

READING CITIZENS:  
POPULAR EDUCATION CAMPAIGNS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CHINESE  
POLITICAL SUBJECT, 1904-1937

Zachary Smith

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Approved by:

Michael Tsin

Michelle King

Lloyd Kramer

James Leloudis

Morgan Pitelka

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## **ABSTRACT**

**ZACHARY SMITH: Reading Citizens: Popular Education Campaigns  
and the Construction of the Chinese Political Subject, 1904-1937  
(Under the direction of Michael Tsin)**

This dissertation examines how education reformers in early twentieth-century China redefined the relationship between the state and its people through popular education policy. As China transitioned from a dynastic empire to a modern nation-state, reformers looked to popular education as one of the most necessary and effective means of transforming the Chinese people from imperial subjects into modern citizens. Yet reformers often disagreed on how new students should be reached, what they should be taught, and how the state should manage such endeavors. Drawing from education law, professional education journals, experimental schools, and popular education textbooks, the dissertation explores these diverse approaches to popular education and argues that in debating how to develop a system for educating citizens, reformers frequently found themselves in a struggle to define who a Chinese citizen was. Furthermore, it argues that many early popular education programs pioneered the specific models of state-society relations that defined Chinese political culture throughout the twentieth century. In treating education policy as an importance space in which citizenship acquired new meanings in China, this project applies intellectual history broadly to include more everyday forms of intellectual production and illustrates the important connections between policy-making, nation building, and the history of ideas.

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## INTRODUCTION

Universal education is a ubiquitous aspiration of the modern nation-state. So omnipresent is the drive for popular education that its logic is rarely questioned, yet prior to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, few states made universal education a priority. Much like the nation-state itself, popular education is a relatively recent phenomenon whose existence as a form of state intervention into individual lives rested upon similarly novel assumptions about the capacities of the modern state, the scope of national communities, and the rights and responsibilities of individual members of those communities. In other words, the effort to educate all citizens was inherently bound up in the question of modern citizenship itself. How and why did popular education suddenly become a central fixture of modern state-building efforts, and what implication did it have for how individuals and states should relate to one another? This dissertation addresses that question in the specific context of early twentieth-century China, wherein a large group of Chinese administrators, teachers, and students embarked on a novel attempt to educate citizens and, in the process, ended up redefining the relationship between the Chinese state and its people.

For most of China's long imperial history, education and the state were closely linked by a civil service examination system that inculcated elite literati in the values of the Confucian cannon and prepared them to serve directly in government offices.<sup>1</sup> When the Qing court made

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<sup>1</sup> This examination system served most interested parties quite well. For the government, it ensured that the bureaucracy was staffed with a steady supply of "men of talent" (*rencai* 人才) loyal to the state; for examination candidates, it represented a way to secure a well-paying position and social prestige. For a more detailed analysis of the advantages of holding a degree in the examination system, see Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil*

the decision to abolish the examination system in 1905, they not only destroyed the foundations of a Chinese education system that had existed in some form for well over a millennium, but they also destroyed the means by which elite Qing society reproduced itself, and the means by which this society participated directly in affairs of state.<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the examination system's collapse, the Qing Ministry of Education declared the founding of a new school system—one that would not simply train a small minority of talented elites, but would rather strive “to educate all citizens (*guomin* 国民).”<sup>3</sup> The Ministry ascribed the recent ascendance of global powers such as Japan and Germany to the strength of their popular education systems and declared that China's efforts to establish a similar system of popular schools constituted “a fundamental tool of survival.”<sup>4</sup> To the memorial's author, education minister Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909), the popularization of education constituted the first step in the construction of a new, more

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*Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 239-256. For a consideration of the centrality of the civil service examination system to late Qing formal education more generally, see Li Shiyu 李世愉. *Qingdai keju zhidu kao bian* 清代科举制度考辨 [A Diagnosis of Qing-era civil service examinations] (Beijing: Zhongyang guangbo dianshi daxue chubanshe, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Even as early as 1932, historians of China had a sense of the profound shift marked by the collapse of the examination system, as Cyrus H. Peake claimed, “[the abolition of the examinations] dealt the death-blow to Confucianism.” While the examinations themselves and Chinese culture more broadly were certainly not coterminous with Confucian learning, and many so-called “Confucian” values continued to inform education projects throughout the Republican period (and beyond), this statement nonetheless expresses the readily perceptible magnitude of the decision (Cyrus H. Peake, *Nationalism and Education in Modern China* (New York: New York University Press, 1932), 71). The reasons behind the decision to abolish the examinations were manifold, but centered upon the perceived incompatibility between the structure of the exams, which focused almost entirely on Confucian texts, and reformers' desire for a new curriculum emphasizing physical fitness, foreign language, physical science, and business studies (*shangxue* 商学). To many members of the late Qing Self-Strengthening Movement, these new curricular goals were crucial to China's national survival but remained absent from the examination curriculum. For more, see Su Yunfeng 苏云峰. *Zhongguo xin jiaoyu de mengya yu chengzhang* 中国新教育的萌芽与成长 (1860-1928) [The origins and development of China's new education system]. Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> “Zou chen jiaoyu zongzhi zhe 奏陈教育宗旨折” [Memorial on the purpose of education], in *Da Qing jiaoyu xin faling* 大清教育新法令 [New education laws of the Great Qing] 1.2 (1906); Reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao huibian: xuezhi yanbian* 中国近代教育史资料汇编：学制演变 [A collection of modern Chinese education history materials: the evolution of the education system], eds. Qu Xingui 瞿鑫圭 and Tang Liangyan 唐良炎 (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 542-543. Hereafter, *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao huibian: xuezhi yanbian* will be abbreviated XZYB.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 544.

nationally minded, physically capable, and practically skilled Chinese political subject. The new program also represented a new understanding of the state's obligation to the people, as it suggested that the Qing government help build, support, and sustain pedagogical projects that had previously been left in the hands of local gentry.

Over the next three decades, and especially after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, popular education and popular educators frequently found themselves at the very center of Chinese efforts to construct a modern nation-state. Shortly after the founding of the Republic of China in 1912, the new Republican Ministry of Education moved to establish a system of national public primary schools—dubbed *guomin xuexiao* or “citizen schools”—which aimed to provide children with “a foundation in citizen ethics and the ordinary skills required for a civic lifestyle.”<sup>5</sup> When early Republican state building efforts failed, New Culture Movement leaders like Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942) declared that popular education, rather than political reform, was the true foundation of “saving the nation” (*jiuguo* 救国).<sup>6</sup> Indeed, several of the student leaders behind the May Fourth, 1919 protests, considered by many to be the birth of Chinese nationalism, actually began their political careers as organizers for the Beijing University Commoners' Education Lecture Corps.<sup>7</sup> A decade later, when Jiang Jieshi 蒋介石

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<sup>5</sup> “Jiaoyu bu gongbu guomin xuexiao ling 教育部公布国民学校令” [The Ministry of Education public decree on *guomin* schools] 1915; reprinted in Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'an guan, ed., *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian* 中华民国史档案资料汇编 (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 460-466. Hereafter, *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian* will be abbreviated ZMDZ.

<sup>6</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 38. This article is also discussed at some length in Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 21-26.

<sup>7</sup> For a general account of the important role played by students in what later became known as the “May Fourth Movement” see Timothy B Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Fabio Lanza, *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). For more specific accounts of Deng Zhongxia and Luo Jialun, two early May Fourth student leaders who were heavily involved in the creation of the Commoners' Education Lecture Corps, see Chen Chunsheng 陳春生, *Xin wenhua de qishou: Luo Jialun zhuan* 新文化的旗手：羅家倫傳 [Luo Jialun: standard bearer of the New Culture Movement] (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1985),

(1887-1975) and the Chinese Nationalist Party or Guomindang (GMD) sought to establish a unified national government, he looked to successful “commoners’ education” (*pingmin jiaoyu* 平民教育) programs pioneered by rural reformers as a means of extending their political control into the countryside. Such programs then became the basis for the Guomindang’s own “mass education” (*minzhong jiaoyu* 民众教育) programs.<sup>8</sup> Throughout the tumultuous lifespan of the Chinese Republic, public education emerged as a key site of state intervention into local society and an important strategy through which reformers of all stripes—conservative Confucian revivalists, radical anarchists, American pedagogical theorists, and the leaders of China’s growing political parties—hoped to transform the former Qing empire into a modern nation-state. For so many of them, popular education constituted a means of strengthening China, a method of navigating the threats posed by colonial domination, and a central feature of a new kind of political modernity predicated upon a national body of educated citizens.

Yet the decision to abandon the civil service examination and embark on a new program of “education for citizens” (*guomin jiaoyu* 国民教育) raised many questions about the practical reality of how to educate the over 320 million Chinese who lacked even basic literacy. Who exactly should participate in these new education schemes? What should they be taught? Who would pay for and organize such endeavors? What responsibilities would graduates from the new education system have, either to their communities or to the nation? “Citizenship” and “citizen” were new and poorly defined concepts in late Qing and early Republican China, and even as

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esp. 16-26, and Daniel Y.K. Kwan, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Chinese Labor Movement: A Study of Deng Zhongxia (1894-1933)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 13. For more on Deng’s organizational activities while a student at Beida, see Jiang Ping 姜平, *Deng Zhongxia de yi sheng* 邓中夏的一生 [The Life of Deng Zhongxia] (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue chubanshe, 1986), 12-23.

<sup>8</sup> Jiang Jieshi was particularly enamored with the rural reforms undertaken by the Chinese National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education, led by Yan Yangchu. For a broader consideration of the relationship between Jiang Jieshi (often referred to in English as Chiang Kai-shek) and Yan Yangchu, see Charles W. Hayford, *To the People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 147-150.

education reformers continued to rally around the language of citizenship as a means of discussing and promoting popular education, their specific policies and programs reveal that they often defined “citizen” in different ways.

This dissertation traces this shifting conversation about citizenship and popular education from the first proposals to establish “education for citizens” in 1905 to the dissolution of the Nationalist Party’s “mass education” programs in 1937. In particular, it focuses on three terms that were essential to the emerging discourse on popular education in China: *guomin* (“national people”), *pingmin* (“common people” or, sometimes, “equal people”), and *minzhong* (“the masses”). Both *guomin* and *pingmin* were neologisms in early twentieth-century China, having been borrowed from Japanese and German political discourse. *Minzhong*, meanwhile, had previously existed in the Qing lexicon, but was given new meaning in the 1920s and 1930s when applied to specific forms of social, cultural, and political community that education reformers hoped to reach and, in some sense, create through mass education. I choose these terms as the focus of my analysis not only because they were among the most widely used within discussions of popular education, but also because they were among the most contested. They represented not only new ways of speaking, but also new ways of thinking about the Chinese political subject in transition from a dynastic empire to a modern nation-state. When reformers adopted new terms like *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong* to define, promote, and explain their policies, they were not drawing upon a stable or universally agreed upon notion of citizenship, nor were they referring a stable or particular body of citizens. Rather, when reformers employed these terms to answer specific structural and curricular questions about how to best educate China’s illiterate masses, they were themselves actively contributing to how these terms could be understood by a broader community of teachers and administrators. Precisely because issues of popular education

were so crucial to nation-building efforts in early twentieth-century China, these specific understandings of citizenship, first articulated by popular education reformers, helped provide the intellectual groundwork for the specific visions of state and society that came to dominate Chinese political culture throughout the twentieth century.

To better understand how reformers contributed to these emerging discussions about the Chinese state and its people, I ask three central questions about education reformers and their programs. First, how did individual administrators, activists, teachers, and textbook publishers define the content of universal “citizens’ education” and on what grounds did they claim that all Chinese must be educated? In other words, how did they understand the broader project of *guomin* education, *pingmin* education, and *minzhong* education? Second, what practical, intellectual, and social contexts motivated these individual articulations of popular education reform programs? Finally, why did some understandings of the relationship between the state and society ultimately come to predominate over others, and what role did education projects play in this process?

In answering these questions, the dissertation pursues three corresponding and inter-related goals. The first and simplest goal is to illustrate that early twentieth-century Chinese education reformers in fact understood the concept of citizenship in radically different ways, and that Eurocentric notions of citizenship emphasizing abstract individual rights and civic participation are largely inadequate for capturing and explaining these diverse readings. Indeed, in highlighting the various ways in which education reformers appropriated, produced, and imposed certain understandings of the Republican Chinese political subject, I seek to revise the cultural and social histories of Republican China that assume a universal notion of citizenship derived from Western experience and apply its conditions to Chinese historical subjects. The

dissertation's second primary goal is to more carefully situate ideas about popular education within the specific historical contexts that produced them, rather than as evidence of China's "failure to modernize" or as derivative of abstract political discourse. By applying rigorous post-structuralist analysis to education policy, school administration, and textbook publication, I seek to contribute to the growing body of "new intellectual history" that shifts focus away from elite philosophical and political inquiry and toward more quotidian forms of intellectual production directly linked to specific context and practices. Third, the dissertation situates late Qing and early Republican debates on popular education as an instance of "colonial modernity," which historian Tani Barlow has defined as both a descriptive condition and an analytical frame for "investigating the infinitely pervasive discursive powers that increasingly connect at key points to the globalizing impulses of capitalism."<sup>9</sup> This focus on colonial forms of domination ultimately serves to produce a new narrative about the overall trajectory of Republican education reform projects in China. Whereas previous studies have emphasized the failure of Republican education reforms and suggested that the party-state regimes of the Guomindang and Chinese Communist Party (CCP) helped to quell, delimit, or otherwise destroy the democratic visions of society contained within popular education projects, I argue that the tutelary logic of China's Leninist political parties was in many ways the *product* of conceptions of citizenship first articulated and enacted by popular education reformers attempts to navigate the intellectual conditions attending colonial modernity in China. The rest of this introduction will explore these three goals in more detail and conclude by providing a broad outline of the chapters to follow.

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<sup>9</sup> Tani Barlow, "Introduction," in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 6.



## Re-thinking Citizenship in Early Twentieth-Century China

In tracking the intellectual construction of citizenship in early twentieth-century China, the dissertation's first and simplest argument is that differing approaches to the practical task of educating China's many illiterate citizens in fact reflected radically different understandings of the modern Chinese state, its people, and the relationship between them. In this way, I treat "citizenship" itself and the Chinese signifiers *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong* as contested social and political categories, which educators often used to explain their pedagogical projects but interpreted in different ways. Given the centrality of citizenship to this project, both as a category of historical analysis and as a category of social practice among early twentieth-century Chinese education reformers, it is useful to consider how this term has been theorized in previous studies.

