

## Transnational Educational and Cultural Interaction Before and During the May Fourth Era: The Chinese Francophile Lobby and the Sino-French Connection

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### *Abstract*

This article seeks to highlight the significance of an ambitious transnational project orchestrated by a group of Chinese Francophile intellectuals active in France from the turn of the twentieth century to the early 1920s (whom I refer to as the Chinese Francophile ‘lobby’) that aimed to enhance Sino-French educational and cultural interaction, in the process effecting a fundamental moral transformation of both Chinese workers and students symbolised by the agenda of work-study which they promoted in Chinese-language journals published in France. These initiatives have tended to be overlooked by historians of the May Fourth period, who primarily focus on key May Fourth journals and newspapers published in China, a small coterie of intellectuals (both radical and conservative) based in Chinese elite educational institutions such as Beijing University, student/worker demonstrations and strikes in Chinese urban centres and treaty ports, and intellectual and student networks and organisations within China itself. In illuminating the significance of the Chinese Francophile lobby, the scope of the so-called ‘May Fourth era’ is widened both temporally and spatially.

**KEYWORDS:** Education reform, Chinese anarchism, Francophilia, work-study, cultural exchange

In 1908 the Parisian north-western suburb of La Garenne-Colombes witnessed the establishment of a rather unique enterprise, a soybean processing plant (*usine caseo-sojaine*) run by a group of Chinese activist intellectuals that employed Chinese workers; these workers were recruited from the district of Gaoyang (高陽) in northern China (Zhili/Hebei province), the native place of the plant’s principal founder, Li Shizeng (李石曾 1881-1973). A year earlier, Li and others had also begun publishing an anarchist journal entitled *New Century* (新世紀 *xin shiji*), which shared a building (5, Rue Broca in

Paris' 5<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*) housing the offices of the French anarchist newspaper *Les temps nouveaux*, from which it took its French title.<sup>1</sup> Li Shizeng was the most prominent amongst a group of Chinese Francophile intellectuals that sought to forge educational, cultural and social links with France as part of a wider agenda to reform Chinese society.<sup>2</sup> This ambitious project, in collaboration with French politicians, educators and intellectuals, involved the encouragement of overseas Chinese study in France before World War One; the organisation of joint Sino-French cultural and educational associations in China and France before and during World War One; the promotion of literacy and elementary education amongst the nearly 37,000 Chinese labourers recruited by France for war-related employment in 1916-1918;<sup>3</sup> the organisation of a work-study

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of the journal (with a print run of up to 1,500) were shipped directly to China and the French colony of Indochina, where they were circulated clandestinely. Youn Dae-yeong, "The Introduction of Revolutionary 'New Books' and Vietnamese Intellectuals in the Early Twentieth Century", *The Newsletter* 99 (Spring 2018): 38-39. This is a publication of the International Institute of Asian Studies, Leiden.

<sup>2</sup> For more details on the origins, thought and activities of this Chinese Francophile lobby, see my chapters "Cultural Interaction, Globalisation and 'Creative Spaces' in the Early Twentieth Century: Li Shizeng (1881-1973) and the Chinese Francophile 'Lobby'", in Denise Gimpel, Bent Nielsen, and Paul Bailey eds., *Creative Spaces: Seeking the Dynamics of Change in China* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2012), 66-91, and "Cultural Connections in a New Global Space: Li Shizeng and the Chinese Francophile Project in the Early Twentieth Century", in Pei-Yin Lin and Weipin Tsai eds., *Print, Profit and Perception: Ideas, Information and Knowledge in Chinese Societies, 1895-1949* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 17-39.

<sup>3</sup> During World War One Britain also recruited Chinese labourers (96,500 in total) who were employed in north-western France and Flanders in south-western Belgium. For an analysis of the historical background to the Franco-British recruitment, the nature of the recruitment, and the experiences of the Chinese workers themselves while in France, see Paul J. Bailey, "From Shandong to the Somme: Chinese Indentured Labour in France

scheme in 1919-1920 that sent nearly 1,600 Chinese students to France and which aimed to both widen opportunities in China for overseas study and to expose prospective students to the world of labour as a means of financing their studies;<sup>4</sup> and the formulation of a Sino-French transnational university arrangement (perhaps the first of its kind in China) that allowed the enrolment of graduates from a college-level institution in China, the Sino-French University created in 1920, in a higher education institution in France, the Lyon Sino-French Institute---launched in 1921 and jointly administered by French and Chinese personnel.<sup>5</sup>

Such a project, in which Li Shizeng very much perceived himself as an *active and contributing member* of a global radical community, intriguingly also demonstrates that the nature of Sino-western interaction at this time should not solely be thought of in terms

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During World War One”, in Anne Kershen ed., *Language, Labour and Migration* (Aldershot: Ashgate Press, 2000), 179-196; Paul J. Bailey, “‘An Army of Labour’: Chinese Indentured Labour in First World War France”, in Santanu Das ed., *Race, Empire and First World War Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011, 35-52; and Paul J. Bailey, *Chinese Overseas Labour in World War One France: Migrant Workers, Globalisation and the Sino-French Connection* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, forthcoming). Most of the Chinese workers recruited by France were not repatriated until 1922 (up to 3,000 remained in France).

<sup>4</sup> Paul J. Bailey, “The Chinese Work-Study Movement in France”, *China Quarterly* no. 115 (September 1988): 441-461; Paul J. Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes Towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1990), chapter 6.

