all public affairs were now put in the charge of Pu Dianjun, who would practice self-governance principles and "establish a true republican politics (*gonghe zhengzhi*) for Sichuanese."⁹

On November 27, at 12 noon, the new revolutionary government declared the independence of Sichuan. The "Declaration of Independence" (*duli xuanyan*) claimed:

The founding principle of the Sichuan Military Government is based on universal principles. We claim to carry the principle of humanitarianism, to organize a republican constitution (*gonghe xianfa*), and to preserve the foundation of our Han federalist empire. We want to solidify the foundation of our state and make sure that all seventy million people in Sichuan obey and follow this constitution.¹⁰

⁸ In Dai Zhili 1959, 503-506.

⁹ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 566.

¹⁰ In Dai Zhili 1959, 511-512. In addition, in this declaration of independence, elites also claimed to reduce the heavy tax that was put upon the Sichuan people.

After having declared independence, the new revolutionary government struggled to restore public order. However, the situation these elites faced was very challenging. In particular, two matters were of particular urgency. The first matter was in regards to the unruly *paoge*. After the railway protection movement, these secret society members considered themselves the saviors and heroes of the Republic. Many came to Chengdu and would not leave the city. The second matter was the large hordes of Qing armies that were stuck in Chengdu. The Patrol and Defense Forces, the New Army troops, with the Railway Protection Armies now added, all gathered in Chengdu, which created a great danger for the citizens' lives. A rather soft leader, Pu Dianjun was not able to adjust to the situation. Factionalism already existed in the new government. The disorganization of the elite and emergence of other power groups created a new situation. Despite the happy image and great sense of hope this government brought to people, it was weak. In a sense, the December 8 Chengdu Mutiny was unavoidable.

On December 8, as Pu Dianjun and Zhu Qinglan were inspecting soldiers at the east field in Chengdu, suddenly a soldier from the Patrol and Defense Forces fired a shot, trying to take down Pu and Zhu. The two governors-general fled frenetically. The situation was out of control. At this time, the New Army official and also a Sichuanese, Yin Changheng, led his New Army troops to rush to Chengdu and "pacify the mutiny." Supported by Luo Lun, who had great influence over the *paoge* troops (the Railway Protection Army), Yin stabilized the situation and proclaimed himself the new Sichuan governor-general. Luo Lun became the vice governor-general.

Despite Yin's attempt to cover up his ambition with the appearance of restoring order, a detailed memoir written by a movement participant, Huang Shou, exposed that

Yin actually purposefully organized the chaos. The person who fired first was a soldier of Zhao Erfeng's Patrol and Defense Forces; however, more importantly, he was also the cousin of one of Yin Changheng's subordinates and he himself was in fact "ordered" by Yin to shoot first!¹¹ As for Luo Lun, because he did not gain the position he had hoped for after the November 27 Declaration of Independence, he decided to support Yin.¹²

After the December 8 Chengdu Mutiny, however, all blame was put on Zhao Erfeng. The public opinion in Chengdu was that Zhao still had the ambition to overthrow the new government.¹³ To solicit support from the Chengdu people, Yin Changheng seized his opportunity. First, Yin Changheng framed Zhao Erfeng as having thoughts of overthrowing the new government. Then, on December 22, Zhao was tricked by Yin and suffered Yin's ambush. Sarcastically, this rather cruel and indecent act was considered the "most important and correct" decision made by the new revolutionary government.¹⁴

In a sense, in this hugely chaotic situation, all people were engaging in radicalization, leading to violence, defection, and increased repression. Yin's attempt to maintain his support base led to the death of Zhao Erfeng. Luo Lun and Yin Changheng won the power because they fitted well with the momentum and power that the movement had already created. By merging themselves with the people, Yin and Luo gained popularity, and people felt that it was their moment too and they might hold a

¹¹ Huang Shou, unpublished memoir.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Qin Nan, *Shuxin* [The ordeal of Sichuan], vol.2. Qin Nan worked for the provincial government and was a clerk. In this book, he recorded closely how the contemporary people viewed the railway movement. In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 573.

¹⁴ In *Sichuan jindaishi*, 578.

stake in the new society. In a strange sense, Yin and Luo's power was still endowed by the "people" because they were the only ones who could be accepted by Sichuan's military men and *paoge*.

The achievement of Sichuan's railway protection movement was thus snatched by Yin Changheng, a person who did not actually contribute to the railway protection movement. Social movements create opportunities for other social actors as well. Ultimately, a social movement had to solidify its results in the political sphere. In this last stage of the game, Pu Dianjun lost his control. Even Luo Lun, who might have gained what he wanted personally, also felt disillusioned and tired. Soon, in 1912, Luo Lun left politics and went back to his hometown. The revolutionaries did not gain control politically and this is the short-term ending of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement.