Many theoretical discussions of citizenship begin with T.H. Marshall's essay "Citizenship and Social Class," which complicated, differentiated, and historicized the notion of citizenship into discrete civil, political, and social dimensions. For Marshall, citizenship can connote either a set of civil rights "necessary for individual freedom," access to political tools of representation like suffrage, or a kind of social membership that grants "the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society."<sup>10</sup> Since its original publication in 1950, Marshall's explication of the different dimensions of citizenship has itself come under heavy critique by historians of gender and non-Western societies, who contend that Marshall's account, which was based off of the political history of nineteenth- and twentieth-century England, ignores the way that citizenship

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<sup>10</sup> Thomas .H. Marhsall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1950), 11.

rights were experienced differently by women and in non-Western societies.<sup>11</sup> Feminist scholars in particular, most notably Joan Scott, Iris Marion Young, and others, have effectively revealed citizenship to be a social and political category that is constantly and perhaps inherently fraught by ambiguity and contradiction.<sup>12</sup> *Reading Citizens* seeks to apply these theoretical insights to the Chinese case by analyzing the ways in which citizenship as a goal of education functioned to include and exclude specific groups at a moment when the Chinese state was in transition and the Chinese subject poorly defined.

At the same time, the dissertation also speaks to Marshall's original schema by highlighting the important but understudied "social" dimension of citizenship in China. Most existing historical scholarship on citizenship in China focuses on the diverse ways in which citizenship has been enacted in a political context, either through student politics, worker strikes, or suffrage movements.<sup>13</sup> While these studies have acknowledged the multiple ways in which these instances of citizenship are understood and expressed, they nevertheless take place within a rather singular dimension of citizenship organized around the articulation of abstract rights and civic participation in a "public sphere" of the kind described by Jürgen Habermas.<sup>14</sup> In doing so,

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<sup>11</sup> For an insightful essay on the theorization of citizenship in non-Western societies see Saud Joseph, "Gendering Citizenship in the Middle East," in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed. Saud Joseph (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 3-30.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example Joan Scott, *Only Paradoxes to Offer: French Feminists and the Rights of Man*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996); Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," in *The Citizenship Debates: A Reader*, ed. Gershon Shafir. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Kathleen Canning and Sonya Rose, eds. *Gender, Citizenship, and Subjectivities*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002); and Sylvia Walby, "Is Citizenship Gendered?" in *Sociology* 28.2 (1994): 379-386.

<sup>13</sup> For example, Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds. *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), and Elizabeth P. Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women's Suffrage in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>14</sup> For Habermas' original definition, see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991). Indeed, studies of political citizenship and civic action in the Republican period are part of a broader collection of scholarship on "the public sphere" in early twentieth-century China, many of which were specifically designed to combat the

they risk applying a universalizing, Eurocentric notion of citizenship to Chinese historical actors. A consideration of Qing and Republican education law, professional education journals, popular literacy textbooks, and individual “people’s schools” reveals that this particular model of citizenship is largely inadequate for understanding the specific forms of social and cultural community articulated in early twentieth-century Chinese popular reform projects. For example, the late Qing popular education textbook *Essential Reader for Citizens* [*Guomin bidu* 国民必读] presented itself as the Qing court’s effort to inculcate a new national body of Qing citizens in the basic Confucian values that had previously defined the social elite.<sup>15</sup> The experimental Xiaozhuang school, founded in the rural outskirts of Nanjing in 1928 to train “commoners’ school” teachers, defined a good Chinese citizen as one with “the physical skills of farmers and the mind of scientists,” both of which the school deemed necessary to fulfill a citizen’s obligation to be economically productive.<sup>16</sup> Even those reform projects that were expressly interested in issues of civic education, such as Yan Yangchu’s 晏阳初 (1893-1990) series of “people’s schools” in Dingxian, often placed more emphasis on developing a sense of “team spirit” (*tuanti jingshen* 团体精神) and communal consciousness (*tongren de ziuexin* 同人的自觉)

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narratives produced by an earlier generation of China historians, such as Lloyd Eastman, who suggested that Chinese political culture was inherently autocratic. See, for example, David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) and Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). Some scholars, such as William Rowe have suggested that the existence of a well-developed civil society dates even earlier to Late Qing urban centers like Hankou. See William Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

<sup>15</sup> “Xuebu zou bian guomin bidu keben, jianyi shizi keben da gai qingxing zhe 学部奏编《国民必读课本》《简易识字课本》大概情形折 [Qing Ministry of Education memorial on the general condition of the *Essential Reader for Guomin* in *Xuebu guanbao* 78:1-3; Reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ciliao huibian: putong jiaoyu* 中国近代教育史资料汇编：普通教育 [A collection of modern Chinese education history materials: popular education], eds. Li Guilin 李桂林, et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 46.

<sup>16</sup> Cheng Benhai, *Zai Xiaozhuang* 在晓庄 [At Xiaozhuang] (Shanghai: Shanghai zhonghua shuju, 1930), 9.

心), than on articulating specific political rights or even a nationalist sentiment.<sup>17</sup> Although very much unconcerned with issues of politics, these articulations of citizenship carried important consequences, both for how individuals came to define themselves as citizens and in how administrators and teachers articulated the responsibilities of the state in educating them.

Accounting for these diffuse and contested notions of social, economic, cultural, and political community in China requires a new theoretical approach to citizenship as a category of historical analysis. Following the work of Charles Tilly and Roberto Alejandro, I view citizenship not as a specific set of behaviors or identities, but rather as a set of mutually contested claims between states, individuals, and groups about the relationship between them.<sup>18</sup> In other words, I view citizenship primarily as a *text* that unfolds through the dialogical exchanges between individual actors and political institutions, one that remains at all times open to multiple interpretations from a variety of readers, and which both shapes and is shaped by the various contexts in which ideas about citizenship are employed.<sup>19</sup> Not only does such an open understanding of citizenship allow me to remain responsive to the diverse ways in which Chinese education reformers defined citizenship for themselves, but it also provides a basis for broader, non-deterministic cross-cultural comparisons between cultures of citizenship in China and elsewhere. This attempt to develop a more precise theoretical language for discussing citizenship

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<sup>17</sup> For an overview of civic education at Dingxian, see Chen Zhushan, *Pingmin gongmin jiaoyu zhi jihua* 平民公民教育之计划 [A plan for commoners' civic education] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1928), 1-2.

<sup>18</sup> This specific definition hews quite closely to Tilly's original formation, which suggests that citizenship is "a set of mutually contested claims between agents of state and members of socially-constructed categories: genders, races, nationalities, and others." (See Charles Tilly, "Citizenship, Identity, and Social History," in *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History*, ed. Charles Tilly (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6. An emphasizing how different actors "read" citizenship, my formulation also derives from Roberto Alejandro's discussion of citizenship as a hermeneutic endeavor. See Roberto Alejandro, *Hermeneutics, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 33-39.

<sup>19</sup> On a general level, this understanding of citizenship marks an attempt to develop what Dominick LaCapra has called a "dialogical" (as opposed to "documentary") approach to the history of citizenship. See Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 13-71.

in early twentieth-century China constitutes one of the primary contributions of this project, and the dissertation's first chapter is devoted to a more robust methodological and theoretical consideration of these issues.

## **Historicizing Education and Literacy**

For many elites in the late Qing and early Republican period, education was a central value worth pursuing as a goal in itself, yet for many historians focusing on the early twentieth-century education reform movement, inquiries into the state of China's developing public school system have often served as means for projecting broader claims about modernization in China. On the one hand, scholars like Paul Bailey have celebrated the populist rhetoric of late Qing education reformers and situated the movement as a precursor to the modern ideas about state and society that characterized Chinese nationalist movements in the Republican period.<sup>20</sup> Conversely, many social histories of education reform have regarded the limited impact of new-style public schools and the continued prevalence of traditional private academies during this time as evidence of China's "failure" to modernize.<sup>21</sup> Whatever their diagnosis, both of these strands of scholarship tend to ahistorically project the education reform movement onto earlier or later social changes, rather than situate specific ideas about education within a particular late

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990). See especially pp. 263-268. For other examples of this type of scholarship, see Ruth Hayhoe, ed., *Education and Modernization: The Chinese Experience* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1992) and Sang Bing, *Wangqing xuetaang xuesheng yu shehui bianqian* 晚清学堂学生与社会变迁 [Late Qing modern school students and social change] (Taipei: Daohe chubanshe, 1991). Sang Bing makes the connection even more explicit, as he situates the origins of the May Fourth Student Movement in the student activism of modern school students during the final years of the Qing dynasty.

<sup>21</sup> See Sally Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China: The Beginnings of the Modern Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983) and Thomas Curran, *Education Reform in Republican China: The Failure of Educators to Create a Modern Nation* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005). Other social histories of education adopting this view include Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*, trans. Paul J Bailey (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1988).

Qing and early Republican context. Furthermore, in seeking to locate the intellectual origins of specific conceptions of nation or education, historians often end up treating the education reform community as having a singular voice, in opposition to other sectors of society, such as political parties or rural students. In contrast to these earlier studies, *Reading Citizens* places debates among educators at the center of its analysis and links reformers' varying positions on the meaning and value of popular education programs to the particular administrative, cultural, and intellectual context in which such programs were proposed.

In the past ten years, historians of Chinese education have begun to offer a more complex, nuanced picture of Chinese education reform, focusing especially on Republican-era public schools as a central site for the construction of new cultural and political identities. In seeking to explain how public education shaped the attitudes and behaviors of Republican-era students, these studies have tended to focus only on those aspects of the Republican Chinese school system that were the most “new,” such as the introduction of physical fitness programs, the growth of student activism, or the adoption of a new school calendar.<sup>22</sup> While these studies effectively highlight the most important results of the education reform movement, they do not explain why or how these policies gained relevance for people who had grown up in the context of the civil service examination system. Indeed, by focusing solely on new-style public schools (which often had foreign-educated headmasters and business relationships with urban textbook publishers), these studies also, in their own way, present an overly simplified picture of Republican China's system for “educating citizens.”

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<sup>22</sup> See for example, Huang Jinlin's *Lishi, shenti, guojia: jindai zhongguo de shenti xingcheng, 1895-1937* [History, body, nation-state: the formation of the modern Chinese body, 1895-1937] (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongse, 2000), Culp, *Articulating Citizenship*, and Elizabeth VanderVen, "It's Time for School: The Introduction of the New Calendar in Haicheng County Primary Schools, Northeast China, 1905-1919" in *Twentieth-Century China* 32.2 (April 2007): 60-83.

The subject of popular literacy education serves as a useful lens through which to explore the meaning of citizenship in this regard precisely because it was not entirely new, and thus attracted a broad spectrum of reformers, each with a distinctive view about the meaning, value, and function of literacy within citizens' education. Whereas the authors of the original Qing memorial on "educating citizens" continued to view literacy as a means of accessing the shared moral values contained within classical Chinese texts, urban students and rural education advocates of the 1920s and early 1930s increasingly came to view literacy as a practical political and economic skill. Others, such as popular educator and anarchist Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 (1891-1946), seemed to abandon literacy training altogether, suggesting it created "bookworms" (*shudaizi* 书呆子) who had no sense of how to "work with their hands."<sup>23</sup> Yet even in criticizing classical literacy, Tao looked to the theory of "unity of knowledge and action" first developed by Ming philosopher Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472-1529), which he cited as the basis for his own program of "life education."<sup>24</sup> Such diversity of opinion reveals that in many respects, literacy (*shizi* 识字) was, like *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong*, itself a contested category in Republican China, one which was informed not just by modern pedagogical theory imported from Japan, Germany, and America, but by pre-existing attitudes about education among Chinese students and teachers. In highlighting these diverse understandings and exploring how new notions about education both contested and built upon more traditional values, this dissertation illuminates not

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<sup>23</sup> For Tao Xingzhi's strongest critique of the bookworm phenomenon, see Tao Xingzhi, "Weizhishi jieji 伪知识阶级" [The false intellectual class], in *Zhongguo jiaoyu gaizao* 中国教育改造 [Remolding Chinese education], ed. Tao Xingzhi (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1928; Reprint, Washington D.C.: Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, 1984), 201-203.

<sup>24</sup> Yusheng Yao, "Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi as an Educational and Social Revolutionary," *Twentieth-Century China* 27.2 (April 2002), 88-91.

only the *products* of the education reform movement, but also the *process* by which certain ideas about the value of literacy and its relationship to citizenship came to be dominant.

Fully accounting for these diverse understandings requires a specific methodology for “reading” Chinese education reform projects—one that takes into account the tensions and ambiguities within individual reform projects and situates them within the specific contexts that produced them. The project locates this methodology within the theoretical and methodological contributions of historians, literary theorists, and analytical philosophers associated with post-structuralism.<sup>25</sup> Chinese literary theorist Rey Chow has usefully defined post-structuralism as an analytic framework designed “to attend to the semiotic operations involved in the production of meanings, meanings that can no longer be assumed to be natural.”<sup>26</sup> Following this insight, my own project seeks to investigate the construction of the idea of citizenship in China not by locating the origins of a singular, stable notion of citizenship or literacy, but rather by mapping out the conditions of possibility under which citizenship and the value of reading could be understood by a range of reformers within a given historical moment.<sup>27</sup> In this sense, I seek to construct a *genealogy* of citizenship that moves beyond the discursive dimensions of categories like “*guomin*/citizen” or “*pingmin*/commoners” and engages in the power relationships and practical contexts that inform the possible meanings of these terms.<sup>28</sup> In tackling both the

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<sup>25</sup> Chief among these influences are Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, and Tani Barlow. In relying so heavily on the language and themes pioneered by these scholars, I am also situating my own conceptual categories within a particular historical context—a contemporary one contingent upon the advent of post-structuralism as a discrete intellectual tradition.

<sup>26</sup> Rey Chow, “The Interruption of Referentiality: Post-structuralism and the Conundrum of Critical Multiculturalism,” in *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.1 (Winter 2002): 172.

<sup>27</sup> In this sense, I treat the signifier *guomin*/citizen as an instance of what Tani Barlow has called “historical catachresis.” For more on postcolonial analyses of unstable signifiers, see Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>28</sup> This understanding of “genealogy” is based on the genealogical method first described by Michel Foucault. For more on Foucault’s understanding of genealogy, see Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in



meanings of globally circulated terms like “citizenship,” “democracy,” and “the people,” as well as the specific contexts that produced understandings of these terms in early twentieth-century China, I draw together several different strands of what Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori have called “global intellectual history,” particularly those focused on the politics of translation, the role of intellectual intermediaries, and the increasingly global networks of intellectual production and circulation that contributed to popular understandings of key terms associated with political and social modernity.<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, this genealogical approach is particularly well suited to the study of popular education during the decades surrounding the Qing-Republican transition. The downfall of the Qing dynasty and the coeval collapse of the civil service examination system marked the first decades of the twentieth century as a period of unique historical possibility in which policy makers, intellectual leaders, and ordinary people could and indeed did imagine many diverse ways of structuring state and society. Secondly, genealogy seems an effective method for dealing with instances of what Lydia Liu has called “translated modernities”—that is, words and concepts, like *guomin*, whose introduction into the local lexicon by means of translation creates a discursive space that is “reducible neither to foreign impact nor to the self-explanatory logic of

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*Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 150-156.