<sup>5</sup> Ruth Hayhoe, “A Comparative Approach to the Cultural Dynamics of Sino-Western Educational Co-operation”, *China Quarterly* no. 104 (December 1988): 676-699; “Li’ang Zhongfa daxue” (The Sino-French Institute), in Chen Xuexun and Tian Zhengping eds., *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyushi ziliao huibian: liuxue jiaoyu* [Collection of Materials on Modern Chinese Educational History: Overseas Education] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 666-681.

of a victimised and ‘semi-colonial’ China haplessly manipulated and exploited by foreign powers, symbolised in particular by China’s unjust treatment at the Versailles Peace Conference that sparked the May Fourth 1919 student protests. The initiatives energetically undertaken by Li Shizeng and the Chinese Francophile lobby, by way of contrast, suggest that Sino-western interaction in the early twentieth century constituted a dynamic two-way process.

Cultural and intellectual studies of the New Culture/May Fourth era---conventionally perceived as the period beginning with the launch of the radical journal *New Youth* (新青年 *xin qingnian*) in 1915 and continuing through to the early 1920s<sup>6</sup>---have generally overlooked the pioneering role played by Li Shizeng and the Chinese Francophile lobby in the creation of transnational networks and associations during the 1910s and 1920s.<sup>7</sup> More overlooked, however, is their significant contribution to the radicalisation of

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<sup>6</sup> Recent studies, however, have begun to examine the process whereby the very idea or concept of “the New Culture movement” came to be “constructed” in the early 1920s (the term itself first only being deployed in 1919 after the May Fourth protests). See Elisabeth Forster, “From Academic Nitpicking to a ‘New Culture Movement’: How Newspapers Turned Academic Debate into the Center of ‘May Fourth’”, *Frontiers of History in China* 9.4 (December 2014): 534-557; Elisabeth Forster, “The Buzzword ‘New Culture Movement’: Intellectual Marketing Strategies in China in the 1910s and 1920s”, *Modern Asian Studies* 51.5 (September 2017): 1253-1282; and Ya-pei Kuo, “The Making of the New Culture Movement: A Discursive History”, *Twentieth-Century China* 42.1 (January 2017): 52-71.

<sup>7</sup> Transnational networks and associations in treaty-port Shanghai during the 1920s and 1930s are explored by Jeffrey Wasserstrom, “Cosmopolitan Connections and Transnational Networks”, in Nara Dillon and Jean Oi eds., *At the Crossroads of Empire: Middlemen, Social Networks and State-building in Republican Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 206-224, but the focus is very much on the role of British and American residents (“Shanghaianders”).

popular educational thought highlighted in the Chinese-language journals they published in France, which itself built on changing attitudes in turn of the century China towards popular education that encompassed novel ways of delineating class in Chinese society. For example, a recent article that investigates how a number of Beijing-based student and professional education groups viewed “commoners’ education” (平民教育 *pingmin jiaoyu*) and its potential role in the creation of a democratic society (however defined) during the New Culture era makes no mention at all of Li Shizeng’s contemporaneous promotion of Chinese worker education and his envisioning of a new society based on the work-study ideal.<sup>8</sup>

Such a phenomenon is not entirely surprising given the fact that hitherto studies have principally drawn on journals and newspapers published in China, and variously focused on a relatively small coterie of intellectuals (both radical and conservative) based in Chinese elite higher education institutions such as Beijing University, student/worker demonstrations and strikes in urban centres and the treaty ports, and intellectual and student networks and associations in China itself.<sup>9</sup> Perhaps more surprising is Li Shizeng’s absence from recent studies that seek to “decentre” May Fourth by exploring

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<sup>8</sup> Zach Smith, “Reading *Pingmin*: Popular Education and the Democratic Ideal in Republican Beijing 1917-1924”, *Twentieth-Century China* 43.1 (January 2018): 3-23.

<sup>9</sup> A recent example of the latter aspect is Anne Chao, ‘The Local in the Global: The Strength of Anhui Ties in Chen Duxiu’s Early Social Networks 1901-1925’, *Twentieth-Century China* 42.2 (May 2017): 113-137. Other studies focus on the communal work-study living arrangements of Beijing University students in 1919-1920 (such as the Work-Study Mutual Aid Corps) without making any reference at all to Li Shizeng’s earlier promotion of work-study as a living ideal for both workers and students. See Shakhrah Rahav, “A May Fourth ‘Peach Blossom Garden’: The Number One Work Study Mutual Aid Corps in Beijing”, *Twentieth-Century China* 33.1 (November 2007): 81-103; and Shakhrah Rahav, “How Shall We Live? Chinese Communal Experiments After the Great War in Global Context”, *Journal of World History* 26.3 (September 2015): 521-548.

the complexity and multifarious aspects of Chinese social, cultural and literary modernity during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>10</sup>

#### THE ORIGINS OF THE CHINESE FRANCOPHILE LOBBY

From a scholar-official family, Li Shizeng---who was to become the unofficial leader of the Chinese Francophile lobby---first went to France in 1902, when he accompanied the newly-appointed Chinese Minister to France, Sun Baoqi (孫寶琦 1867-1931), as an embassy student.<sup>11</sup> Li's decision to study in France not only indicated a desire to seek western knowledge at its source rather than to go to Japan as an increasing number of his compatriots were doing,<sup>12</sup> but was also a relatively bold one for the time since France's image in the Chinese official mind in the early twentieth century was not altogether a