Conclusion: The Making of Modern Chinese Politics

A movement might have failed in its narrow and political sense, but even if it failed, it had profound effects and set in motion important political changes. Do movements have an impact beyond the short-lived mobilizations? If the impact of movements is so short-lived, then what are the legacies of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan? I argue that it will not be fruitful to examine the outcomes of the Sichuan railway movement in a direct way. Protests do not simply end and leave nothing; they have indirect and long-term effects that emerge when the initial excitement is over and disillusionment passes.

In the railway movement in Sichuan, the leaders did their best to make sure that everyone possessed a common purpose and a shared value. A common purpose was effectively established, namely, to recover the railway and to break the treaty with the foreigners; and a common value was formulated, that is, to stand up for both *minquan* and *guoquan*. The propaganda encouraged people to struggle for their rights and interests, even though they had to face a powerful enemy, the Qing court and its representative, the Sichuan governor-general. Sometimes, movement leaders utilized familiar cultural symbols from the past to stimulate people's emotions, and sometimes they appropriated traditional values such as loyalty (*zhong*) and righteousness (*yi*) to give people a sense of moral purpose.

The new conceptions and the old cultural symbols created a mixed political culture in the Railway Movement. On the one hand, it is undeniable that people in Sichuan had learned from this particular event of new ideas, new identities, and new modes of politics and collective action. They realized their identity as Chinese national

citizens and citizens with legal and civic rights, realized that they had to bond together to fight for the sovereignty of their nation, and that everyone had responsibility in taking up action. They learned to organize, to propagate their message, to apply the peaceful yet firm movement repertoire to achieve their goals, and to articulate their perspectives on national and public affairs. They tasted the experience of being solidified as a group, understanding political egalitarianism, and feeling the sensation of a new kind of gregariousness. On the other hand, the hierarchical structure of the organization, the unchallenged authority of the movement leaders, who still monopolized cultural and social superiority, and the traditional moralistic overtone of dividing people into “the treacherous” and “the loyal” did not disappear. As the new claims were diffused and as people gained enhanced capacities for collective action, these older feelings remained.

It is true that the ending of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement was not pretty. Nevertheless, if we look at what this event had brought to these people, we see “a sea change” did occur. The Sichuan Railway Protection Movement established the mobilizing potential of democratic constitutionalism and the compelling intensity of political change. The language of preserving the nation, the gestures of equality and fraternity, and the emotion-filled folk songs and public meetings were not soon forgotten. The new repertoire of movement politics, the new values of promoting national sovereignty and popular sovereignty, civic rights, and the rule of law would not disappear. For the people of Sichuan, the memory of the railway movement continued. I argue it is through this tumultuous Railway Protection Movement that key notions conducive of modern Chinese politics became first spread among a larger group of people in Sichuan.

The railway movement connected elite with their commoner fellowmen. And after that, Sichuan was not the same again.

In this conclusion, I venture to articulate the political transformation that Sichuan experienced in the last decade of the Qing. Such transformation culminated in the railway protection movement in 1911, which ultimately brought down the dynasty and the Old Regime. If in 1900 the Sichuan viceregal government was still serving its emperor, providing him with abundant resources and doing its best to maintain his monarchical legitimacy, in 1912 a new republic was born, embodying fresh political principles that Sichuan constitutional elites and commoners held to be true. The political transformation, in my opinion, centered around one theme, namely, the legitimacy of the polity.

By 1900, although the *effectiveness* of the Old Regime was being seriously challenged by rebellions, riots, religious cases, and foreign powers, neither Sichuan elite nor commoners challenged the very principle of monarchical rule. For example, in 1870s, the righteous Yuan Tingjiao rebelled against the evil *shenliang*, talking about “upholding the emperor’s rule” and “not allowing treacherous bullies to falsely levy tax in the name of the emperor.” The purpose of Yuan’s rebellion was “to clear the name of the emperor” and “to not allow the rule of our emperor to be denigrated!” In 1890s, the flamboyant and legendary Yu Dongchen rose up to “repel the foreigners and restore the Qing.” Even though Yu and his followers started questioning the outsider Manchu’s otherness in dominating the country, they did not bother to question the sacredness of the existing power structure. As influential as Yu Dongchen was, he collaborated with the local *shenliang* and yamen officials in Dazu county and still exploited the local power

structure in the Old Regime to gain what he wanted. He never questioned the very existence of the old power structure, the prestige and authority that *shenliang* and yamen officials maintained; rather, that structure was still pretty much something natural and given. These people, trying to survive in the increasingly worsening political and economic conditions, took up arms. Yet pretty much none of the rebels had a bigger goal than survival. The domination of the legitimacy of the Old Regime was obvious. Still, the influence of the officials (*guanshi*) remained, the *shenliang* enjoyed privilege, and the old political legitimacy survived. Even severe rebels (*dani*) such as Yuan Tingjiao and Yu Dongchen still considered the Old Regime as the norm. Heaven held their fate, not they themselves.