<sup>29</sup> Samuel Moyn and Andrew Sartori, eds, *Global Intellectual History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013), 3-30. Moyn and Sartori suggest that there are currently roughly three modes or models of global intellectual history—the first adopts the global as a “meta-analytical category” and emphasizes a comparative or universal approach to the understanding of ideas; the second treats the global as “a substantive scale of historical process” and focuses on the intermediaries, translators, and networks of intellectual circulation that contribute to structural transformations in the history of ideas; the third model investigates the global as “a subjective category used by historical agents” and explores how “the global” itself comes to be understood in moments of historical contingency. In positioning my own work as an attempt at “global intellectual history” I follow the second method. For reasons to be elaborated in Chapter One, I do not wish to organize the study simply around a comparison between Chinese understandings of citizenship and other (presumably “Western”) understandings. Rather, my focus is on the localized and contingent consequences of how these global networks worked to produce specific understandings of citizenship and the value of education in China itself.

the indigenous tradition.”<sup>30</sup> If we acknowledge, as Liu does, that neologisms like *guomin* derive their meanings from the ways in which they are “cited, translated, appropriated, or claimed in moments of perceived historical contingency,” rather than from any singular local or foreign intellectual tradition, then the task of the historian is necessarily to map out the ways in which meanings change when concepts are placed in different social, administrative, temporal, and geographical contexts.<sup>31</sup> Genealogy’s emphasis on “effective” history and the shifting power relations that accompany discourse is well equipped to do just that.

While this dissertation represents a concerted effort to apply post-structuralist theory to Chinese education reform, I also want to demonstrate the value of employing these theoretical tools in a more historically specific way. Rather than simply assert the (ahistorical, timeless) instability of political and social signifiers like *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong*, I seek to show how the conditions of possibility for understanding citizenship education were *especially* broad during the immediate aftermath of the civil service examination system’s collapse and then narrowed over time to focus on a more cohesive, singular notion of civic education emphasizing practical literacy, economic productivity, and political allegiance to the Nationalist party-state in the early 1930s. Secondly, while most post-structuralist scholarship, and Foucault in particular, seeks out historical discontinuity as an end in itself, I assert that a study of citizenship and its relation to education in China would benefit from a more thorough engagement with China’s long educational history, particularly as embodied in the shared commitment to literacy among

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<sup>30</sup> Lyida Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture and Translated Modernity, China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), xix-xx.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. To be clear, this dissertation is not solely focused on specific instances of translation (that is, in identifying the contextual factors shaping the sources and targets of specific translingual concepts), but rather on the broader networked processes by which these concepts came to produce meanings assumed to be universal. This approach follows from the method of studying transnational fields of intellectual production articulated by Christopher L. Hill, albeit with a strong focus on the local conditions of transnational historical actors in late Qing and Republican China. For more on Hill’s method, see Christopher L. Hill, “Conceptual Universalization in the Transnational Nineteenth Century,” in *Global Intellectual History*, 134-158.

people of all social classes and political backgrounds. Indeed, by acknowledging the basic continuities between Qing revivalists, Beijing University students, and foreign education rural reconstruction reformers with regards to literacy as a goal of education, I hope to establish a context in which to better appreciate that which is truly discontinuous about early twentieth-century notions of Chinese citizenship.

### **Republican China and Colonial Modernity**

Having suggested that the possibilities for imagining citizenship and citizens' education narrowed over the course of the early Republican period, the question remains: what caused this growing level of consensus and why were some understandings of citizenship ultimately able to predominate over others within the shared discourse of popular education reform? In searching for a causal explanation for the increasingly narrow assumptions about state and society that surrounded discussions of popular education reform, this project suggests that the most discursively influential education projects were those that spoke to the uniquely colonial conditions of late Qing and early Republican China. In other words, debates over popular education in early twentieth-century China were not decided by a dichotomous contest between urban reformers and rural peasants, or even between "traditional" Confucian bureaucrats and "modern" practical education proponents, but rather by a constantly shifting conversation about the meaning of education and modern citizenship embedded within broader colonial discourses. One of the most influential articulations of popular education was offered by Yan Yangchu, a Chinese-born, Yale-trained educator of the American progressive school whose programs succeeded by appealing to rural students with a focus on literacy and to urban donors with narratives of national shame stemming from colonial anxiety. Even as Yan appropriated the

quantitative methods of social science—their products of European colonial regimes—to lend credibility his educational projects, he often described his own efforts at rural education in expressly anti-colonial terms, noting that his vision of popular education was “adapted to the genius of the Chinese people” and an attempt “to develop a modern (*not Western*) Chinese district to serve as a model for China.”<sup>32</sup> Earlier projects, such as late Qing educator Lu Erkui’s “Simple and Easy Literacy Program” similarly combined a commitment to traditional notions of classical literacy with a radical new understanding of popular education as a right of all Qing citizens, yet because classical literacy soon came to be viewed as an ineffective means of navigating China’s colonial threats, such efforts to popularize the Confucian canon were swiftly abandoned.

In highlighting the important role played by foreign discourses, new methods of statistical measurement, and the looming threat of imperial domination, the dissertation situates late Qing and early Republican China as instances of “colonial modernity.” Although China was never itself formally colonized, Chinese historical actors were nevertheless subject to colonial forms of power and knowledge, which informed and conditioned the creation of new forms of knowledge within China. In the years following the abrogation of the examination system, education policy was one such field of knowledge production: it required new readings of the relationship between states and individuals as well as new assertions about the role of knowledge in mediating that relationship, and these readings ultimately produced new boundaries for conceiving of citizenship in later decades. As the above examples show, these new

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<sup>32</sup> James Yen, “New Citizens for China,” *The Yale Review* 18.2 (1929): 272. James Yen was the English name of Yan Yangchu. For a broader consideration of the relationship between statistical surveys and European colonialism, and particularly the European colonial project of presenting the “world-as-exhibition,” see Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988). For a more recent consideration of how colonial methods of social survey influenced Chinese intellectuals, see Tom Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

understandings did not represent any particular wholesale adoption of “modernity” from the West, in part because reformers’ own understanding of China’s position vis-à-vis the modern West made such importation difficult to conceive.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, despite the protestations of nationally-minded reformers like Yan Yangchu, such understandings of citizenship were also not truly reflective of some alternative, quintessentially “Chinese” modernity, reducible solely to pre-existing cultural norms and disconnected from the social, political, and intellectual inequalities that accompanied foreign imperialism. Rather, discursive forms of colonial power, and the threat of colonial domination more generally, provided much of the impetus behind Chinese education reform as well as the technological, semantic, and institutional frameworks through which reform was attempted or achieved.

In the past ten years, historians like Barlow, Joshua Goldstein, and James Hevia have shown that many new developments in twentieth-century China, including the development of “women” (*funü/nüxing*) as a biologically sexed category, the transformation of Peking Opera into an entertainment genre of pure aestheticism, and even the Chinese nationalist movement itself constituted important arenas of knowledge production that were nevertheless thoroughly enmeshed in China’s complex colonial encounters with Europe and Japan.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, much of this work has been subjected to the critique that it denies agency to Chinese historical

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<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, as R. Bin Wong and others have pointed out, China already had elements of modern commercial, state, and social relations since at least the 1500s if not earlier. See, for example, R. Bin Wong, *China Transformed: Historical Change and the Limits of European Experience* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), especially pp. 9-70. For a similar argument about modern urban relations and the growth of a “modern” public sphere in late imperial China prior to European contact, see William Rowe, *Hankow*.

<sup>34</sup> The works alluded to here are Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004); Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); and Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice*. Other recent examples of scholars who have productively utilized “colonial modernity” as a framework for understanding historical change in early twentieth-century China include Ruth Rogaski, *Hygienic Modernity: Meanings of Health and Disease in Treaty-Port China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and James L. Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003).

actors and ignores instances of resistance to colonial practices.<sup>35</sup> Where this project differs from previous analyses of colonial modernity in late Qing and early Republican China is in its effort to focus not only on the most obviously or self-consciously “modern” products of China’s colonial encounters, but also on an aspect of public policy—literacy education—about which pervasive public discourses already existed. In fully accounting for the many different ways in which reformers articulated and occasionally resisted various understandings of citizenship and popular education, we can reclaim a space for Chinese agency in the face of colonial power.

### **Outline of the Dissertation**

This dissertation project is designed to investigate the articulation, administration, and assessment of popular education projects at a diversity of levels, from the legal framework supporting Qing and Republican education efforts down to individual schools, textbooks, and promotional organizations. Before carrying out this investigation, however, I wish to define more clearly the basic theoretical and methodological considerations that inform this project. Thus, Chapter One, “Theorizing Citizenship,” draws upon broad comparative and theoretical literature on citizenship to establish a more precise analytical framework for discussing modern political subjects—one that treats citizenship primarily as a hermeneutic endeavor to understand and make legible the relationships between individuals, groups, and states. This chapter also explores how previous scholarly norms within the China field have both enabled and excluded particular understandings of citizenship, while ignoring the actual function of Chinese terms like *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong*. Breaking from these conventions, I explain my focus on popular education as a strategy for examining how individual educators and administrators “read”

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<sup>35</sup> See, for example, Joanna Waley-Cohen’s review of Hevia’s *English Lessons* in *The Chinese Quarterly* 149 (September 2004): 843-845.

neologisms like *guomin* (and re-appropriated signifiers like *minzhong*) as practical and social categories.

Following this largely methodological first chapter, the dissertation proceeds chronologically, beginning with the incredibly diverse articulations of *guomin* education in the late Qing period, and moving forward to examine how popular education became rebranded as “commoners’ education” (*pingmin jiaoyu*) in the 1920s, and eventually “mass education” (*minzhong jiaoyu*) during the so-called Nanjing Decade of Guomindang rule from 1927-1937. Within this chronological framework, each chapter focuses on a specific subset of education reformers—education theorists, college students, school administrators, and textbook publishers—whose ideas about education provide the greatest insight into the diverse understandings of popular education within a given period.

In the immediate aftermath of the Qing decision to abolish the civil service examination system, popular education remained a largely theoretical endeavor. Although fiscal shortfalls and the feebleness of the Qing state ensured that very few national education initiatives were actually implemented on a local level, the subject of *guomin* education was nevertheless an important focus among the drafters of the Qing constitution and within the pages of China’s first professional education journal, *The Educational Review* [*Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育杂志]. Chapter Two, “Reading Citizens,” explores these earliest articulations of “education for citizens” in the late Qing, focusing on the degree to which popular literacy was incorporated within the broader social and political project of “educating citizens.” In examining diverse articulations of *guomin* education within the Qing Ministry of Education and among the members of the editorial board of *The Educational Review*, the chapter argues that the late Qing period represented an especially unique moment of historical possibility for understanding the scope and intent of Chinese

education. Furthermore, I suggest that in debating the relative merits of “education for citizens,” reformers helped to produce and make available new understandings of citizenship and the value of literacy that were rooted neither in previous Qing notions of education nor in the Japanese educational discourses from which these early debates derived.

Following the fall of the Qing in 1911 and the widespread failure of the Republican government to establish effective state institutions (including “*guomin* education” programs), popular education advocates began to search for new methods and a new language with which to discuss popular education. Chapter Three, “Teaching the ‘Common People,’” chronicles the growth and development of the “commoners’ education” (*pingmin jiaoyu*) movement from 1917-1925. This chapter illustrates how student groups at Beijing’s leading colleges as well as newly formed national education societies internalized and re-articulated internationally circulating ideas from American educators like John Dewey in an effort to refocus education on “the common people,” or *pingmin*, who had been largely denied access to the formal school system first established under the banner of “education for citizens.” Here, I argue that while some early efforts from *pingmin* education leaders like Yan Yangchu were actually quite successful in redefining the Chinese national subject to include the so-called “common people,” different approaches to the task of teaching *pingmin* continued to reveal different understandings of the relationship between “the common people” and “citizens.” While some organizations, such as the Beijing University Commoners’ Education Lecture Corps or the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society at Beijing Upper-Level Normal College, offered radical visions of popular education centered on themes of equality and democracy, the most successful “commoners’ education” initiatives were often those that treated illiterate Chinese as a colonial problem that needed solving.



Chapter Four, “Reevaluating Literacy,” tracks the growth of the *pingmin* education movement into the countryside as it became absorbed within the broader “Rural Reconstruction Movement” (*xiangcun jianshe yundong* 乡村建设运动) between 1926 and 1934. This chapter focuses on the individual pedagogical initiatives of two leading rural reconstruction advocates, Tao Xingzhi and Yan Yangchu, and argues that a shift in the focus of popular education from the city to the countryside prompted a re-evaluation of the basic purpose of literacy. While literacy was once conceived as a normative moral good in and of itself, reformers like Tao and Yan increasingly came to view literacy merely as a practical “tool” with which to “do work” and “become useful.” These local education projects were widely reported in both China and America, with Yan Yangchu’s system of “people’s schools” in Dingxian county in particular attracting the admiration of the Nationalist Party government in Nanjing. Such widespread attention ensured that Tao and Yan’s arguments about the value of literacy themselves helped to stabilize broader assumptions about the relationship between education and citizens, most notably the idea that the “common people” can (and must) be transformed from “blind masses” into “good *guomin*” who can think and act in economically productive ways.

The dissertation’s fifth and final chapter, “Citizen Readers,” examines the editing, publishing, and distribution of popular literacy and primary school readers by the Chinese Nationalist Party in the 1930s. In particular, it focuses on how the Nationalist Party re-appropriated the language of *minzhong* (“the masses”) to describe a new national body of popular education participants and a new role for the Leninist Guomindang state in educating them. In chronicling the ways in which the GMD’s compulsory mass education programs reintegrated literacy into a narrow notion of political membership centered upon awareness of and adherence to the party-state, I show how the GMD’s education leaders drew from and built

upon the understandings of Chinese political subjectivity first articulated and propagated by earlier generations of popular education reformers. More specifically, I show how *minzhong* education emerged as a central project of the Chinese Nationalist Party, as well as how the party-state's mass education programs adopted previous notions of practical literacy and reoriented them toward more expressly political ends. The Nationalist Party's mass education efforts established a template for political tutelage that persisted throughout China's tumultuous twentieth century. In positioning previous popular education reform projects as an important source of inspiration for these pedagogical endeavors, the chapter positions early twentieth-century popular education reformers as vital contributors to twentieth-century China's state-building efforts. A brief epilogue revisits the range of these contributions and considers the place of "democracy" (often rendered in Chinese as *pingminzhuyi* 平民主义 or "common people-ism") within the popular education movement, suggesting the investigative frame of colonial modernity as an explanation for why Chinese conceptions of Republican citizenship may have diverged from their European and American sources of inspiration in this regard.