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<sup>10</sup> Milena Dolželová-Velingerová and Oldrich Král eds., *The Appropriation of Cultural Capital: China's May Fourth Project* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002); Kai-wing Chow, Tze-ki Hon, Hung-yok Ip, Don Price eds., *Beyond the May Fourth Paradigm: In Search of Chinese Modernity* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008). Since Li Shizeng later in his career became a senior member of the Guomindang, there are a few brief references to him in a new study of China's 'conservative revolution' after 1927 in which Li is simply identified as one of the ideologues of the radical right (which was anti-communist, averse to social revolution, and supportive of state-managed capitalism). See Brian Tsui, *China's Conservative Revolution: The Quest for a New Order 1927-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 21, 34, 36, 50-53. Worse still, Li Shizeng does not merit a reference at all in Timothy Cheek, *The Intellectual in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Li's father was Li Hongzao (1820-1897), who had served as a Grand Councillor and tutor to Emperor Tongzhi (r.1861-1874).

<sup>12</sup> Douglas Reynolds, *China 1898-1912: The Xinzhen Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press), 42.

positive one. Li later recalled in 1925 that France at the turn of the century was very much associated with subversive political radicalism and chronic instability; anyone intending to study in France, he noted, was thought to be needlessly risking exposure to “dangerous extremism” (洪水猛兽 *hongshui mengshou*, literally “fierce floods and dangerous beasts”).<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after his arrival in France Li enrolled in an agricultural college in Montargis sixty miles south of Paris, a region well-known for its anticlerical sentiments. Li would later become a fierce critic of religion, an outlook that can be traced to his time spent in France. On graduation from the college in 1905 Li pursued his studies at the Pasteur Institute in Paris, where he studied chemistry, biology and bacteriology. During this time he began reading anarchist works by Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876) and Peter Kropotkin (1842-1921), and soon developed an avid interest in the thought of French utopian and anarchist writers such as Charles Fourier (1772-1837), Pierre-Joseph Proudhon (1809-1865) and, particularly, the geographer Elisée Reclus (1830-1905), whose nephew, Paul Reclus, Li met in Paris.<sup>14</sup> Through this acquaintance Li was introduced to a wide circle of French

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<sup>13</sup> Li Shizeng, “Zhongfa jiaoyu wenti” (The question of Sino-French education), *Zhongfa daxue banyuekan* [Semi-Monthly Journal of the Sino-French University], no.1 (1925): 5-6. A 1920s portrait of Li Shizeng in a French journal also noted that his parents had been reluctant to see him study in France since the country at the time was considered as dangerous as “Bolshevik Russia today”. *Annales franco-chinoises* no.2 (1927): 27-30.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Reclus (1847-1914) was a surgeon and professor at Paris University’s Faculty of Medicine. See the account of their relationship by Paul Reclus’ son, Jacques Reclus (Shao Kelu), “Wo suorenshe de Li Shizeng” [The Li Shizeng I knew], *Zhuanji wenxue* 45.3 (1984): 87-88. Jacques Reclus (1894-1984) would himself later travel to China in 1927 to teach at the Shanghai Labour University (whose overseers included Li Shizeng and other members of the Chinese Francophile lobby), and would remain in China until 1952. On the Shanghai Labour University, see Chan Ming and Arif Dirlik, *Schools into Fields and Factories: Anarchists, the Guomindang and the National Labor University in Shanghai 1927-1932* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991).

intellectuals and politicians such as the mathematician Paul Painlevé (1863-1933), who would twice serve as prime minister (in 1917 and 1925), Edouard Herriot (1872-1957), mayor of Lyon from 1905 to his death as well as a three-time prime minister (in 1924-1925, 1926, and 1932), Marius Moutet (1876-1968), a long serving socialist deputy in the National Assembly who served as Minister for Overseas France in the 1930s and 1940s, and the academic Alphonse Aulard (1849-1928), prominent historian at the Sorbonne and pioneering scholar of the French Revolution, all of whom would be key supporters of Li Shizeng's project of Sino-French cultural and educational interaction.

Li's admiration of the utopian thought of Elisée Reclus led him to translate into Chinese excerpts from Reclus' last completed work, *L'homme et la terre* (1903). Many of Reclus' ideas resonated with Li's own preoccupations and concerns. Reclus' faith, for example, in the power of science and education to dissipate all social prejudice, as well as his valorisation of gradual and peaceful evolutionary change in the eventual formation of a new world community in which all humans would recognise their common membership of the planet (prompting a recent study to hail Reclus as an "early prophet of globalisation"),<sup>15</sup> were to inspire Li's promotion of Chinese worker education and the

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<sup>15</sup> John Clark and Camille Martin eds., *Anarchy, Geography, Modernity: The Radical Social Thought of Elisée Reclus* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2004), 4. The authors point out that Reclus foresaw a world in which there would be no "core" or "periphery" but one which would have "its center everywhere, its periphery nowhere". Little has been written on Reclus in English. For other studies, see Gary Dunbar, *Elisée Reclus: Historian of Nature* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1978); and Marie Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism: Elisée Reclus and Nineteenth-Century European Anarchism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979). Reclus' influence on Li Shizeng is overlooked in earlier English-language studies of Chinese anarchism such as Robert Scalapino and George Yu, *The Chinese Anarchist Movement* (Berkeley: Center for Chinese Studies, University of California, 1961), and is only fleetingly mentioned in more recent studies. See, for example, Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 25, 51, 94.