As for the elites, they were the beneficiaries of the Old Regime and they endorsed the Old Regime. *Shenshi* and *lianghu* both gained their prestige and local status from the Qing government. Neither their power nor prestige was endowed by the people: they were no self-government agents. Therefore, *shenliang*'s participation in government and their speaking on behalf of the community were not defined and there were no representatives for the rest of the people. On the contrary, *shenliang*'s power came from the political order. *Shenliang* and local officials determined the local policy and administration and shared the control of society. The norm was that local officials ruled, and local power was distributed between *shenliang* and local officials. There were strains and conflict between them and these were stimuli for change; however, because those elites (*shenliang*) secured maximal returns under the existing system, they were not interested in altering the status quo. In this situation, when mentioning the "rebels," *shenliang* paid no respect to them and maintained that all rebels deserved to die and "die

more than ten thousand times” (*zuigai wansi*) for they had shown the “greatest defiance (*dani*) and had no basic morality (*budao*).” Indeed, *shenliang* were exploiting the Old Regime and tried their best to become masters in the society. Of course, in this circumstance, there was no political participation of the people. It seemed that the principles of such a social classification would last forever and any change in an attempt to challenge the universality of the Old Regime was defamation. The dominance of the officials and elites was going strong.

In Sichuan, *jiao'an* added extra tension to the Old Regime. In Sichuan, as we have seen clearly in the seven big religious cases (*jiao'an*), Sichuan local yamen officials did share with the elites and commoners their repugnance against Chinese Christians and their animosity against foreign priests. However, despite the commonality and solidarity that Sichuan officials formed with the local *shenliang* and *paoge*, imperial edicts and orders of Zongli Yamen from Beijing put them (provincial and local officials both) in a quandary. They had to obey rules to maintain their posts, but as they did so, the alliance with the local elites was collapsing. It was exactly in moments like these that the local people lost their loyalty to Beijing, and also gradually their support of the local yamen because of the things they had to do to follow Beijing's orders. To Sichuan *shenliang*, it was obvious that the Qing state was not able to give them what they wanted or to protect them. And because of this, the Qing state lost its legitimacy and authority too. After the *jiao'an*, the alliance between the local officials and the elites was shaken. On the contrary, a new alliance, as was demonstrated in Yu's mass-scale rebellion, that is, the one between local elites and the local *paoge*, was formed and became strong. The Old

Regime and its authority were for the first time severely challenged and a competing social force and social alliance was formed.

With local powers reorganized, new ideas also came to Sichuan at roughly the same time. Indeed, ideas helped Sichuanese to see the world in new ways. In the 1900s, as “Mister Xinmin’s” (Liang Qichao’s) passionate wordings and passages spread widely in Sichuan province, people started to believe in their own rights and decided that they were entitled to actually change the society and to establish a constitution. In essence, this was the invention of the new rhetoric centering on the issue of “*quan*.” Ideas such as “we all have god-given human rights” (*tianfu renquan*) and “we are all equal to each other” (*renren pingdeng*) became widespread. There was also a strong sense of entitlement in public affairs and the notion that ordinary people were also stakeholders in a polity. The notion of mass political participation became prevalent and gradually gained popularity. Soon, arguments that we were all “masters of the nation” were chanted in local classrooms in Sichuan.

Importantly, the ideas of *quan* included both political rights and economic rights. In Sichuan elite’s economic and political struggles against the state, their ideas of *quan* became stronger and concretized. They in fact could use this rhetoric as a weapon in struggles against the Qing state. During this process, the new rhetoric actually helped them win their battles. The constitutional leaders became increasingly influential and powerful. They soon consolidated their power in the Sichuan Provincial Assembly. In the Railway Company, they were the economic power holders too. Social, political, and economic powers converged and a strong class was formed.