Often, historical accounts of China's Republican period are couched in narratives of failure—of revolutions aborted or destroyed, of democratic visions curtailed, and of republican political projects left fundamentally "unfinished."<sup>36</sup> The historical monographs focusing

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<sup>36</sup> The seminal works in this genre are Lloyd Eastman's twin monographs *The Abortive Revolution: China Under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) and *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937-1949* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), both of which attempt to provide explanations for the declining trajectory of the Guomindang state, the failure of which Eastman attributes to a corrupt and anti-democratic political culture that had served China well during the imperial period but was unsuited to Republican China's modernization efforts. Other accounts of the period, such as Prasenjit Duara's *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988), address more specific failings of the Republican state-building efforts, such as the inability of effectively generate tax revenue without destroying the "cultural nexus of power" that had legitimated state authority during the Qing period. Those accounts which do highlight the Republican period as a time of intellectual and cultural flowering suggest that such advances were rendered temporary by the political demands of China's growing party-states. In *The Chinese Enlightenment*, Vera Schwarcz argues that an increased focus on the anti-imperialist mobilization of the masses helped transform Republican Chinese intellectuals from enlightened leaders to a politicized intelligentsia that gave up any intellectual autonomy to the needs of political authorities. Arif Dirlik offers a similar narrative within the

specifically on Chinese education have largely been conducted within the paradigms set forth by these declension narratives, asking why modern schools were resisted by local populations, why popular education projects failed to take advantage of existing education structures, or why more obviously democratically-minded education leaders like Yan Yangchu and Tao Xingzhi were ultimately subsumed within or pushed aside by China's anti-democratic political parties.<sup>37</sup> Many of the popular education projects discussed in this dissertation were indeed failures, at least when judged according to their architects' own lofty goals. The literacy campaigns, street corner lectures, "people's schools," and mass education textbooks issued by popular educators very rarely attracted significant numbers of students, and there is little evidence that they broadly affected national literacy rates.<sup>38</sup> Rather than focus solely on these practical difficulties (and thus

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early years of the Chinese Communist Party, during which a more eclectic, democratically oriented, and anarchistic strand of Chinese socialism was ultimately cast aside in favor of a more authoritarian organizational dynamic imposed upon the Chinese Communist Party by USSR Comintern advisers (see Arif Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)). In the field of women's and gender history, Wang Zheng's *Women in the Chinese Enlightenment: Oral and Textual Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) paints a similar narrative, showing how the "liberal feminism" of literate, urban, elite women of the 1920s was ultimately cast aside in the face of Marxist discourse that coded feminism as a bourgeois signifier. Some works, such as Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), suggest that the Republican political project was doomed from the start because it was founded upon the narrow goals of a Westernized, urban, reformist elite and did nothing to change the fundamental conditions of the Chinese masses. More recently, David Strand has argued that the 1911 Revolution was actually quite successful in creating a new mode of Republican civic life founded upon opposition to monarchism, a resistance to gestures of subordination, and an embrace of the public meeting and of speech making as important patterns of modern political life. Nevertheless, Strand claims that the "failures" of the Republican state—most notably, the inability to elect national political representatives or to sustain open political debate—weakened these more Republican dimensions of civic life, leaving the Republican political project ultimately unfinished. For more of Strand's argument, see David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), esp. 1-11.

<sup>37</sup> As highlighted in the earlier discussion of the historiography of education, these works include Bastid, *Educational Reform in Early Twentieth-Century China*; Borthwick, *Educational and Social Change in China*; and Curran, *Educational Reform in Republican China*. For more focused accounts of the failures of Yan Yangchu and other leaders of the democratically-minded "Commoners' Education Movement" (sometimes called the "Mass Education Movement") see Hayward, *To The People*; Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977); and to a lesser extent, Yusheng Yao, "Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi."

<sup>38</sup> Individual popular education programs were occasionally able to claim statistical successes. For example, by 1925, Yan Yangchu's National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education (which had only been in existence for two years) claimed to have taught over five million students across the country (see James Y.C. Yen, "New Citizens for a New China," 269-270. Yet despite individual success stories like this one, national literacy rates (to the degree measurable) remained low throughout the Republican period. In August 1923 the National

reproduce these broader narratives of failure), I seek to highlight the important discursive contributions popular education reformers made to the ideological construction of citizenship within the broader colonial conditions of early twentieth-century China. Although Republican education reformers may have been unsuccessful in their attempts to teach all Chinese citizens to read, they played an important role in teaching others how to “read” the modern Chinese political subject. *Reading Citizens* explores how this process occurred.

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Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education suggested that 80% of the population was illiterate (“Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui zai jing kai chengli dahuihan”中华平民教育促进会在京开成立大会函” [A letter delivered to the opening plenary of the NAPCE] Aug 1923; Reprint, ZMDZ, 812). By the end of the decade, an outline of propaganda materials for the Guomindang's mass literacy movement program claimed that, “according to the latest surveys, illiterate people comprise 80% of the population.” (Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu 中国国民党中央执行委员会宣传部, *Shizi yundong xuanchuan gangyao* 识字运动宣传纲要 [An outline of literacy movement propaganda] (Nanjing: Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu, 1929), 1-2.

## CHAPTER ONE

### THEORIZING CITIZENSHIP IN EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY CHINA: CITIZENSHIP AS HERMENEUTIC ENDEAVOR

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, the Chinese word *guomin* 國民 went from being an unfamiliar term to most Chinese to a frequently employed category in political debate, public policy, and even popular culture. While the component characters *guo* 國 (“state” or “polity”) and *min* 民 (“people”) were both common characters in the late Qing lexicon, the compound term *guomin* was a fundamentally new construction.<sup>1</sup> As with many other neologisms in early twentieth-century China, *guomin* seemingly derived its meaning most directly from the Japanese term *kokumin* (“people of the nation”), which Chinese students had encountered while studying abroad and appropriated for their own political uses.<sup>2</sup> In an 1899 article on international affairs, one such intellectual, Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), lamented that, “Chinese people do not know anything about *guomin*.”<sup>3</sup> He thus began a

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<sup>1</sup> Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry, “Introduction: Political Citizenship in Modern China,” in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 4.

<sup>2</sup> The translation from *kukomin* to *guomin* was but one of many such transitions, whereby Japan acted as a linguistic mediator between Western ideas and Chinese discourse. For more on the translated vocabulary of the Chinese nationalist movement, see Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>3</sup> Liang Qichao 梁啟超, “Lun jinshi guomin jingzheng zhi dashi ji Zhongguo zhi qiantu 近世國民競爭之大及中國之前途” [The general tendency of *guomin* struggles in the modern age and the future of China], in *Yinbingshi wenji* 冰室文集 [Collective essays from the Ice-drinker’s Studio], (Taipei: Zhonghua Shuju 中環書局, 1978), IV, 56. Liang Qichao went on to popularize the term *guomin* through his serialized essay *The New People* (*Xinminshuo*) which began publishing in 1902. For a discussion of Liang’s conception of citizenship as expressed in this series see Peter Zarrow, “Introduction: Citizenship in China and the West,” in *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920*, eds. Joshua Fogel and Peter Zarrow (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 16-17. For a more thorough discussion of how these essays fit in with Liang’s broader political thought, see Hao Chang, *Liang Ch’i-Ch’ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971),

concerted effort to bring the term into greater usage in China. Just a few years later, education reformer and future Minister of Education Zhang Shizhao 章士釗 (1881-1973) claimed, “the grandest term that has the greatest attraction and impact on the country is none other than *guomin*,” signaling the importance of the language of *guomin* in crafting new public policy.<sup>4</sup> The abolishment of the civil service examination system in 1905 led to a colossal effort to construct a new public school system under the banner of “educating *guomin*.”<sup>5</sup> This effort lasted through the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911 and into the first decades of the Republican period, during which time students gained literacy through such textbooks as *Guomin Bidu* 國民必讀 [The Essential Reader for *Guomin*] and other works intended to supply the everyday knowledge required of all Chinese. By the mid 1920s, students and soldiers sang patriotic songs with the lyrics, “Work for the *guomin*’s revolution! Come and fight!”<sup>6</sup> When the Chinese Nationalist Party seized Nanjing and assumed control of the central government in 1928, they claimed that state authority would now be synonymous with the *Guomindang* 國民黨, or “the party of

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149-219. In some cases *xinmin* is translated as “new citizen,” but Peter Zarrow has argued that the more literal “new people” better represents how the phrase would have been read by Liang’s audience.

<sup>4</sup> This quote originally appeared in an issue of *Shubao* (Jiangshu Journal) from 1903, and is quoted here from Sung-chiao Shen and Sechin Y.S. Chien, “Turning Slaves into Citizens: Discourses of *Guomin* and the Construction of Chinese National Identity in the Late Qing Period,” in *The Dignity of Nations: Equality, Competition, and Honor in East Asian Nationalism*, eds. Sechin Y.S. Chien and John Fitzgerald (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 50.

<sup>5</sup> *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育□志 [The Chinese educational review] 1:1 (1909; repr., Taipei: Taiwan Shang wu yin shu guan 台灣商務印書館, 1975), 1. According to one leading reformer of the time, Lu Erkui, the goal of “education for *guomin*” was “to train the people so that they can unite as one and so constitute the spirit of the nation!” As we shall see, however, this was not the only means of understanding “education for citizens or “*guomin jiaoyu* 國民教育”

<sup>6</sup> Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 174.

*guomin*.” By the end of the Nanjing Decade,<sup>7</sup> the language of *guomin* was an integral part of Chinese political life.

Yet even as political leaders, students, workers, and dissidents came to understand and employ the word *guomin* on a wider basis, a precise definition of the term itself remains elusive. As a metaphor for explaining the proper relationship between the state (*guo*) and the people (*min*), the term struggled to connect entities which were themselves poorly defined. For much of the early twentieth century, central Chinese states were very weak and the boundaries of China’s political community shifted continuously across ethnic, regional, linguistic, and gender divides.<sup>8</sup> As a way of speaking about the intended objects of republican governance, the term *guomin* was used at turns to refer to an ethno-national community of Han Chinese, the participants in a modern Chinese nation-state, the intended recipients of benefits from the welfare state, an emerging group of civically engaged urbanites, or a loosely defined cultural community whose membership was based on the acquisition of certain forms of knowledge. Soon after *guomin*’s introduction to the popular political lexicon, it was swiftly accompanied by other neologisms like

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<sup>7</sup> The Nanjing Decade refers to the period from 1927-1937, during which the Guomindang, headed by Chiang Kaishek (in Mandarin Chinese, Jiang Jieshi 蔣介石 (1887-1985)), established a central government with a national capital in Nanjing.

<sup>8</sup> The weakness of the central Chinese state during the decades surrounding the 1911 Revolution cannot be overstated. Although the revolution itself was successful in toppling the nearly three-hundred-year-old Manchu Qing dynasty, it was not successful in establishing a new centralized authority of any kind until the rise of the Nationalist Party in the late 1920s. For this reason, several scholars have recently argued against using a traditional “state/society” framework for analyzing social and political developments in Republican China. In the case of education, Xiaoping Cong has noted that while the Republican Ministry of Education sought to promote certain uniform national education standards, these efforts rarely extended beyond urban, coastal areas. Meanwhile, local warlords were often uninterested in educational projects, leaving local community leaders to their own devices in crafting local educational systems and mediating the role of schools in local society. See Xiaoping Cong, *Teachers’ Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), especially pp. 71-95. Other scholars have argued on a more general level that “state” and “society” themselves existed as unstable social and discursive formations whose coherence and contents were mutually constituted by one another during the Republican period. See, for example, Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity: Canton, 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), which deals with the way in which society (*shehui* 社會) was itself constituted and discursively articulated by the early governing bodies of the Guomindang.

*pingmin* 平民 (“common people”) and by re-appropriated Chinese terms like *minzhong* 民众 (“the masses”), which identified similar referents and were similarly embraced by social and political reformers. Today, *guomin* is most commonly translated as “citizen” or “national,” but such simple transliterations betray the diversity of meanings available to users of the term *guomin* in the late Qing and early Republican period.

The growing prevalence and continued ambiguity of the category *guomin* (and sister terms such as *pingmin* and *minzhong*) created unique opportunities for both political leaders and so-called ordinary *guomin*. Whether drafting policies, administering programs, or participating in national celebrations, Chinese historical actors were not drawing upon any particular, stable conception of *guomin*; rather, the stated goals and contents of reform projects and political activities themselves constituted the very conception of *guomin* that supposedly shaped their formation, creating a situation whereby ever shifting notions of *guomin* could be used to support a variety of political programs and agendas with misleading coherence. In this sense, *guomin* functioned as an example of what Tani Barlow has called historical catachreses—categorical concepts which lack a stable referent but nonetheless have “a diffused, powerful ability to explain everyday life and consequently to justify and define and stabilize our activities.”<sup>9</sup> Historical catachreses are not merely discursive objects but rather “highly ideated elements of lived experience” that carry social and political consequences through their employment in everyday practice.<sup>10</sup> Previous scholars have shown that over the course of the Republican period,

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<sup>9</sup> Tani Barlow, *The Question of Women in Chinese Feminism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2. Barlow contends that the category “woman” (in Chinese, *funü* 婦女 or *nǚxing* 女性) serves as a useful example of historical catachresis. The terminology of catachresis is itself derived from the work of postcolonial literary theorist Gayatri Spivak who used the term in reference to the category “the working class” and its ability to order a broad variety of social and political relations. See also, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside the Teaching Machine* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> For other discussions of the theoretical value of “catachresis” see Tani Barlow, “History and the Border,” *The Journal of Women’s History* 18.2 (Summer 2006): 8-32.



the conditions of possibility under which *guomin* could be understood narrowed to focus more specifically on a program of civic engagement and practical action derived from the tutelage of the party-state and enacted for the sake of the national welfare. Prior to the Nationalist Party's mobilization of this particular meaning of *guomin*, however, the catachrestic qualities of such an unstable signifier provided a space in which different historical actors could enact and embody many different dimensions of citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

This dissertation is concerned primarily with the production, imposition, articulation, and institutionalization of the concept metaphors *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong*, all of which were used to discuss issues related to citizenship and education in early twentieth-century China. In the chapters that follow, I show how educators, in the process of remaking China's illiterate masses into active citizens, themselves helped shape the boundaries under which terms like *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong* could be used, both as a means of state identification and as a set of terms by which individual students and teachers came to understand themselves. I further show both how state organs worked to produce and propagate particular understandings of these terms as well as how students and teachers played an active role in contesting, accepting, promoting, and reframing different conceptualizations of citizenship at different times. In order to chart this historical process, the present chapter outlines a few analytical categories and methodological strategies that will set the stage for arguments in later chapters regarding the roles educators played in the genealogy of these terms in China.

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<sup>11</sup> For a masterful discussion of the narrowing confines in which thinkers came to understand the Chinese nation and its citizens, see John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). For a more focused discussion on the development of civic engagement as a primary qualification of citizenship in public schools in the lower Yangzi delta region, see Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007).

As the latter chapters will show, these methodological insights apply equally to Chinese discourses on *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong*. For the sake of simplicity, however, this chapter will frame its arguments in terms of the Chinese discourse on *guomin*, which was among the first and most prominent (if not the only) means by which reformers discussed the contents and participants of popular education projects. First, I explain my use of the term “citizen” and its relationship to *guomin*. Second, I draw on the broad comparative and theoretical literature on citizenship to establish a more precise analytical framework, which treats citizenship primarily as a hermeneutic endeavor that can encapsulate, but does not necessarily include, the multiple dimensions along which citizenship has been differentiated in a comparative context. Third, I demonstrate the ways in which certain historiographical norms within the China field have both enabled and excluded particular understandings of the contents of the category *citizen* while ignoring or obscuring the actual function of terms like *guomin* in Republican China. As an alternative, I elaborate on my treatment of the neologism *guomin* as an example of historical catachresis, the contents of which are made clear(er) through the various contexts in which educators and administrators used the language of *guomin*.