ideal of “work-study” (勤工儉學 *qingong jianxue*). Li was equally inspired by Reclus’ vision of a future society that comprised autonomous, self-sufficient and mutually supporting associations that would ultimately lead to a “federative republic of the entire world”.<sup>16</sup> In his later memoirs published in 1961, Li would observe that the greatest “truth” (道理 *daoli*) he had discovered while in France was the principle of peaceful “federation” (聯合 *lianhe*).<sup>17</sup>

Li Shizeng’s attraction to French anarchist thought, moreover, buttressed his growing admiration of French culture in general. In one of the journals he was to publish in France during and after World War One he contrasted the ideals of the French secular republic, which he defined as freedom, creativity and pacifism (ideals, Li added, that were equally valued in China) with what he perceived as the more brutal German ideals of autocracy, utilitarianism and militarism (although this did not prevent him from praising French socialists for abandoning their pacifist ideals in supporting the war, which he described as a conflict “between the people and hegemonism” [民帝之爭 *mindì zhī zhēng*]).<sup>18</sup> In another article Li insisted that whereas China and France “delighted in righteousness” (好

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<sup>16</sup> Cited in Fleming, *The Anarchist Way to Socialism*, 70-71.

<sup>17</sup> Li Shizeng, *Shizeng bji* [Notes from Li Shizeng] (Taipei: Zhongguo guoli wenzi xuekanshe, 1961), 105-108.

<sup>18</sup> Li Shizeng, “Ouzhan lun” (Discussion of the European war), *Lü’ou zazhi* (Journal for Chinese Students in Europe), no. 2 (1 September 1916): 3-9. In justifying the decision of French socialists to support the war against Germany, Li extraordinarily anticipated in some way the Maoist concept of “the people’s democratic dictatorship” when he argued that “while revolutionaries fundamentally adhere to humanitarianism as their goal, they have no option but to adopt extreme measures in dealing with the people’s enemies (ie Germany)” [*zhengru gemingjia yi rendao zhuyi wei di ran duiyu minzei budeyi er yong jilie zhi shouduan ye*].

義 *haoyi*) above all else, Germany and Japan simply “valorised material or utilitarian profit” (好利 *haoli*).<sup>19</sup>

It is clear that Li’s Francophilia involved an enthusiastic embrace of what Republicanism had come to represent in early twentieth century France.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on the political symbolism of the revolutions of 1789 and 1848, and continuing in a modified form through to the final decades of the Third Republic (1870-1940), Republicanism was noted for its fierce denunciation of monarchical despotism and religious obscurantism (although increasingly after 1905 with the formal separation of Church and state in France, anticlericalism was to be replaced by hostility to communism as the Republic’s principal enemy). Although by the end of the nineteenth century Republicanism was divided along left-right lines, most of those who defined themselves as “republicans” opposed plutocracy, militarism, religious authority and political despotism, while championing the extension of suffrage rights (at least for men), the wider availability of education, and the nurturing of a rational and civic-minded citizenry.<sup>21</sup>

Li was joined by a coterie of like-minded Chinese intellectuals who together would form a Francophile “lobby”---an “epistemic community” that embraced a specific cultural and

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<sup>19</sup> Li Shizeng, “Zhongfa deri bijiao” (Comparisons between China, France, Germany and Japan), *Lü’ou zhoukan* (Weekly Journal for Chinese Students in Europe), no.3 (29 November 1919).

<sup>20</sup> Such Francophilia was not adversely affected in any way by France’s role as an imperial power, about which Li and his colleagues said virtually nothing. Wang Jingwei in a 1917 speech did admit that France’s colonial record in Indochina was poor, but insisted this should not overly influence views on French culture in general. “Liufa jianxuehui jiangyanhui yanshuo” [Talk given at the Lecture Society of the Association for Frugal Study in France], *Dongfang zazhi* 14.9 (September 1917): 178-179.

<sup>21</sup> Emile Chabal, *A Divided Republic: Nation, State and Citizenship in Contemporary France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 11-15.

educational agenda that they were prepared to promote politically.<sup>22</sup> Such a “lobby” differed, for example, from the rather loosely organised group of Chinese Francophile writers and aesthetes in the 1920s who gathered in Shanghai’s French Concession aiming to create the ambiance of a French-style *salon* centred on the publishing house run by Zeng Pu (曾樸 1872-1935) and his son Zeng Xubai (曾虛白 1895-1994).<sup>23</sup> Li Shizeng’s Francophile colleagues included Zhang Jingjiang (張靜江 1877-1950), who had joined Li in travelling to France in 1902 and later served as a commercial *attaché* at the Chinese legation in Paris as well as opening an import-export business in Paris’ 5<sup>th</sup> *arrondissement*;<sup>24</sup> the future linguist and philosopher Wu Zhihui (吳稚暉 1864-1953), who arrived in Paris following two years of study in Britain; and Cai Yuanpei (蔡元培 1868-1940), future Education Minister and Chancellor of Beijing University during the

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<sup>22</sup> I have borrowed the phrase “epistemic community” from Alison Assiter’s description of feminism in the postmodern age (*Enlightened Women: Modernist Feminism in the Postmodern Age* [Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1996], 82). Assiter defines such a community as “a group of intellectuals who share certain fundamental interests, values and beliefs in common...and who work on consequences of these presuppositions”.