In particular, the Provincial Assembly was a formative moment in emergence of the Sichuan railway movement. It was through the intense negotiations between provincial elite and the governor-general that the free-floating political ideas that had been in circulation for years among the disaffected Chinese intelligentsia finally coalesced into a formidable political movement. Also, in this process, the notion “to make the governed content” was more widely spread. The Sichuan assemblymen found a way to address the principle of popular sovereignty as they sharpened their ideas and rhetoric. That principle would become a crucial factor in the railway movement that was soon to come and would leave a long-lasting legacy for China’s later history. In the process, the concept of *quan* (“rights”) started to become rooted in the minds of the Sichuanese. In their nitty-gritty clashes with the new police system and the new tax bureaus, the elites learned to use *quan* as a mobilizing slogan to win their battles. Soon, the open clash between the constitutionalist elite and the state started, and soon it gained sharp articulation as a clash over their political principles.

When the Railway Protection Movement finally came in 1911, the new political repertoires (demonstrations, speeches, and holding meetings) that had already been practiced in the provincial assembly were quickly mastered by the elites to mobilize people. In the heat of the movement, the revolutionary experience was filtered through the media to create a new political community, transforming the ways in which politics was conducted in the early twentieth century in China.

I argue that the notion of rights (*quan*) and the sense of entitlement in participating in politics was actually the very basis of modern Chinese politics. They were also the legacies of the Railway Protection Movement: these ideas that were created

during the movement stayed in the hearts of the Sichuan people and were internalized in their everyday activities. Sichuan people learned about their rights and powers, learned to make contentious arguments, and learned protest repertoires. They experienced the possibility of having an official who might be “their man.” A movement attracts people’s enthusiasm in an extremely exciting way. It shakes people’s beliefs and destabilizes their old lifestyles, it creates good stories to watch, it puts on a good show on open streets, and by doing so it touches people’s hearts and makes an impact on people. It is through movements like this that modern Chinese politics was taking its shape.