### **The Relationship between Guomin and Citizen**

In most English language contexts, the word *guomin* is translated as “citizen.” In order to properly explain my understanding of the relationship between *guomin* and *citizen*, I must first distinguish between citizenship as a category of practice and a category of analysis. Whereas the former refers to the language and labels deployed by individuals (either in today’s politics and culture, or in a particular historical time period) to explain and describe the relationship between individuals and states, the latter refers to more abstracted and often normative concepts used by

historians to distinguish certain phenomena or call attention to important questions about these relationships.<sup>12</sup> While there is nothing inherently wrong in using the same term as both a category of practice and a category of analysis—indeed, many of the most important analytical categories of the past half-century, including race, nation, ethnicity, identity, and modernity, have derived from their salience as categories of everyday social experience—Frederick Cooper has argued persuasively that the easy elision between analytical categories and practical categories may limit our ability to understand the particularistic and subjective ways in which historical actors deployed these terms.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the adoption of practical categories as analytical categories tends to reify these terms, even as the analysis itself seeks primarily to explain or interpret why such reification takes place.<sup>14</sup> While the political dangers of this kind of analysis are perhaps most obvious with categories such as *race* or *nation*, the simultaneous usage of citizenship and citizens as both practical and analytical categories similarly risks universalizing a particular understanding of what it means to be a citizen.

In general, this dissertation will demonstrate that the category of practice *guomin* does not share much in common with the category of practice *citizen*. At the same time, for reasons to be elaborated below, I assert that the language of citizenship remains a useful analytical tool for thinking and writing about what Chinese authors and actors could mean when they used the word *guomin*. So that I may properly differentiate between the (English) analytical category

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<sup>12</sup> The differentiation between categories of practice and categories of analysis follows the framework outlined by Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper in their chapter, “Identity,” in Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 62-64.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9. Indeed, Cooper and Brubaker show that in the case of *identity*, the muddled relationship between the analytical concept identity and the everyday use of the word *identity* has served to reproduce and reinforce the reification of a variety of ethnic and racial identities.

<sup>14</sup> As Rogers Brubaker cogently explains in his essay “Ethnicity Beyond Groups,” the impulse to use practical categories as analytic ones blinds us to the fact that race, ethnicity, nation—and, I would add, citizenship—are not “entities in the world” but rather “perspectives on the world.” See Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 3-6.

citizenship, the (English) practical category *citizen*, and the (Chinese) practical category *guomin*, I have chosen to italicize all those terms which refer to categories and concepts employed in specific historical contexts.

While the contents and contours of the contested category *guomin* occasionally overlapped with the practical category *citizen* or *citoyen* as it has been broadly understood and employed in Euro-American contexts, this was more often not the case. Many of the relationships and behaviors most commonly associated with the classic ideal of *citizenship*, such as political suffrage or civic engagement in a public sphere, were either entirely absent or highly contested in Chinese discussions of *guomin*.<sup>15</sup> Chinese historian Peter Zarrow has suggested that “the concept of citizenship developed in the West; it is probably not applicable historically to other societies.”<sup>16</sup> Within the Chinese context, *guomin* itself competed not only with the aforementioned *pingmin* and *minzhong*, but with similar terms such as *gongmin* 公民 (“public people”) or *shimin* 市民 (“urban people”), each of which carried with it differing claims about the boundaries and activities of China’s political community.<sup>17</sup> In short, one cannot draw any casual equivalence between *guomin* and a Eurocentric understanding of *citizen*. To do so would not only subject experiences in one historical context to the representations and interpretations of

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<sup>15</sup> For a fuller discussion of citizenship as a classical ideal see J.G.A. Pocock, “The Ideal of Citizenship Since Classical Times,” in *Theorizing Citizenship*, ed. Ronald Beiner (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995): 29-52.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Zarrow, “Introduction: Citizenship in China and the West,” 4.

<sup>17</sup> Goldman and Perry, “Introduction,” 5-6. Goldman and Perry argue that each of these terms highlights “distinct aspects of state-society relations” in modern China and that “their deployment in dissimilar ways by different parties for divergent political purposes suggests the richness of the citizenship debate.” While this chapter will certainly echo Goldman and Perry’s assertion regarding the richness of citizenship debates in China, it will argue also that these terms (*guomin* in particular) do not represent any discrete meaning, but are themselves the grounds for debate on the meaning of citizenship in China.

another, but would also blind us to the ways in which the referents on either side of the translingual divide are themselves the products of contingent cultural conditions.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, to assert that terms like *guomin* and *citizen* have nothing in common is equally problematic. Given the widespread prevalence of citizenship language in contemporary political discourse, to assert as Zarrow does that the concept of citizenship is not applicable to Chinese society runs the risk of accepting an Orientalist logic whereby Chinese social categories are written off as ineffably foreign and Chinese historical actors are seen as incapable of creating or inhabiting the same conditions of modernity that characterize other societies.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, as an historical tool, culturally relativistic claims that establish an essential separation between the terms *citizen* and *guomin* seem ill-equipped to address the intellectual environment of early twentieth-century China, when many new ideas and concepts—*citizen* and *guomin* included—were constantly interacting with one another. If approached in a way that resists the hegemony of European understandings of *citizenship* as a normative path of sociopolitical development—that is, if approached in a way that does not confuse *citizenship* as a specific category of practice with citizenship as a more general category of analysis—a comparison of *guomin* and *citizen* reveals some basic similarities. Both *guomin* and *citizen* speak to some kind of relationship between people and states, even if the particulars of those relationships—the rights and responsibilities given to members, the terms of inclusion and exclusion, the benefits provided by the state—may differ both within and between each category. To claim that the terms *guomin* and *citizen* cannot

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<sup>18</sup> For an extended discussion on the epistemological issues inherent to histories dealing with translated words and concepts, see Lydia Liu, “Introduction: The Problem of Language in Cross-Cultural Studies,” in *Translingual Practice*, 1-44.

<sup>19</sup> In this regard, I seek to echo the sentiments offered by William Rowe in his discussion of “civil society” as a useful analytic device for thinking about the Chinese past. Rowe contends that it is precisely the impulse to deny the commensurability between so-called Chinese and so-called Western sociopolitical developments that lay behind the Bush administration’s acquiescent stand toward the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989. See William Rowe, “The Problem of ‘Civil Society’ in Late Imperial China,” *Modern China* 19.2 (April 1993): 139-141.

speak to one another in theoretically or politically productive ways not only Orientalizes Chinese historical subjects, but also unduly limits the ability of Chinese historians to challenge existing historical paradigms regarding the social and cultural functions of citizenship in a comparative context.<sup>20</sup>

In this dissertation, I will use the analytical terms “citizen” and “citizenship,” when talking about the social relationships, cultural memberships, political claims, self-understandings, and objects of governance articulated or implied through the use of the concept metaphor *guomin*. Similarly, I will use Chinese discourses on *guomin* (and in later chapters, discourses on *pingmin* and *minzhong*) as a lens through which to examine questions about, tensions within, and ambiguities surrounding the meaning of citizenship in a global and comparative context. I chose to focus on these terms not only because they were among the first and most popular means for speaking about the relationship between people and the state in Republican China, but also because their meanings were comparatively less fixed than similar terms such as *gongmin* or *shimin*. As such, they provide the greatest opportunities for historical work that examines the ways individual thinkers and actors articulated specific understandings of the relationship between people, knowledge, and the state within the shared language of citizenship itself. In using the analytical language of citizenship to write about *guomin* and vice versa, my goal is to map out a conceptual middle ground that avoids both the Eurocentrism and cultural relativism outlined above while simultaneously problematizing the construction of both *citizen* and *guomin* as social and cultural categories.

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<sup>20</sup> In his conclusion to the edited volume *Imagining the People*, Joshua Fogel argues, “It would be a welcome first indeed if raw material from the Chinese case were to enter the mainstream of cultural studies and enrich the larger theoretical concerns of scholars interested in citizenship, if not necessarily in China.” (Joshua Fogel, “The People, A Citizenry, Modern China” in *Imagining the People*, 281). Indeed, such is the aim of this dissertation.

Indeed, my ability to compare ideas about *guomin* and ideas about *citizenship* is enhanced by a conceptualization of *citizenship* and *guomin* as contested interpretive spaces. In short, I suggest that citizenship is primarily a hermeneutic endeavor, that is, a linguistic and textual means through which states identify and code intended objects of governance and through which individuals and communities “reflect and act upon the possibility of constructing a common life.”<sup>21</sup> Similarly, I view *guomin* as an unstable concept metaphor whose repeated deployment in the everyday lives of Chinese students, teachers, and administrators nonetheless served to stabilize particular social and political communities.<sup>22</sup> The following two sections deal more explicitly with these conceptions of citizenship and *guomin*, but the fundamental point here is that the unfixed nature of both *guomin* and *citizen* allows one to draw comparisons between their cultural function without presuming continuity among the contents of either category at any particular time. In other words, by denying the normative contents of the hegemonic category *citizen*, I render a discussion of *guomin* more accessible to English-reading audiences while avoiding the Eurocentric assumptions that have characterized previous studies.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The notion of citizenship as a hermeneutic endeavor is adopted from Roberto Alejandro. For a further explanation, see Roberto Alejandro, *Hermeneutics, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), 33-39.

<sup>22</sup> While not the focus of this dissertation, it follows from this argument that the practical category *citizen* is also an unstable concept metaphor—an implication that is well supported by various feminist and minority critiques of citizenship.

<sup>23</sup> For an example of Chinese historical work that operates on a seemingly universalized (and hence Eurocentric) notion of citizenship, see Paul Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes Towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990) and Merle Goldman, “The Reassertion of Political Citizenship in the Post-Mao Era: The Democracy Wall Movement,” in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, eds. Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002): 159-186.

## Defining Citizenship as an Analytical Category

In many national contexts, the language of citizenship has provided an important means by which governments, political groups, and individuals have come to describe and delineate the relationship between members of a political community and the modern nation-state.

Unsurprisingly, “citizen” and “citizenship” have similarly emerged as common categories of analysis among historians, sociologists, and political scientists seeking to explain the origins and trajectories of various social and political struggles. Yet as many critics have suggested, “citizenship” itself can inhabit a variety of meanings, functions, and modalities.<sup>24</sup> These meanings can include state-conferred status that guarantees certain political rights, a form of civic engagement defined by political activity in the public sphere, or a means of accessing the social benefits provided by welfare states.<sup>25</sup> Even within these larger political or social dimensions, the category *citizen* itself can serve to include and exclude different groups at different times, relying on multiple, competing, racialized, or gendered meanings.<sup>26</sup>

While the capaciousness of the category *citizen* has no doubt contributed to its ubiquity in social and political practice, such referential instability has also created challenges for the analyst, even if such challenges are not always acknowledged or addressed. At any particular

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<sup>24</sup> See, for instance, Alejandro, *Hermeneutics, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere*; Bryan S. Turner, ed., *Citizenship and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1993); and Gershon Shafir, “Introduction,” in *The Citizenship Debates: A Reader*, ed. Gershon Shafir (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998): 1-30.

<sup>25</sup> The disaggregation of “citizenship” into these political, civic, and social dimensions is derived primarily from T.H. Marshall’s path-breaking essay “Citizenship and Social Class.” See Thomas .H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1950).

<sup>26</sup> Much of the most promising work in this area has been done by feminist historians on the gendered meanings of citizenship. See, for example, Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (1997. Reprint, Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 2003); Kathleen Canning and Sonya Rose, eds., *Gender, Citizenship, and Subjectivities* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2002); and Anna Clark, “The Rhetoric of Masculine Citizenship: Concepts and Representations in Modern Western Political Culture,” in *Representing Masculinity: Male Citizenship in Modern Western Culture*, eds. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and Anna Clark (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007): 3-24.



historical moment we might ask the following questions: who can be considered a citizen and what makes them such? To what degree does there exist a public sphere sufficient to produce or otherwise enable civic action? What types of rights and responsibilities are involved with claims of citizenship (either by states or individuals)? While these are all complex, historically contingent issues in their own right, they contain within themselves equally thorny questions related to the operations of power that attend to the production of the category *citizen*. On whose consideration is the category of *citizen* predicated? Why and how do certain political and social actions (be they new or preexisting) come to be labeled as civic or indicative of citizenship? More generally, what are the conditions of possibility under which the terms of citizenship can be understood and how do such terms themselves function as a means for understanding other practices or mobilizing group identities? If indeed we are able to acknowledge that the contents of the practical category *citizen* are nearly always contested, constructed, and unstable, then it is this latter set of questions that provides more fertile ground for historians. By asking how and why certain understandings of citizenship came to predominate over others, we can move beyond what Rogers Brubaker has called “clichéd constructivism” in order to make more useful and important claims about the operations of power that attend the ideation of citizenship.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, by viewing citizenship as a fundamentally hermeneutic (rather than explicitly social or political) endeavor, we can establish a basis of comparison between various dimensions of citizenship in both Western and Chinese contexts.

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<sup>27</sup> Brubaker, *Ethnicity Without Groups*, 3, 38. In speaking about “identity,” Brubaker notes, “Weak or soft conceptions of identity are routinely packaged with standard qualifiers indicated that identity is multiple, unstable, in flux, contingent, fragmented, constructed, negotiated, and so on. These qualifiers have become so familiar—indeed obligatory—in recent years that one reads (and writes) them virtually automatically. They risk becoming mere placeholders, gestures signaling a stance rather than words conveying a meaning.” In examining the role of education reform in setting the boundaries in which citizenship is understood, I seek to go beyond merely acknowledging the multiplicity of understandings of *guomin* in late Qing and early Republican China, and to make stronger claims about the role of public policy in contributing to the ideation of the social category citizen.

Over the past sixty years, historians, political scientists, sociologists, and cultural critics have worked to theorize conceptions of citizenship in more precise ways. This effort gained particular strength with T.H. Marshall's influential essay *Citizenship and Social Class*, first published in 1950. Marshall's classic postwar analysis outlined a basic historical trajectory for the development of "citizenship" as a concept, including its "civil," "political," and "social elements."<sup>28</sup> Marshall contended that civic citizenship, in the form of civil rights "necessary for individual freedom," developed primarily in the eighteenth century, followed in the nineteenth century by the development of political citizenship in the form of suffrage and other tools of political representation. He asserts that during the twentieth century, there arose a new conception of social citizenship, that is, "the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in society."<sup>29</sup> For Marshall, these rights are embodied in the development of public education and the welfare state.