<sup>23</sup> Heinrich Fruehauf, “Urban Exoticism in Modern and Contemporary Chinese Literature”, in Ellen Widmer and David Der-wei Wang eds., *From May Fourth to June Fourth: Fiction and Film in Twentieth-Century China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 145; Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999), 18-20.

<sup>24</sup> Like Li Shizeng, Zhang cultivated a wide network of contacts amongst French politicians, intellectuals and businessmen; in 1907, for example, he was a member of the editorial committee of the Sino-French Friendship Association whose members included the French Foreign Minister, a former French Minister to China, and a director of the Bank of Paris.

early years of the Chinese Republic. Other members of the “lobby” who joined Li in France were Wang Jingwei (汪精衛 1883-1944), a future prominent member of the Guomindang, and Chu Minyi (褚民誼 1884-1946), Wang’s brother-in-law and future vice-president of the Lyon Sino-French Institute.

In 1906 Li, Wu and Zhang established the World Society (世界社 *shijie she*), a publishing house in Paris that produced a pictorial providing information on celebrated scientists and philosophers; one year later the Society began publishing *New Century* which not only critiqued the “corruption” and “backwardness” of the Qing monarchy but also promoted the Francophile lobby’s brand of anarchism. In a series of articles that appeared in *New Century* in 1908 (which were in many ways more radical in their implications than anything published during the New Culture era), Li defined “anarchist revolution” as a radical form of education that prioritised the ending of all divisions in society through the valorisation of social equality and harmony---in contrast to, in Li’s view, state-imposed or controlled education that merely reinforced political and social hierarchies and legitimised militarism and an oppressive legal system. He disputed the notion that the “lower classes” (defined as the impoverished and illiterate) were permanently to accept their assigned inferiority *vis-a-vis* the educated and the privileged, arguing that they were in any event more hard-working and potentially more intelligent than the well-to-do since the former through necessity had constantly to use their wits in the daily struggle for survival whereas the latter, with no challenges to exercise their

ingenuity, spent their lives in idleness.<sup>25</sup> Such educational egalitarianism would underpin Li Shizeng's work-study ideal.<sup>26</sup>

It is also worth noting here that Li's distinction between the "lower classes" and the idle rich resonated with reformist discourse in China during the last years of the Qing, as writers and educators---in urging the need for widespread popular education---began to analyse Chinese society in unprecedented ways, in particular observing that society was principally divided between those who produced wealth (生利者 *shenglizhe*), comprising peasants, workers, artisans and small traders, and those who consumed it (分利者 *fenlizhe*) such as officials and gentry elites.<sup>27</sup> It was precisely the importance increasingly attributed during this period to economic productivity as the crucial factor in determining national survival that manual labour began to gain more prestige---a phenomenon that was to become a significant feature of political and educational discourse in the New Culture/May Fourth era (especially in the wake of the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution). It is striking also that while a deeper Chinese knowledge of Marxism and the strictly Marxian definition of class did not develop until after 1919, some Chinese writers in the early years of the twentieth century were arguing that the difference between those classes (阶级 *jiejie*, or 流 *liu*) which produced wealth and those which simply consumed it (rather

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<sup>25</sup> Li Shizeng, "Wuzhengfu shuo" [The theory of anarchism], reprinted in Zhang Nan and Wang Renzhi eds., *Xinhai geming qian shinianjian shilun xuanji* (Selection of Journal Editorials from the Ten Years Before the 1911 Revolution) [Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1977], volume 3, 133-179. *New Century* was published between 1907 and 1910.

<sup>26</sup> I have argued elsewhere that educational egalitarianism characterised reform discourse amongst some officials and educators during the last years of the Qing and first years of the Republic, which itself echoed the egalitarian implications of certain strands of Confucian educational thought. See "Globalization and Chinese Education in the Early Twentieth Century", *Frontiers of Education in China* 8.3 (September 2013): 412-414.

<sup>27</sup> Bailey, *Reform the People*, 79-84.

than the more conventional differentiation of educated literati from the rest of the population) constituted *the* defining feature of society.

## THE WORK-STUDY VISION

Li first implemented his work-study ideal amongst the thirty-odd Chinese workers hailing from his home district in Zhili province employed in the beancurd-processing plant in north-western Paris he had established in 1908. Ever the entrepreneur as a well as anarchist visionary, Li had in mind to popularise the consumption of beancurd (豆腐 *doufu*) as a substitute for meat in Europe, publishing a pamphlet in French extolling its nutritional and medicinal benefits.<sup>28</sup> Li was able to secure funds for the project from the Governor-general of Zhili province when he returned briefly to China in 1908.<sup>29</sup> He opened a school on the plant's premises where he and other members of the Francophile lobby provided instruction in Chinese, French and general science. For Li, work-study had as much a moral as an educational purpose in transforming illiterate workers into knowledgeable, diligent and morally upright members of the community (the workers, for example, were exhorted to devote as much of their spare time as possible to study and to forego indulgence of "vices" such as gambling and smoking). Li's beancurd plant was

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<sup>28</sup> *Le soja: sa culture, ses usages alimentaires, thérapeutiques, agricoles et industrielles* (Paris: Augustin Challand, 1912). Li also arranged for excerpts from the unpublished manuscript to be distributed amongst the crowds visiting the Bruxelles' Universal Exhibition in 1910. Li's promotion of beancurd coincided with initiatives by British and Egyptian agriculturalists to encourage soybean cultivation in Egypt; although soybeans were to be exported to Britain as a substitute for cottonseeds in its oil crushing industry and utilised as animal fodder in Egypt, they did not become a popular item of human consumption there. Shuang Wen "Mediated Imaginations: Chinese-Arab Connections in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries", PhD Thesis, Georgetown University, 2015, 80-99.