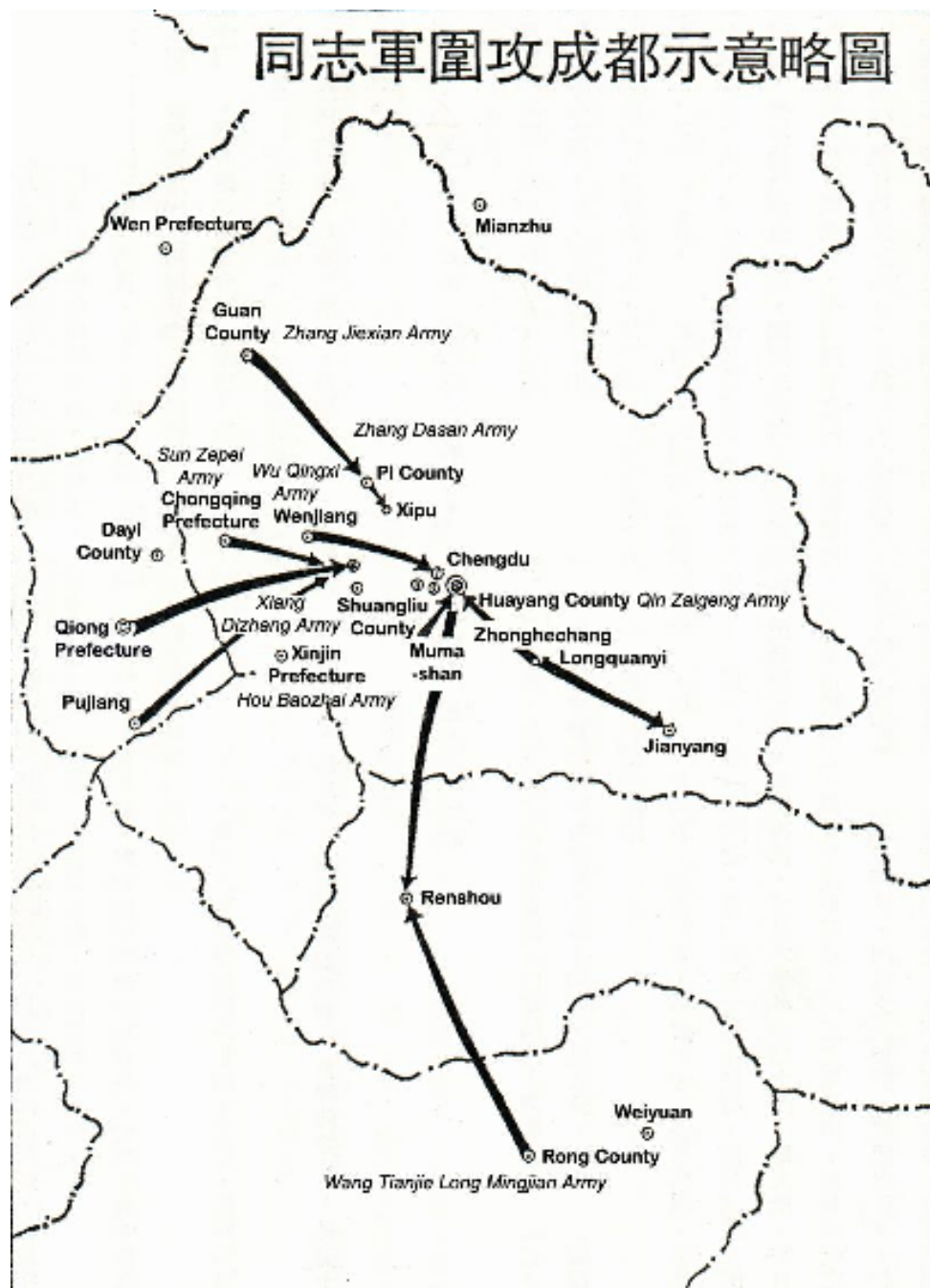
APPENDICES



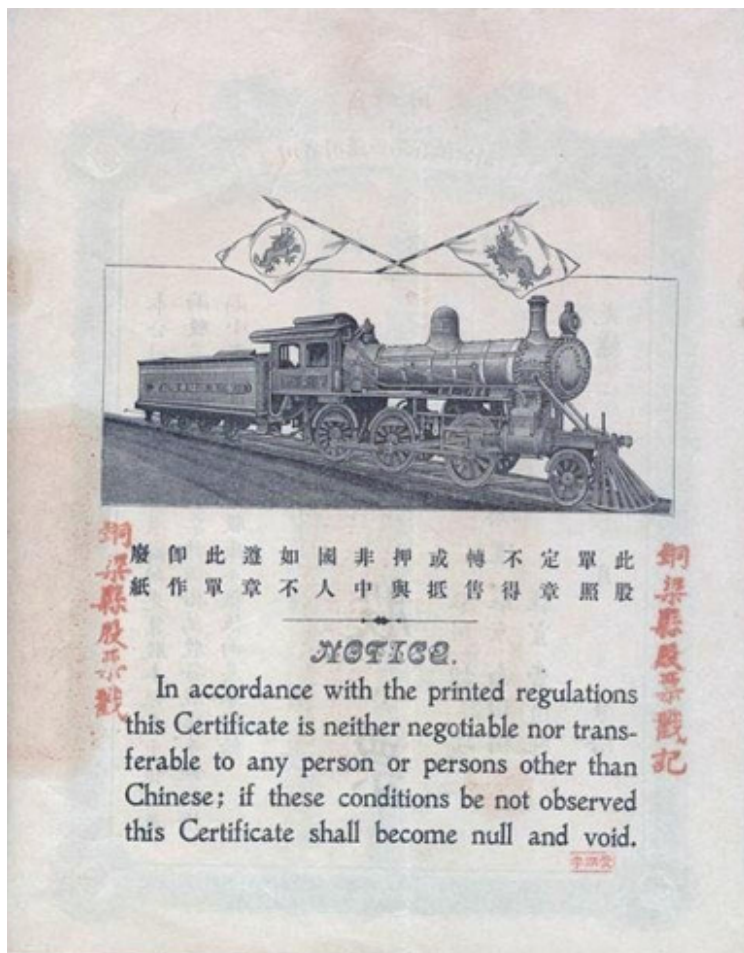
Map 1: Sichuan Province in China



Map 2: The Sichuan Network of Navigable Rivers



Map 3: Railway Protection Armies Attacking Chengdu, September 1911-October 1911



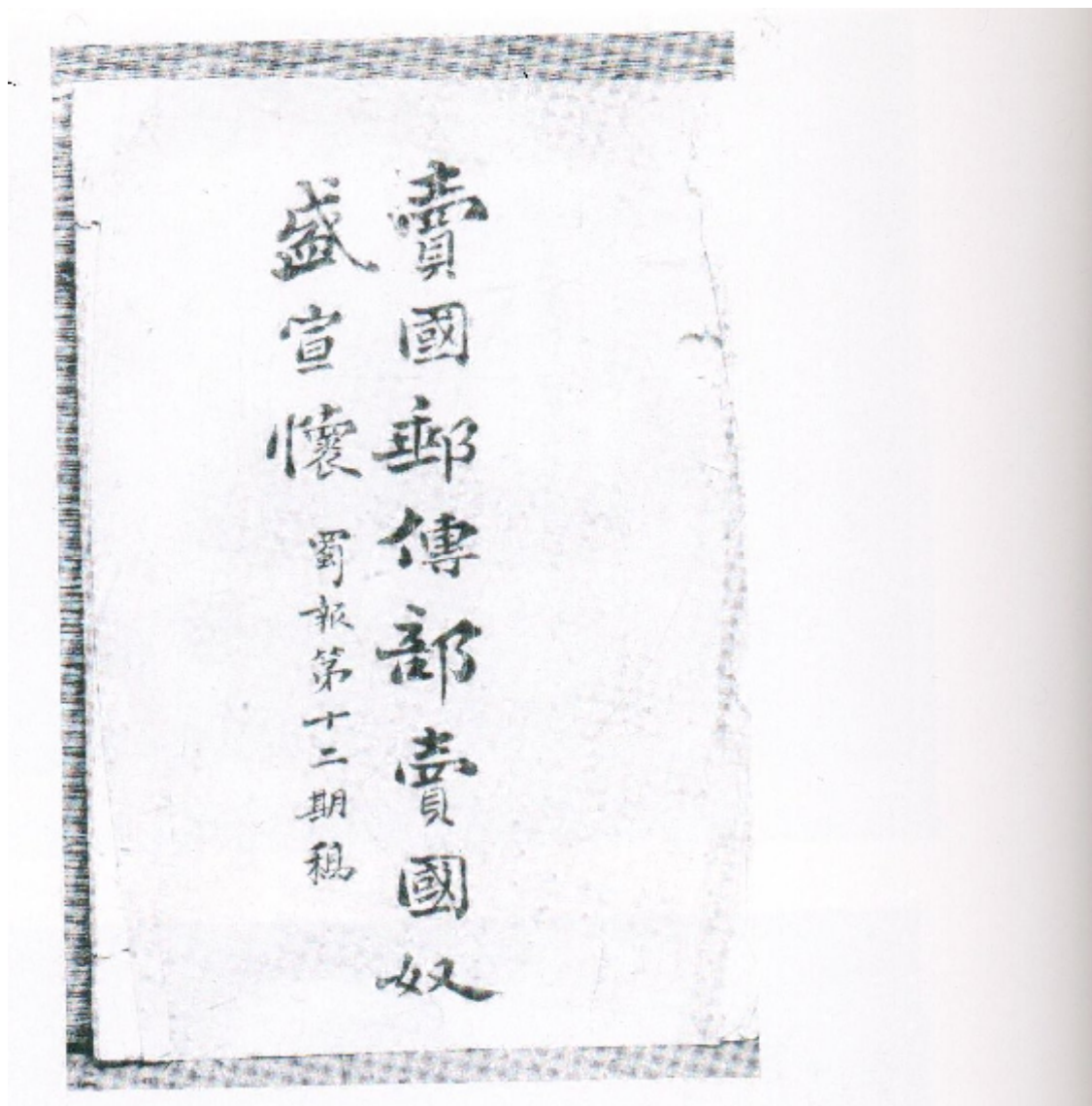
Picture 1: The Chuan-Han Railway Company Stock: “Notice: In accordance with the printed regulations this Certificate is neither negotiable nor transferable to any person or persons other than Chinese; if these conditions be not observed this Certificate shall become null and void.” Red Ink: “Stamp for stocks from Tongliang county.”