Marshall's work was truly groundbreaking and marked the first step in a half-century-long effort to complicate, disaggregate, and historicize competing understandings of citizenship. At the same time, his work has since been subjected to substantial critique, primarily for presenting an overly teleological framework for the development of modern citizenship and for ignoring the differential experiences of women, racial and ethnic minorities, colonial subjects, and disadvantaged groups.<sup>30</sup> Part of this critique is due to the fact that while Marshall worked as a Professor of Social Institutions at the University of London and clearly based his analysis on the history of citizenship in England, he often structured his claims so as to be universally

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<sup>28</sup> Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, 10.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>30</sup> For an overview of various critiques of Marshall, including those based on issues of gender, race, and class, see Sylvia Walby, "Is Citizenship Gendered?" *Sociology* 28.2 (1994): 379-386 and Kathleen Canning, *Gender History in Practice: Historical Perspectives on Bodies, Class, and Citizenship* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 15-16.

applicable to all liberal democracies. Yet even remaining within the historical confines of Britain, scholars like Sylvia Walby have observed that many of the features of political citizenship that Marshall ascribes to the nineteenth century were in fact not available to British women until 1928.<sup>31</sup> While much of Marshall's work remained relatively unchallenged for several decades after its publication, it eventually became clear that the process of differentiating the various meanings and impacts of citizenship did not end with the basic categories Marshall had provided.

While subsequent theoretical work on citizenship has expanded upon and complicated the universal descriptions implied by Marshall's theoretical description, most scholars have adopted a similar strategy of differentiating between multiple kinds or dimensions of citizenship. Bryan S. Turner has suggested that adding a fourth dimension—cultural citizenship—to Marshall's original tripartite division will allow scholars to address a multitude of instances of citizenship, including those which are developed from social struggle and those which are imposed through the incorporation strategies of states.<sup>32</sup> Ronald Beiner has suggested that the association of citizenship with a political community must be itself differentiated according to whether such a political community exists in the service of individual identity (liberalism), communalist identity (nationalism), or as an expression of civic identity.<sup>33</sup> Feminist historians such as Linda Kerber have argued that we must develop a “braided” conception of citizenship that juxtaposes the universalized, egalitarian ideal of citizenship with the social practices that often excluded women

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<sup>31</sup> Walby, “Is Citizenship Gendered?” 380.

<sup>32</sup> Bryan S. Turner, “Postmodern Culture / Modern Citizens,” in *The Condition of Citizenship*, ed. Bart Van Steenbergen (London: Sage Publications, 1994): 158-160.

<sup>33</sup> Ronald Beiner, “Introduction: Why Citizenship Constitutes a Theoretical Problem in the Last Decade of the Twentieth Century,” in *Theorizing Citizenship*, 1-28.

and other minority groups.<sup>34</sup> Moving beyond the Euro-American context, anthropologist Saud Joseph has argued that in the context of Middle Eastern history, citizenship must be differentiated according to the law and practice of regionally specific formulations of citizenship, which are themselves dependent upon differing conceptions of politics, religion, kinship, and individuals.<sup>35</sup> Chinese historian Robert Culp has characterized citizenship in China as consisting of four distinct dimensions: national identity, political participation and rights, social membership, and cultural citizenship.<sup>36</sup>

When viewed together, the sheer volume of differing disaggregation schemes reveals the limits of such efforts to describe the contents and condition of the category *citizen*. Indeed, while the above work has in the aggregate made great strides in demonstrating the variability of citizenship as a social, cultural, political, legal, economic, gendered, or racialized category, such work has also made any particular attempt to provide a description of such variability seem meaningless, and no standard definition of citizenship has yet gained scholarly consensus.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, any effort to establish a universalized understanding of the contents of citizenship, no matter how finely differentiated, runs the risk of “pathologizing” those historical actors and

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<sup>34</sup> Linda Kerber, “The Meanings of Citizenship,” *Journal of American History* 84.3 (December 1997): 833-854. This conceptualization of citizenship is itself conceptually similar to Margaret Somers’s notion of citizenship as an “instituted process.” (See Margaret Somers, “Citizenship and the Place of the Public Sphere: Law, Community, and Political Culture in the Transition to Democracy,” *American Sociological Review* 58.5 (October 1993), 611-612.)

<sup>35</sup> Saud Joseph, “Gendering Citizenship in the Middle East,” in *Gender and Citizenship in the Middle East*, ed. Saud Joseph (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 3-30.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> The works outlined above are indeed but a few of the many, many efforts to describe and explain the conditions of citizenship in positive, universal terms. For additional attempts, see Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1981); Max Weber, “Citizenship in Ancient and Medieval Cities,” in *The Citizenship Debates*, 43-52; J.M. Barbalet, *Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); and T.K. Oommen, ed. *Citizenship and National Identity: From Colonialism to Globalism* (London: Sage Publications, 1997); The sheer number of different possible interpretations have caused scholars like Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman to question “what we can expect from a ‘theory of citizenship.’” Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” in *Theorizing Citizenship*, 309.

contexts that still manage fall outside of the dimensions enumerated within any particular scheme. This problem is particularly acute in the Chinese case, as most of the critical theoretical approaches to citizenship outlined above remain rooted in a Eurocentric historical framework. While one could embark on a more balanced discussion of the degree to which the above frameworks may or may not apply to the Chinese case and thus may or may not be universal in application, such an endeavor risks merely adding to a branch of scholarship whose continued lack of consensus has rendered new interpretive schemes less and less useful. In short, the disambiguation of the category *citizen*, while well-intentioned, seems like a lost cause.

Moving forward, then, the most promising theoretical conceptions of citizenship are those that synthesize rather than disassemble the various meanings of citizenship, albeit in ways that allow for the manifestation and mobilization of different and often ambiguous modalities of citizenship in different historical contexts. Seeking such a general definition, Charles Tilly has suggested that citizenship is “a set of mutually contested claims between agents of states and members of socially-constructed categories: genders, races, nationalities, and others” about the relationship between them.<sup>38</sup> Such an approach positions citizenship as a fundamentally hermeneutic endeavor in that it locates the “reality” of citizenship in the social event of the claims made about citizens—in other words, it posits that citizenship is primarily a *text* that unfolds through the interplay of individual actions and political institutions and which remains at

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Tilly, “Citizenship, Identity, and Social History,” in *Citizenship, Identity, and Social History*, ed. Charles Tilly (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 6. Tilly goes on to provide an even more precise definition, wherein citizenship is “a continuing series of transactions between persons and agents of a given state in which each has enforceable rights and obligations uniquely by virtue of (1) the person’s membership in an exclusive category, the native-born plus the naturalized and (2) the agent’s relation to the state rather than any other authority the agent may enjoy.” Tilly himself, it should be noted, is not immune to the impulse to disaggregate—he notes that citizenship can function as a category, a tie (i.e. “a continuing series of transactions to which participants attach shared understandings, memories, forecasts, rights, and obligations”), a role (i.e. “a bundle of ties attached to a single actor), or to an identity (i.e. an actor’s experience of a category, tie, role, etc) (pp.6-9). While I appreciate the conceptual precision of this latter definition, I think that even this level of disambiguation runs the risk of limiting, rather than opening up, historical horizons for examining citizenship in a comparative context.

all times open to multiple interpretations from a plurality of readers (including state institutions). This emphasis on claims about citizenship and on the dialogical processes that produce and condition those claims not only allows for more informed cross-cultural comparisons but also seems particularly well suited to investigating the conditions of possibility for thinking about early twentieth-century Chinese neologisms such as *guomin*, which lacked singular or stable definitions.<sup>39</sup> As such, my own definition of citizenship follows closely from Tilly's definition and from Roberto Alejandro's conception of citizenship as a hermeneutic endeavor.<sup>40</sup> I view citizenship as a set of mutually contested claims between states, individuals, and socially-constructed groups that either code certain people as objects of governance, serve as a set of terms through which individuals and groups can mobilize certain forms of collective self-understanding, or both.<sup>41</sup> In short, I view citizenship not as a derivative or predicate of some other activity (as is the case with many of the above schemas) but rather as a means of reading or interpreting sociopolitical relationships.<sup>42</sup>

This broad conception of citizenship is useful for several reasons. First, if citizenship is viewed as a set of competing claims, the ambiguity of the practical category *citizen* or *guomin* becomes an analytical strength in that it provides a window through which to assess how

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<sup>39</sup> On a general level, this understanding of citizenship marks an attempt to develop what Dominick LaCapra has called a "dialogical" (as opposed to a "documentary") approach to the history of citizenship. Following the assertion that citizenship itself constitutes a hermeneutic endeavor, the reality of which lies in the texts that serve as grounds for the mobilization of group constituencies as well as sociopolitical relationships, we must be more attentive to the fact that practical language of citizenship (including *citizen*, *guomin*, etc) both shapes and is shaped by the various contexts in which it is employed. Dominick LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1983), 13-71.

<sup>40</sup> Roberto Alejandro, *Hermeneutics, Citizenship, and the Public Sphere*, 33-39.

<sup>41</sup> This definition of citizenship also marks an attempt to address the problems inherent to treating citizenship as an identity. Following Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's article, "Beyond 'Identity,'" this definition of citizenship seeks to differentiate (but not exclude the possibility of overlap) between state identification and subjective self-understanding. See Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper, "Beyond 'Identity'" in *Ethnicity Without Groups*. This essay is also reprinted in Cooper, *Colonialism in Question*.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 37.

individuals, groups, and states articulate and mobilize such claims—that is, the stated ambiguity of the category itself allows us to move away from the question of who or what is a citizen and focus instead on the particular historical circumstances, groups, and ideas that surround and produce the boundaries of possibility under which citizenship can be imagined. Second, the generalized view of citizenship as a set of competing claims by states, groups, and individuals remains open enough to allow cross-cultural comparisons that are not deterministic or normative. Thirdly, this understanding of citizenship has the benefit of positioning so-called *citizens* (or *citoyens* or *guomin*) as the subjects rather than the objects of *citizenship* as a practice, even in those circumstances such as China or the Middle East, in which citizenship has been characterized as a “top-down” process.<sup>43</sup> By refusing to seek a fixed understanding of citizenship, historians can remain responsive to the diverse ways in which historical actors are themselves involved in attempts to define citizenship.<sup>44</sup> In addition to these general benefits, such a conception of citizenship is particularly useful to an analysis of the function of the term *guomin* in late Qing and early Republican China, both because of the diversity that characterizes reformers’ articulations of the relationship between individuals, groups, and states, and because of the ways in which reading and translation played a key role in these articulations. Finally, in accounting for the ways in which Chinese historical actors defined *guomin* for themselves, a hermeneutic conception of citizenship allows us to access some of the social and cultural dimensions of citizenship that have been occluded from more recent historical analyses of citizenship in China. It is to these Chinese historical analyses that I now turn.

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<sup>43</sup>For characterizations of citizenship as “top-down” see Saud Joseph, “Gendering Citizenship in the Middle-East,” 9 and Peter Zarrow, “Introduction: Citizenship in China and the West,” 13-15.

<sup>44</sup> LaCapra, *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 18. As LaCapra states, one of the primary implications of an insistence on a more “dialogical” relation to the past on the part of the historian is that it “attests to the ways historical agents are themselves involved in attempts to make sense—or to explore the limits of sense-making—in their texts or other historical acts.”

### ***Citizenship as a Category of Practice Among English-Speaking Historians of China***

The seeming incommensurability of liberal-democratic understandings of *citizenship* and twentieth-century Chinese history may account for the reluctance on the part of many historians of China to engage the issue of citizenship in China. Since the early 1990s, however, it is precisely the unique historical trajectory of Chinese politics relative to Euro-American national contexts that has motivated a growing degree of interest in citizenship among historians and political scientists, many of whom seek historical explanations for more recent political developments in the post-Mao People's Republic of China and in democratizing Taiwan.<sup>45</sup> The resulting historiography of citizenship in China has constituted a reevaluation of twentieth-century Chinese political history, moving away from the ideological and state-centric narratives of the Nationalist and Communist Parties towards a focus on sociopolitical relationships as expressed in the practical language of *guomin* and in the comparative language of "civic engagement" and "the public sphere."

Much of this more recent work on citizenship in China has been quite interdisciplinary in nature, resulting in a set of approaches that, while individually compelling, do not always allow advocates of different conceptual approaches to citizenship to speak to one another in like terms. Indeed, one could say that much like *guomin* served as a contested category among late Qing and early Republican reformers, so too has *citizenship* itself functioned as a contested category among English-speaking historians of China over the past two decades. While the field is

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<sup>45</sup> This development was also occasioned in part by a general rise in interest regarding critical approaches to citizenship and identity during the 1990s. Examples of this trend are too numerous to mention here, but include the works referenced in the previous section as well as Rogers Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood in France and Germany* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Linda Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *Journal of American History* 84.3 (December 1997): 833-54; Iris Marion Young, "Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship," in *The Citizenship Debates: A Reader*, ed. Gershon Shafir (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); and others.



continuing to evolve, most existing studies treat citizenship in China in one of two distinct ways. The first, largely practiced by intellectual and cultural historians, treats Chinese translations of the foreign terms *citizen* and *kokumin* as linguistic signs that animate the political debates of China's leading reformers. The second, practiced by social historians and political scientists, seems to imagine citizenship as a universalized set of practices and proceeds to investigate the degree to which the political activities of ordinary Chinese people meet that standard. These two historiographical trends are well represented by two edited volumes, published in 1997 and 2002, which embrace the intellectual/linguistic and social/political approaches respectively.<sup>46</sup> A close analysis of each volume reveals that the contributors' ability to tell us about the function of *guomin*—that is, the means by which historical actors came to see certain individuals and groups as citizens and to act accordingly—is itself dependent upon the particular understandings of citizenship they adopt. In general, I argue that both approaches are lacking and suggest that treating *guomin* as an example of historical catachresis will better enable us to understand how reformers, administrators, and educators attempted to appropriate and fix the meaning of citizenship in particular contexts.

One of the first major works to deal directly with the issue of citizenship in China is *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920*, edited by Joshua Fogel and Peter Zarrow. Following Zarrow's initial claim that "the concept of citizenship" as it is understood in the West is "probably not applicable historically to other societies," the volume focuses primarily on the different ways in which intellectuals, journalists, and political reformers understood Chinese concepts such as *guomin*, *gongmin*, *yulun* 舆论

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<sup>46</sup> See Joshua Fogel and Peter Zarrow, eds. *Imagining the People*, and Elizabeth J. Perry and Merle Goodman, eds. *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*. The fact that much of the most prominent work on citizenship in China appears in edited volumes rather than monographs speaks to newness of citizenship as an object of study in the China field as a whole.

/gonglun 公论 (“public opinion”), minqing 民情 (“popular sentiment”), shehui 社会 (“society”) or gong 公 (simply “public”), all of which are related but not equivalent to “the concept of citizenship.”<sup>47</sup> Taken together, the contributors to *Imagining the People* explore the ways in which politically active intellectuals drew from various internationally-circulating discourses (most notably those related to Social Darwinism) in order to construct a multitude of competing notions of what it meant to be a citizen in China.<sup>48</sup> A more recent article by Sung-chiao Shen and Sechin Y.S. Chien follows in this same spirit, examining how leading intellectuals like Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868-1936), Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927), and Liang Qichao alternatively envisioned *guomin* in ethnic, cultural, or political terms in abstract political debate.<sup>49</sup>

While these intellectual histories have been very effective in pointing to the lack of a singular, stable understanding of *guomin* and similar terms in early twentieth-century China, their argumentative scope is limited by an analytical approach that places citizenship almost entirely within elite discourse. Ultimately, the focus on elite discourse is unable to account for the ways in which such terms functioned among broader groups of people. In fact, one essay in

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<sup>47</sup> For example, one essay explores how new ideas about the proper relationships between peoples and states transformed philological debates between Confucian scholars, while another shows how radical political reformer Tan Sitong 譚嗣同 (1865-1898) employed new notions of “people’s rule” (*minzhu* 民主) to promote a kind of citizenry that stood in direct opposition to the aims of “rulers” (*jun* 君). See Anne Cheng, “Nationalism, Citizenship, and the Old Text/New Text Controversy in late Nineteenth Century China” and Ingo Schäfer, “The People, People’s Rights, and Rebellion: The Development of Tan Sitong’s Political Thought” in *Imagining the People*, 61-112.