<sup>29</sup> *Shizeng biji*, 78; Li Shuhua, "Xinhai geming qianhou de Li Shizeng xiansheng" [Li Shizeng before and after the 1911 Revolution], *Zhuanji wenxue* 24.2 (1974): 44.

to continue operating throughout World War One, and a report on a 1919 visit to the plant by the Chinese Minister to France, Hu Weide (胡惟德 1863-1933)--by which time it was producing soybean milk that proved a popular substitute for increasingly expensive cows' milk---noted that all of the Chinese workers (now totalling seventy) possessed basic literacy in Chinese and French, with a few even studying to enter technical school.<sup>30</sup>

A similar moral imperative underwrote the Chinese Francophile lobby's campaign before 1914 to encourage Chinese students to go to France---considered a republic *par excellence* free of the baneful influences of monarchy and religion, and thus an ideal environment in which to work and study. In 1912 Li and his colleagues founded the Association for Frugal Study in France (留法俭學會 *liufa jianxuehui*) to facilitate Chinese overseas study in France. Its stated aims were to “cut down on expenditures in order to widen opportunities for overseas study and, by labour and a simple life to cultivate habits of diligence and hard work”.<sup>31</sup> Preparatory schools were opened in Beijing and Chengdu to provide potential overseas students with instruction in basic French, while in France Li utilised his contacts in Montargis (including the mayor) to arrange for the reception of “frugal study” students in schools and colleges in the area. Li calculated that living expenditures during their sojourn in France would be low since they would be expected to dress and eat frugally in addition to carrying out collective menial tasks (cleaning, cooking, washing and repairing clothes)—an innovation that clearly anticipated the communal living experiments of Beijing University students during the May Fourth period. By the time World War One broke out the Association had sent one hundred “frugal study” students to France. The behavioural modernisation agenda and popularisation of education underpinning the project were succinctly illustrated by Wang

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<sup>30</sup> “Bali huaren doufu gongsi cangan ji” [Record of a visit to the Chinese-run beancurd plant], *Dongfang zazhi* 16.9 (1919): 214-215.

<sup>31</sup> The aims and regulations of the Association are in Lü'ou zazhi she ed., *Lü'ou jiaoyu yundong* [The Movement for Overseas Education in Europe] (Tours: Zhonghua yinziju, 1916), 50-55.

Jingwei, who observed that “frugal study” would allow others than the wealthy or influential to go abroad and thus contribute to raising the educational level of the population as a whole (and, on the other hand, noting that only when intellectual elites led simple and unostentatious lives could they join ranks with “the great majority of hard-pressed commoners”);<sup>32</sup> Wu Zhihui put it more bluntly when he remarked that no matter whether the scions of well-off families joined the scheme and did not take their studies seriously, “if at least they learn how to clean latrines, it will be worth it.”<sup>33</sup>

With the French recruitment of Chinese labourers in 1916-1918 who were employed in government-run munitions plants and privately-owned metallurgical, chemical and construction firms, the Chinese Francophile lobby seized the opportunity to expand their work-study project. Anticipating the recruitment, Li and his colleagues founded the Diligent Work and Frugal Study Association (勤工儉學會 *qingong jianxue hui*) in 1915 to promote the importance of workers’ spare-time education; in the following year they received official permission to open a Chinese workers’ school in Paris (which even benefitted from a subsidy granted by the French government) to provide instruction in Chinese, French and general scientific knowledge.<sup>34</sup> The first intake of twenty-four students were those Chinese workers already in France before 1914, and the plan was that some of them could be trained as interpreters and teachers for the soon-to-be arriving French-recruited workers. Between 1917 and 1920 the Francophile lobby also published

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<sup>32</sup> *Liufa jianxue baogaoshu* [Report on Frugal Study in France] (Guangzhou: np, 1918), 66-71; *Lü’ou jiaoyu yundong*, 35.

<sup>33</sup> Cited in Tao Yinghui, “Ji minguo silao “ [On the four elder statesmen of the Republic], *Zhuanji wenxue* 23.5 (1973): 35.

<sup>34</sup> The proposed curriculum also included an introduction to the history of trade unions, reflecting Li Shizeng’s view that they encouraged individual workers to subordinate their personal interests to those of the group. Chu Minyi had earlier similarly praised French trade unions for encouraging members to work together in the collective interest. “Gonghui” [Trade unions], *Xin shiji* no.82 (1909).



the Chinese Workers Journal (華工雜誌 *huagong zazhi*) that included items written in the vernacular and was used as teaching material for the workers' spare-time classes; a later report on the 930 Chinese workers employed at a match factory in Vonges (eastern France) noted fifty per cent of them were studying in their spare time, while thirty per cent were regularly reading issues of the Chinese Workers Journal.<sup>35</sup>