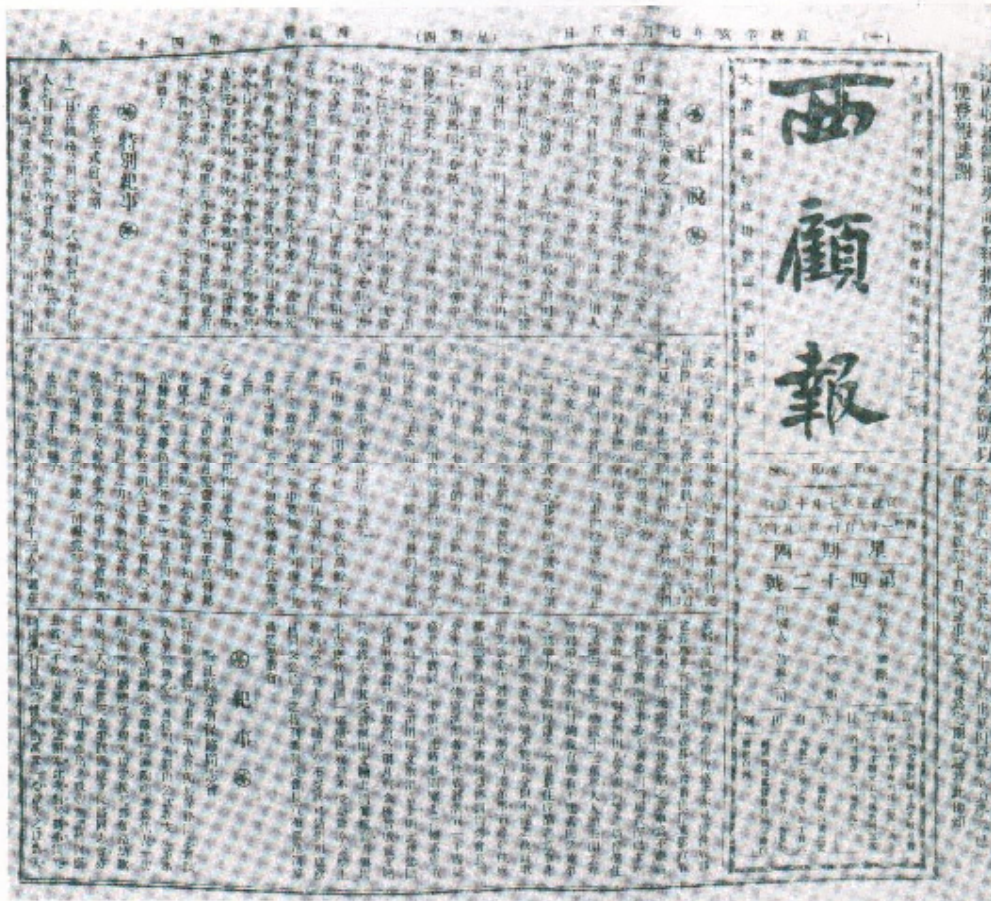
Picture 2: Election for Provincial Assembly



Picture 3: Chairman of Sichuan Provincial Assembly Pu Dianjun



Picture 4: Revolutionary Propaganda: *Shubao*

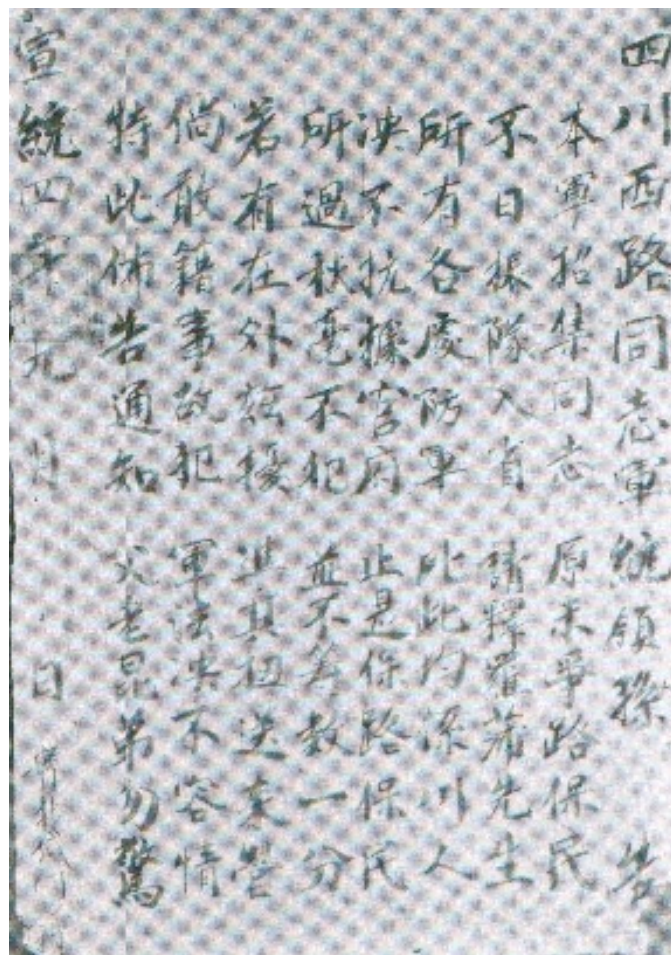


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Picture 5: Revolutionary Propaganda: Xigubao