<sup>48</sup> It should be said that not all essays in the volume *Imagining the People* are equally focused on “intellectuals” per se. Joan Judge’s “Publicists and Populists: Including the Common People in the Late Qing New Citizen Ideal” and Michael Tsin’s “Imagining ‘Society’ in Early Twentieth-Century China” work to show how journalists and party operatives respectively worked to identify and code new groups of people as citizens or members of “civil society.” Nevertheless, both articles deal with the articulation of ideal understandings of these terms, leading to many of the same problems explored in the following paragraph.

<sup>49</sup> Sung-chiao Shen and Sechin Y.S. Chien, “Turning Slaves into Citizens: Discourses of *Guomin* and the Construction of Chinese National Identity in the Late Qing Period,” in *The Dignity of Nations: Equality, Competition, and Honor in East Asian Nationalism*, eds. Sechin Y.S. Chien and John Fitzgerald (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 49-69. As Shen and Chien observe, these competing understandings of *guomin* themselves correspond to different types of nationalism espoused by each reformer—for Zhang, ethno-nationalism, for Kang, cultural-nationalism, and for Liang, state-centered nationalism.

Fogel and Zarrow's edited volume that does marginally address popular responses to citizenship discourse notes that most former Qing subjects, when faced with the political visions espoused by Republican China's earliest political parties, "repudiated citizenship consciousness, not to mention the political institutions associated with citizenship."<sup>50</sup> While one might take issue with the claim that a rejection of particular understandings of citizenship, such as those espoused by the founding members of the Goumindang, constitutes a wholesale rejection of "citizenship consciousness," the fact remains that elite discourse alone cannot fully account for the everyday appropriation of, identification with, or resistance to ideas about *guomin*, *pingmin*, *minzhong* and other such terms. Furthermore, an exclusive focus on authors and activists who self-consciously worked to define the meaning of terms like *guomin* creates a conception of Chinese discourse on citizenship wherein meanings of *guomin* are understood to be multiple but nonetheless appear internally consistent within specific texts and, in many cases, throughout a particular author's intellectual development. Indeed, even as arguments such as those by Shen and Chien are intended to illustrate the important differences between high-profile intellectual leaders' ideas about *guomin*, this comparative approach effectively establishes a teleological if not entirely stable conception of what *guomin* came to mean *within* each author's own corpus of writing.<sup>51</sup> In other words, by focusing on authors who write *about* categories of citizenship in an abstract sense, intellectual historians of China fail to capture the tensions and ambiguities that arise when multiple historical actors speak *with* assumedly shared notions of citizenship to promote or

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<sup>50</sup> Liu Zehua and Liu Jianqing, "Civic Associations, Political Parties, and the Cultivation of Citizenship Consciousness in Modern China," in *Imagining the People*, 57.

<sup>51</sup> For an excellent, detailed explanation of the interpretive challenges associated with assessing the intentionality of specific authors through a large body of texts, see Dominick LaCapra, "Rethinking Intellectual History and Reading Texts," in *Rethinking Intellectual History*, 23-71. Indeed, any approach asserting the existence of a stable, knowable meaning attached to a particular linguistic signifier across multiple texts by a particular author or across multiple authors would be subject to a post-structuralist critique such as that provided in Michel Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 139-64.

explain different endeavors. In general, intellectual histories of *guomin* and other similar categories tend to produce idealized (if multiple) understandings of what certain authors meant by those terms, in turn overlooking the processes through which competing claims were articulated.

A second, larger, and mostly separate strand of historiography treats citizenship as a practice in twentieth-century China. Within this framework, citizenship is typically embodied in specific actions of workers or students or in specific conditions such as the growth of a “civil society” in urban, coastal China. Drawing largely from the procedural norms of social history and political science, the goal of this branch of scholarship has been to locate evidence of citizenship in China by shifting attention away from the state and towards the role played by disadvantaged groups in shaping China’s political trajectory. Early examples of this kind of work include Elizabeth J. Perry’s study of workers’ strikes in Shanghai and David Strand’s account of the growth of civil society in Republican Beijing, both of which were published in the mid 1990s.<sup>52</sup> More recently, the collected volume *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern*

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<sup>52</sup> In contrast to an earlier generation of historians, who argued that Chinese political culture was inherently autocratic, scholars like Strand and Perry sought to show that many Chinese historical actors, including lowly rickshaw pullers and urban industrial workers, remained civically active and worked to exert their influence over the affairs of the state. In uncovering the political activities of these subaltern groups, Strand and Perry attempted to show that a certain kind of “public sphere” existed in Chinese urban areas, whereby urbanites of different stripes commented on state affairs and asserted certain kinds of political rights through solidarity across ethnic, regional, and linguistic boundaries. For an urban history that claims to locate the conditions of a burgeoning “civil society” (of the kind described by Jürgen Habermas) in Republican-era Beijing, see David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993). For an analysis of civic engagement among Shanghai’s urban industrial workers, see Elizabeth J. Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995). Perry’s other works, including the essay collection *Challenging the Mandate of Heaven: Social Protest and State Power in China* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002) and more recently *Patrolling the Revolution: Worker Militias, Citizenship, and the Modern Chinese State* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), have been similarly influential in asserting the importance of social protest and other forms of civic engagement in shaping China’s politics. For another recent study that ascribes the language of citizenship to the political actions of women’s rights activists, see Louise P. Edwards, *Gender, Politics, and Democracy: Women’s Suffrage in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008). Bryna Goodman has argued that, contrary to the claims of William Rowe and David Strand regarding the growth of a public urban identity in late Qing and early Republican China, many of the most powerful forms of national identification in Shanghai grew out of native-place associations (*huiguan* 会馆), which helped to engender public action within, rather than between,

*China* (2002), edited by Perry and fellow political scientist Merle Goldman, has exemplified this approach. In the introduction to the volume, Goldman and Perry suggest that “the term ‘citizenship’ need not connote a teleological movement toward a liberal democratic regime” and that political citizenship in China has been a multivalent concept.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, many of the articles in the volume, most notably Goldman’s “The Reassertion of Political Citizenship in the Post-Mao Era: The Democracy Wall Movement” and Kevin J. O’Brien’s “Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship,” analyze how specific Chinese historical actors came to embody a standard of citizenship analogous to those practices associated with *citizens* or *citoyens* in a liberal-democratic context.<sup>54</sup> In Goldman’s case, the focus is on the way certain intellectuals used Cultural Revolution-style “Big Character Posters” (*dazibao* 大字报) to assert liberal political rights during the Deng Xiaoping era.<sup>55</sup> O’Brien, meanwhile, adopts a tripartite division of citizenship into its civil, social, and political elements to demonstrate that villagers have experienced the “stirrings of citizenship” since the dawn of the PRC era, despite the fact that they lacked the same kind of political freedoms experienced in the West.<sup>56</sup>

As noted in a review of this edited volume, many of these approaches are problematic because they ultimately “conflate citizenship as a general category with a specific liberal-democratic or perhaps civic-republican citizenship based on inalienable rights and individual

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regional lines. See Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).

<sup>53</sup> Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry, “Introduction: Political Citizenship in Modern China,” in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship*, 1-3.

<sup>54</sup> It is worth noting that while Elizabeth Perry and David Strand argue that many Chinese historical actors did, in fact, “act like citizens,” Jeffrey Wasserstrom’s contribution to this volume points out that some areas, like the foreign settlements in Old Shanghai, were in fact marked by a distinct lack of citizenship, and indeed a lack of what Wasserstrom calls “political modernity.” Wasserstrom, “Questioning the Modernity of the Model Settlement: Citizenship and Exclusion in Old Shanghai” in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship*, 111.

<sup>55</sup> Goldman, “The Reassertion of Political Citizenship in the Post-Mao Era: The Democracy Wall Movement,” in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship*, 159-161.

<sup>56</sup> Kevin O’Brien, “Villagers, Elections, and Citizenship,” in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship*, 212-215.

autonomy” thus holding Chinese historical actors to a universalized and indeed Eurocentric standard of citizenship.<sup>57</sup> This confusion not only suggests the continued hegemonic power of understandings of *citizenship* based on Euro-American experiences, but is also the direct result of a methodological approach that seeks to define and explain the political actions of peoples and groups who typically do not or cannot define the meaning of their activities in similar terms.<sup>58</sup> If villagers participate in local elections or author “big-character posters,” but do not self-consciously define their actions as constituting citizenship, can the analyst do the same? Similarly, if a particular worker considers him- or herself a *guomin* and also participates in a strike for better working conditions, to what extent is his or her identification as the former contingent upon or even related to the latter activity? Too often, the politically-oriented approaches outlined above seem to gloss over these issues and, in so doing, risk ignoring the contingent cultural processes by which individuals and states mobilize citizenship claims or understand political actions. By treating *citizenship* as a standard set of behaviors or dispositions to be embodied or not, the political dimensions of the categories *citizen* or *guomin* are assumed rather than problematized. Indeed, the avowed focus of Perry and others on politics seems to necessarily discount many other potential dimensions of citizenship, including membership in a national community, identification by the state as an object of (non-democratic) governance, and access to benefits of the social welfare state.<sup>59</sup>

In sum, a review of the recent historiography on citizenship in China reveals that most scholarship has yet to fully address the historical processes through which a broad spectrum of

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<sup>57</sup> Kristen Parris, [Untitled Review], *China Review International* 11.1 (Spring, 2004): 95-102.

<sup>58</sup> Indeed, one could say that the application of the label “citizenship” to such actions is—like early attempts to define *guomin*—catachrestic!

<sup>59</sup> One could argue that, given multiple reports of growing political apathy among mainland China’s post-1989 generation, these alternative (less political) dimensions of citizenship are indeed the more salient ones.

individuals and groups came to understand terms like *guomin*, because it treats citizenship itself as either an abstract intellectual endeavor or as a universalized standard of (liberal-democratic) political action. What is needed now is a new methodological approach that engages the multiplicity of understandings of *guomin* without precluding the role of a broad spectrum of historical actors in shaping and mobilizing these understandings. Recently, Robert Culp has moved in this direction by examining how “multiple forms of citizenship intersected” in China’s early public secondary schools to produce a new understanding of political citizenship as expressed through civic engagement.<sup>60</sup> Even though Culp’s work produces an understanding of citizenship that is perhaps overly familiar and confined to China’s wealthiest public academies, this focus on how notions of citizenship were ideated constitutes a step in the right direction. Following the intellectual histories of citizenship, we should acknowledge that understandings of *guomin* in China are multivalent and do not necessarily match up with the ideas, activities, and behaviors associated with *citizenship* in Euro-American contexts, but we must move beyond the realm of abstract intellectual debate to include policy makers, local administrators, teachers, and students as agents whose actions (discursive and otherwise) provided new contexts for the

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<sup>60</sup> Culp, *Articulating Citizenship*, 7-9. Culp draws on a wealth of research culled from primary school textbooks, local periodicals, and student-published journals to show how student political groups “enacted their citizenship” by applying various forms of civic action to effect social change. Culp’s observation that “the idea of citizenship, once introduced, raised as many questions as it answered” speaks to the broad conditions of possibility under which teachers and students could conceive of citizenship during this period, but his narrative of the increasing mobilization of student political groups in the lower Yangzi delta nonetheless arrives at a rather familiar understanding of citizenship as constituting primarily civic engagement. One other work that deals more explicitly with the complex ways in which meanings of citizenship differed among political leaders, state officials, and ordinary people is Henrietta Harrison’s *The Making of the Republican Citizen*. One of the chief insights of Harrison’s work is that while the state was quite successful in propagating and popularizing new national symbols and practices, an evaluation of their uses in daily life reveals that many of these materials and activities (including the five color flag, the Sun Yat-sen suit (*zhongshan zhuang* 中山装), and the National Day holiday) were themselves subject to a variety of localized, unintended meanings beyond the state’s control. While this insight into the contested meaning of national ceremonies informs certain aspects of the present study, Harrison’s work occupies only a tangential relationship to the other work examined here. Despite the presence of “citizenship” in the title of the book, it is never clear in Harrison’s study whether or not the items and activities under review were ever understood by states or individuals to be constitutive of citizenship itself. In general, Harrison is more concerned with the meanings attached to particular aspects of material culture than she is in assessing the meaning of “citizenship” itself in a Chinese context.

mobilization of ideas about *guomin*. Following recent social histories of citizenship, we should view political activity as an important component of twentieth-century Chinese discourses on citizenship, but we should view such actions as themselves productive of new understandings of terms like *guomin*, rather than as the embodiment of stable, pre-existing conceptions of citizenship. Furthermore, we should acknowledge that the production of new understandings of the relationship between people and the state can occur outside of those contexts that states and individual actors understand to be political.

### **The Practical Category *Guomin* as Historical Catachresis**

If we understand the general analytic category citizenship as referring to a set of emergent claims made by individuals and states about the relationship between them, then it follows that we should view particular terms like *guomin* not as the expressive outcome of a particular activity or position vis-à-vis the state, but rather as the advocacy for a particular way of thinking about these positions and activities.<sup>61</sup> In other words, situated uses of unstable terms like *guomin*, in order to be legible, must necessarily contain embedded claims about what such terms will or should mean at some future point in time. While this understanding of the concept of *guomin* is primarily discursive in nature, it also acknowledges that this discourse helped to produce an operational and increasingly stabilized collectivity that itself served as a basis for the interpellation of a variety of political activities and cultural practices. Given this function of *guomin* in Chinese social, cultural, and political life, I argue that it represents an instance of historical catachreses, i.e. conceptual terms which lack a stable referent but which acquire meanings and stabilize activities over time through the claims made about or with them. Indeed,

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<sup>61</sup> This understanding is very similar to the understanding of “class” recently advocated by Geoff Eley and Keith Nield. See Eley and Nield, *The Future of Class in History: What’s Left of the Social?* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 166-168.



an approach that treats the analytic category citizenship as a hermeneutic endeavor must treat specific practical categories like *guomin*—or *citizen*, or *citoyen*—as instances of historical catachresis.