As in the case of the Chinese workers employed in Li Shizeng's beancurd-processing plant before World War One, so the education of the World War One Chinese workers was to be the vehicle for their moral and behavioural "improvement". Cai Yuanpei, for example, gave a series of lectures in 1916 at the Chinese Workers' School in Paris describing the "unseemly" habits of Chinese commoners (eg inattention to hygiene, cursing in public, adherence to "superstitious" beliefs) and urging the need to adopt "civilised" Western ways such as politeness, decorum, a love of animals, and concern for the public welfare.<sup>36</sup> An article in *Huagong zazhi* a year later compiled an extraordinarily detailed list of behavioural rules for Chinese workers in France designed to make them more "civilised" and thus less likely to damage China's reputation in the world. Such rules included not to spit or shout in public, not to pick a fight if pushed or shoved in a crowd, not to throw rubbish onto the streets, not to touch exhibits or artefacts in museums, not to pick flowers in public parks, and not to persist in haggling over price when

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<sup>35</sup> *Jiaoyu gongbao* [Bulletin of Education], no.4 (1919): 22-25. The initiatives of the Chinese Francophile lobby in promoting workers' education before and during World War One have been entirely overlooked by studies that highlight the role of the American-educated James Yen (1890-1990) as the pioneering champion of mass education in China during the 1920s (eg Charles Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* [New York: Columbia University Press, 1990]).

<sup>36</sup> *Cai Yuanpei xiansheng quanji* [The Collected Works of Cai Yuanpei] (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1968), 197, 202-205, 210-220. Cai's lectures were published in *Lü'ou zazhi* and *Huagong zazhi*.

purchasing items.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese Francophile lobby's concern with the behavioural "improvement" of the Chinese workers not only anticipated later May Fourth discourse and practice----whether it be Li Dazhao's call in 1918 for urban youth to "go down to the countryside" in order to "enlighten" rural folk, or the "outreach" activities of Beijing University students in 1919-1920 lecturing public audiences on the importance of transforming their daily habits and "old-fashioned" beliefs-----but also the obsession of party and intellectual elites throughout the rest of the twentieth century and on into the twenty-first with the people's "behavioural modernisation".<sup>38</sup>

After World War One Li's work-study program focused equally on Chinese students, whom he confidently predicted would benefit from living, studying and working in France. In the journals Li and others published at this time the philosophy of work-study was extolled as the means to end social division by raising the educational level of workers while also transforming elitist attitudes amongst the educated and privileged as a result of experiencing manual labour. In rationalising the importance of work-study as the means to end intellectual elitism, Wang Jingwei had earlier remarked in 1916 that the rigid division between intellectual and manual labour in China had brought about in its wake a "dictatorship of scholarship" (学术之专制 *xueshu zhi zhuanzhi*) symbolised by an educated elite exercising unjustifiable hegemony over the rest of the population.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Xu Haifan, "Huagong xuzhi" [What Chinese workers should know], *Huagong zazhi* no.2 (25 January 1917): 18-21; no.3 (10 February 1917): 21-23. On the increasing concern amongst Chinese officials, educators and reformers from the turn of the twentieth century onwards to remould the people's behaviour and customary practices, see Bailey, *Reform the People*, 72-79, 186-200, 267-268.

<sup>38</sup> A recent example is the "Guide to Civilised Tourism and Travel" issued by China's National Tourism Administration in 2013, whose advice includes not to spit or speak loudly in public, not to pick flowers in public parks, not to throw litter, and not to deface cultural relics or historical sites.

<sup>39</sup> Wang Jingwei, "Wuren duiyu Zhongguo zhi zeren" [Our responsibility toward China], *Lü'ou zazhi* no.4 (1 October 1916): 1-7.

What was especially novel about this work-study discourse was its unambiguous valorisation of commoners' education. A contributor to one of Li's journals in 1919 declared that widespread education amongst workers would smash the "monopoly of knowledge" held by a few and thereby prevent capitalists from hoodwinking their workers.<sup>40</sup> Li himself observed that the Chinese workers in France represented a "new force" (新擊 *xinji*) whose potential would be realised through education; in any event, he continued, the traditional social hierarchy in China was now redundant since the times demanded that everyone consider themselves a "worker" (工人 *gongren*) in both the literal and metaphorical sense.<sup>41</sup>

Li also publicised the achievements of historical "work-study" exemplars to demonstrate the intellectual potential of ordinary commoners. These included Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778), whose lower class and impoverished origins, Li argued, did not prevent them from becoming world-class scientists and philosophers through their diligence and application. These were just two examples, Li enthused, of potentially millions of similarly disadvantaged commoners who could achieve equal success.<sup>42</sup> A more contemporary work-study pioneer referred to by Li was the Spanish educator Francisco Ferrer (1859-1909), whose school in Barcelona banned religious instruction and mandated manual labour as part of the curriculum. As if

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<sup>40</sup> Yu Gong, "Jinri gongren suo xuyao de shi shemma" [What do workers need today?], *Lü'ou zhoukan* no. 4 (6 December 1919).

<sup>41</sup> Li Shizeng, "Huagong" [Chinese overseas workers], *Huagong zazhi* no. 39 (25 October 1919): 3-11.