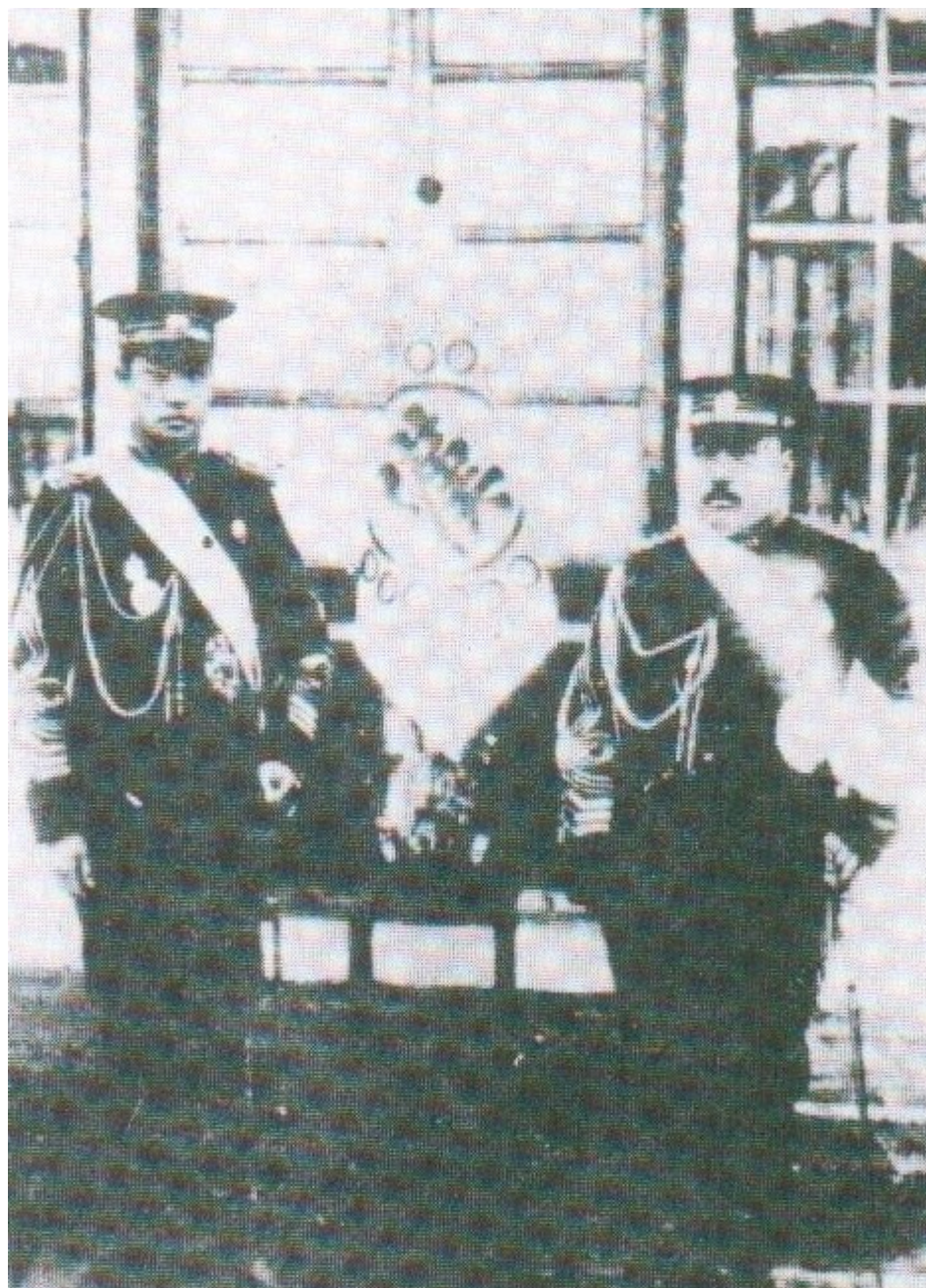
Picture 6: Chengdu Massacre on September 7, 1911



Picture 7: A Poster of the Sichuan Railway Protection Army: “Announcement of the West Route Leader Sun Zepei: The reason that we have the Railway Protection Army is to recover our railway and to protect our people. We have rushed to Chengdu, hoping that Zhao Erfeng would release Luo and Pu ... Our intention was to protect the railway and to protect our people, and we do not want to disturb the locale.” The 9th month [November] of the 4th [should be 3rd] year of the Xuantong Reign [1911].



Picture 8: Public Gathering for the New Sichuan Provincial Government



Picture 9: Sichuan Governor-general Yin Changheng (Left) and Vice Governor-general Luo Lun (Right) after the December 18 Mutiny



Picture 10: Monument Commemorating the Martyrs of the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement

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