<sup>42</sup> Li Shizeng, "Fenkelin zhuan" [Biography of Franklin], *Lü'ou zazhi* no. 1 (15 August 1916): 1-6; "Lusuo zhuan" [Biography of Rousseau], *Lü'ou zazhi* no.4 (1 October 1916):1-2, and no.5 (15 October 1916): 1-3.

to indicate his personal role within a global community of like-minded radical thinkers and activists, Li claimed that he had met and *exchanged ideas* with Ferrer in Paris.<sup>43</sup>

## TRANSNATIONAL INITIATIVES

The Francophile lobby's agenda also included the creation of transnational organisations and institutions promoting cultural interaction and exchange. During the first year of the Chinese Republic, for example, Li and his colleagues founded the Sino-French Association in Beijing (which had a Chinese chairman and French vice-chairman) and the Sino-French Union in Paris presided over by Li and Paul Painlevé as co-presidents. In 1916 the lobby created the Sino-French Education Association (華法教育會 *huafa jiaoyuhui*), which aimed to foster scientific and educational ties as well to serve as an umbrella organisation overseeing the interests of Chinese workers and students in France (with branches established in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu). At the opening meeting of the Association the two co-presidents---Cai Yuanpei and Alphonse Aulard---spoke admiringly of the other's culture. While Cai reiterated his earlier observation (in 1912) that the French republican ideals of freedom, equality and universal brotherhood had much in common with Confucian values of public-spiritedness (義 *yi*), reciprocity in human interaction (恕 *shu*) and humaneness (仁 *ren*), Aulard hailed the humanist ideals of Confucius as the harbinger of the French Revolution.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Li Shizeng, "Fulai zhuan" [Biography of Ferrer], *Lü'ou zazhi* no.7 (15 November 1916): 1-5.

<sup>44</sup> Cai Yuanpei, "Duiyu jiaoyu fangzhen zhi yijian" (My opinion on the direction of education), in *Cai Yuanpei xuanji* (Selected Works of Cai Yuanpei) (Hong Kong: Xianggang wenxue yanjiushe, n.d.), 20-27; *Lü'ou jiaoyu yundong*, 106-115. Aulard's view was typical of a particular and unique strand of French writing on China in the early twentieth century that posited a *complementarity* between French and Chinese cultures. See Paul J Bailey, "Voltaire and Confucius: French Attitudes Towards China in the Early Twentieth Century", *History of European ideas* 14.6 (November 1992): 817-837.

Finally, in 1920 Li and Cai were involved in the establishment of the Sino-French University (中法大學 *zhongfa daxue*), a system of interlocking higher and lower schools in Beijing and Guangzhou whose graduates would be eligible to enrol in a new higher education institution in France—the Sino-French Institute attached to the University of Lyon (between 1926 and 1946 nearly 500 Chinese students attended the Institute). Intriguingly, Li explained in 1922 that his passionate support for Sino-French cultural interaction was motivated in part by the desire to prevent China, in his view, from being completely dominated by Anglo-American culture.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Highlighting the role and writings of the Chinese Francophile lobby during the first two decades of the twentieth century brings to light two significant aspects of the so-called “New Culture/May Fourth” era. First, it uncovers alternative voices and novel ideas dating from the early years of the twentieth century and often occluded by a mainstream narrative focusing on a particular brand of social and cultural radicalism associated with *New Youth* and its contributors (such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi). Second, the lobby’s active engagement in forging transnational cultural and educational relations with France in the cause of pursuing its *own* reform agenda undermines in some concrete ways the hoary stereotype of a passive and non-autonomous China beholden to western powers symbolised by the “betrayal” of Versailles. Three further examples of the “Sino-French connection” are equally suggestive. While in France to attend the Versailles Peace Conference in September 1919, Chinese Foreign Minister Lu Zhengxiang (陆征祥 1871-1949) met with French President Raymond Poincaré and visited war-shattered Verdun; as a gesture of empathy for impoverished France and to demonstrate China’s civilised commitment to education, Lu announced on behalf of the Chinese government the grant

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<sup>45</sup> Li Shizeng, “Faguo jiaoyu yu wo jiaoyu qiantu zhi guanxi” (The connection between France’s education and the future of our country’s education), in *Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji* [Collected Writings of Li Shizeng] (Taipei: Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang weiyuanhui, 1980), volume 2, 231-236.

of 50,000 francs to help restore educational facilities in Verdun.<sup>46</sup> One year later, on an official visit to China to confer the degree of D.Litt on President Xu Shichang (徐世昌 1855-1939) on behalf of the University of Paris, Paul Painlevé was offered 100,000 francs by the Chinese government as a contribution towards the newly-founded Higher Institute of Chinese Studies in Paris. As if this was not enough, in 1922 a French-language newspaper published in China reported the safe arrival in Dunkirk of a ship loaded with four hundred tons of eggs as a gift from the Chinese government to help ease France's food shortages as a result of the post-war economic depression.<sup>47</sup> Clearly, the "Sino-French connection" could operate in two directions.

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<sup>46</sup> A similar grant was later awarded to Belgium to enable the reconstruction of schools in Ypres. *La politique de Pékin* (7 September 1919), (20 June 1920). The political career of Lu Zhengxiang (diplomat, prime minister, foreign minister) is explored in David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press). Having converted to Catholicism in 1911, Lu eventually in 1935 became a Benedictine monk (as Dom Pierre-Célestin) at the Abbey of Saint-André near Bruges. His later memoir (*Souvenirs et Pensées*) was published in 1945 and subsequently translated from the French into English; see *Ways of Confucius and of Christ* (London: Burns Oates, 1948).

<sup>47</sup> *La politique de Pékin* (11 June 1922).