The concept of catachresis is derived from deconstructive literary theory, where it refers to a linguistic sign with an arbitrary connection to its referent or to the misuse of a particular metaphor to refer to something that does not exist.<sup>62</sup> One of the foremost advocates of a deconstructive view of language, Gayatri Spivak has gone so far as to argue that “the *political* use of words... is irreducibly catachrestic.”<sup>63</sup> In her own work, she has used the concept of catachresis productively to show how various social and political categories have been mobilized and/or strategically essentialized for political aims. According to Spivak, “women,” “the working class,” and “subaltern consciousness” are all catachrestic in their operation, in large part because there is no one true “woman,” “worker,” or singular consciousness among all subalterns.<sup>64</sup> In emphasizing the lack of a stable referent for many of the most important sociopolitical categories of the past several centuries, Spivak has contributed substantially to the “systematic unsettling of the stability of meaning,” which constitutes one of the foremost accomplishments of post-structuralism.<sup>65</sup> At the same time, historians’ ability to use the concept of “catachresis” (and, one

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<sup>62</sup> For more on the application of the analytical language of catachresis in a more straightforward (to such a degree as such things can be straightforward) deconstructivist context, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993. Reprint, New York: Routledge, 2009), esp. pp. 158-192 and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), especially the chapter on “History,” pp. 198-311.

<sup>63</sup> Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, 181-183.

<sup>64</sup> For a prolonged critique of the catachresis “subaltern consciousness,” see Spivak’s “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 3-34. Although she does not embrace the terminology of catachresis, Denise Riley’s *Am I That Name?: Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (New York: Macmillan, 1988) works to address many of the same issues Spivak brings up in her own critique of “women” as catachrestic.

<sup>65</sup> Rey Chow, “The Interruption of Referentiality: Post-structuralism and the Conundrum of Critical Multiculturalism,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 101.1 (Winter 2002): 172.

could say, post-structuralism) in analytically productive ways is limited by the totalizing and indeed ahistorical claims necessitated by a purely deconstructive view of language.

Following Tani Barlow, I have chosen to emphasize the notion of *historical* catachresis because this concept enables us to historicize these ambiguous, often politicized, categories and transform their referential instability into a positive analytical good. Barlow contends that, as fundamentally unstable signifiers, historical catachreses like *nüxing* 女性/*funü* 妇女 (often translated as “women”) “retain the trace of the operating assumptions and normalizing strategies that characterize [the time and place in which they are used].”<sup>66</sup> In other words, precisely because catachreses do not themselves accurately or consistently correspond with any particular referent, they must always rely upon a set of normalizing strategies that make them intelligible within any given context. Historians can then take as their focus of analysis these normalizing strategies, many of which do in fact correspond to operations of power or individual bodies that actually existed in the past. By turning our attention away from the contents of particular claims, which were always shifting and could be interpreted in different ways by different actors, and towards the politics of claiming, which was often rooted in specific actions and strategies, we can better assess what was historically specific about particular concepts.<sup>67</sup> Finally, through the

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<sup>66</sup> Barlow, *The Question of Women*, 2. Barlow’s understanding of “trace” in this line is derived from Derrida’s philosophic notion of the “trace.” See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 67-73.

<sup>67</sup> In many respects, this aspect of historical catachreses bears a close relationship to the practice of *genealogy* developed by Michel Foucault. Genealogy, originally a Nietzschean concept, represents for Foucault a way of recording the history of “morals, ideals, and metaphysical concepts” that “rejects the metahistorical deployment of ideal significations and indefinite teleologies” to focus on the specific set of historically contingent events that accompany the construction of ideas. Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. D.F. Bouchard (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977), 152, 140. In contrast with Foucault’s other historical method, archeology, the genealogist seeks to move beyond the discursive dimensions of a particular concept to engage the “endlessly repeated play of dominations” and power relationships that inform the possible meanings of a given idea at any particular moment (p.150). Finally, genealogy represents what Foucault called “effective” history, or history which focuses on the most unique characteristics of a particular event in order to emphasize the discontinuity and disparity that marks all historical developments. My own effort to position *guomin* as an instance of historical catachresis is intended to accomplish precisely those goals

notion of historical catachresis we can come to recognize that this historicity is itself characterized by “the ambiguity of time lived in the moment.”<sup>68</sup>

I also interpret the analytic value of catachresis as being historical in another way. To me, important categories like *guomin* or *nüxing/funü* are *historical* catachreses because, while they are generally inadequate to their referents, they are not always equally so across time. Indeed, as concepts that contain normative claims about the things they represent, one of the primary consequences of historical catachreses is that over time, various historical agents use these terms to appropriate and fix meanings that were not previously legible. This is not to suggest that the history of catachreses is a teleological one in which terms become more and more adequate to their referents over time, as there always remains the possibility of disjuncture, wherein new conditions (such as “modernity,” “colonialism,” etc) or new historical agents serve to radically alter the context in which particular ideas are understood and employed.<sup>69</sup> Rather, I argue simply that the conditions of possibility for understanding and articulating historical catachresis are themselves subject to historical change and thus fall under the purview of the historian, rather than the literary theorist or philosopher. While certain strands of post-structuralist criticism might seek out historical discontinuity as an end in itself, the concept of historical catachresis rejects the timeless instability of all metaphorical categories and leaves open the possibility that such terms came to acquire more or less (but never entirely) fixed meanings at particular times.

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first established by Foucault’s genealogical method. For critiques of Foucault’s use of genealogy as well as a helpful elaboration on the importance of extradiscursive practices to the formation of ideas, see Michel de Certeau, “Making History: Problems of Method and Problems of Meaning,” in *The Writing of History*, trans. Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 19-55 and Roger Chartier, *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language, and Practices* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1997), especially pp. 51-106.

<sup>68</sup> Barlow, “History and the Border,” 15.

<sup>69</sup> I realize that “colonialism” and particularly “modernity” are themselves catachrestic in that the conditions to which the terms are applicable are themselves constantly in flux. I simply use them here to refer to some of the most important transformations that have occurred in China and other parts of the non-Western world in terms that would be easily understood by the English reader.

Such was the case with the historical catachresis *guomin* in early twentieth-century China. At the turn of the twentieth century, before Liang Qichao ushered in the widespread use of the term *guomin* in his serialized essay *Xinmin shuo*, there were no Chinese people who could identify or be identified as *guomin*. By the 1920s, the Guomindang government sought to collect taxes from and provide education to *guomin*, nationalist thinkers pinned their hopes for the future on the physical and moral strength of China's *guomin*, students mobilized as civically engaged *guomin* associations, and textbooks established new literacy standards under the guise that they were required of all *guomin*. Even as the concept of *guomin* emerged as the product of elite political discourse by the likes of Liang and others, so too did it serve as a grounds for the organization of state policies and the mobilization of collective identities. And although the term continued to resist a singular or stable meaning as late as 1927, *guomin* represented an important historical catachresis because of the way it was employed to stabilize a tangible and meaningful collectivity, both through the governing language of the state and through the terms by which workers, students, and administrators came to understand themselves. By treating *guomin* as an instance of historical catachresis, we can work to locate the meaning of *guomin*—and indeed the “reality” of citizenship itself—in the space between discourse and experience, and begin to develop strategies to name the conditions of possibility under which this meaning was produced.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Indeed, in employing the concept of historical catachresis, I am trying to collapse the analytical distinctions that have positioned “experience” as an essential and residual Other that defines the limits of the discursive world. Following Jay Smith, I am skeptical of social analyses that “invoke experience as an explanation for purposeful political action” by positioning it somehow outside of the realm of discourse. See Jay Smith, “Between Discourse and Experience: Agency and Ideas in the French Pre-Revolution,” *History and Theory* 40.4 (Dec 2001): 119. That no less an authority than Dominick LaCapra should resort to quoting the Oxford English Dictionary in trying to define “experience” should say something about the slippery way in which historians have utilized this particular concept. Although the full discussion of “experience” as an analytical concept lies beyond the bounds of my particular interests, it will suffice to say that I view historical catachresis as a means by which to examine the embeddedness of discursive forms within active human processes and practices that are themselves conditioned by and understood through systems of language and ideology. For more on definitions of experience that are not

## Conclusion

To a certain degree, the task of Republican-era writers and activists resembles our own: how do we read the neologism *guomin*? In early twentieth-century China, *guomin* was not simply an idea confined to political discourse, but neither was it a specific group of beliefs, attitudes, actions, positions, or people that existed prior to the ideating claims of individuals, groups, and states. Despite its referential instability, the language of *guomin* played an important role in shaping the ways that historical actors imagined new relationships between peoples and states in the wake of monumental changes occasioned by the collapse of the Qing state and the ongoing threat of Western imperialism.<sup>71</sup> While recent scholarship has rendered the easy equation of *guomin* with *citizen* untenable, I would argue that the Republican-era discourse on *guomin* can play an important role in allowing Chinese historians to enter the mainstream of cultural studies and challenge normative understandings of what it means to be a citizen.

This chapter has argued that in order to properly explain the function of *guomin* in Chinese society, we must develop a new analytical framework that distinguishes more explicitly between categories of analysis and categories of practice. By treating the analytic category citizenship as a hermeneutic endeavor, I hope to establish a theoretical basis for cross-cultural comparison that nevertheless avoids the totalizing Eurocentrism of classical understandings of

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exclusive of discourse, see Dominick LaCapra, *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Following a variety of recent studies on imperialism and modernity in East Asia, I include Japanese efforts to expand their empire and establish territorial holdings in Taiwan and Manchuria within the larger framework of Western imperialism. For a great discussion of the relationship between nationalism, imperialism, and Japanese colonial efforts in Manchukuo, see Prasenjit Duara, *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004). For a more focused discussion on why Japanese imperial actions and ambitions should not be treated separately from Western imperial formations, see Leo T.S. Ching, *Becoming Japanese: Colonial Taiwan and the Politics of Identity Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 15-50.

citizenship and that establishes the specific meaning of citizenship in China as existing in a dialogical relationship to the everyday actions of Chinese historical subjects. By treating the practical category *guomin* as an instance of historical catachresis, I hope to avoid the artificial limits of elite intellectual history and draw attention to the normalizing strategies employed by a broader group of historical actors who attempted to fix meaning to and make legible their own activities and identities. Although the term *guomin* itself may never be fully translatable, either across languages or across historical contexts within China, we can still observe and explain the effect of its employment in the specificities that characterize historical writing—in terms of the discourses, policies, and performances that produce understandings of *guomin* and in terms of the subjects who act based upon these understandings. Having thus established a theoretical framework that positions the meaning of *guomin* as shaping and being shaped by the conditions of its production, the historian is able to investigate the cultural processes through which individuals and states imagined and instituted social and political change.

## CHAPTER TWO

### READING “CITIZENS”: THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, PROFESSIONAL REFORMERS, AND THE CONCEPTUALIZATION OF EDUCATION FOR *GUOMIN* IN LATE QING CHINA

On March 25, 1906, the waning Qing dynasty’s Ministry of Education published a memorial to the emperor defining the goals of education in China. A focus on such basic issues was warranted, as one year earlier, the Ministry had moved to abolish the civil service examination system and, with it, much of the entire late imperial education system. In its place, the Ministry argued for a new system of popular education, which sought to train not just a small number of “men of talent” (*rencai* 人才), but rather a large number of “citizens” (*guomin* 国民).<sup>1</sup> Following the 1906 pronouncement, “education for citizens” (*guomin jiaoyu* 国民教育) quickly established itself as the primary goal among Chinese education reformers, who saw it as one of the best means by which the crumbling dynasty could remake itself into a modern nation. Yet while the Qing Ministry’s decision to re-orient Chinese schools away from training officials and toward educating citizens certainly constituted an important shift in its philosophy, this pivot towards popular education introduced several practical and conceptual problems. Given the Qing government’s limited funds and influence, how could reformers possibly hope to establish a new

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<sup>1</sup> “Zou chen jiaoyu zongzhi zhe 奏陈教育宗旨折” [Memorial on the purpose of education], in *Da Qing jiaoyu xin faling* 大清教育新法令 [New education laws of the Great Qing] 1.2 (1906); Reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao huibian: xuezhi yanbian* 中国近代教育史资料汇编：学制演变 [A collection of modern Chinese education history materials: the evolution of the education system], eds. Qu Xingui 瞿鑫圭 and Tang Liangyan 唐良炎 (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 542. Hereafter, *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao huibian: xuezhi yanbian* will be abbreviated XZYB.

nationwide school system to serve the vast majority of the population who lacked even basic literacy?<sup>2</sup> Even if such a colossal effort were successful, what types of knowledge would these new schools actually teach? What social groups should get priority? In short, what did it mean to provide “education for citizens”?

Reformers’ answers to these practical questions differed considerably, and these differences carried extraordinary implications, not only for the direction of China’s education system, but also for the ways in which administrators, teachers, and students imagined the modern Chinese state and the Chinese national body. Some reformers, such as Education Minister Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837-1909), felt that popular education should focus on

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<sup>2</sup> Precise literacy figures from the late Qing period are difficult to calculate, not only due to the practical challenges in gathering the necessary census data, but also due to the lack of a clear standard of what constitutes “literacy” in the Chinese language at a time when the written language itself was undergoing rapid changes. For most of the late imperial period, the notion of literacy was likely understood in terms of one’s familiarity with classical Chinese (*wenyan* 文言) and with the Confucian canon, but the increase in vernacular publications around the turn of the twentieth century allowed for new understandings of what constituted “literacy” in Chinese. Similarly, singular literacy figures for the entire country obscure the huge disparities in literacy rates between men and women, and between urban and rural populations. For a discussion of the different meanings of “literacy” in late imperial and early Republican China, see Elisabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 31-35. A report from a provisional education inspector published in *Jiaoyu zazhi* suggest that literacy rates in modestly wealthy provinces like Jiangsu were below five percent. See “Jiangsu xunfu duanfang zou kaiban jianyi shizi xueshu pian 江苏巡抚端方奏开办简易识字学塾片” [The Jiangsu provincial governor’s formal memorial on the opening of simplified literacy schools] in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育杂志 1.10 (1909); reprinted in *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao huibian: putong jiaoyu* 中国近代教育史资料汇编：普通教育 [A collection of modern Chinese education history materials: popular education], eds. Li Guilin 李桂林, et al. (Shanghai: Shanghai Jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 164]. Hereafter *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi ziliao huibian: putong jiaoyu* will be abbreviated PTJY. Such a figure almost assuredly confines “literacy” to those who were able to read classical texts (*shi wenyi* 识文意), or those whom Benjamin Elman has referred to as the “writing elite” who could not only read and write but were also generally conversant in the various linguistic norms mandated by the civil service examination system. See Benjamin Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), esp. 276-277. By the late 1910s and early 1920s, education reformers were much more likely to consider the ability to read and write in the vernacular within the broad category of literacy, but they still maintained that over eighty percent of the population were illiterate. See, for example, Yan Yangchu 晏阳初, “Pingmin Jiaoyu 平民教育” [Commoners’ Education], in *Xin Jiaoyu* 新教育 7.2 (Oct 1923), reprinted in *Yan Yangchu wenji* 晏阳初文集 [The Collected Works of Yan Yangchu], ed. Song Enrong 宋恩荣 (Beijing: Jiaoyu kexue chubanshe, 1989), 2. Western historians, and especially Evelyn Rawski, have argued that composite literacy rates in the late Qing were much higher. Her analysis of local gazetteers suggests that by the late nineteenth century, “30-45 per cent of the men and from 2 to 10 per cent of the women in China knew how to read and write. This group included fully literate members of the elite and, on the opposite pole, those knowing only a few hundred characters.” See Evelyn Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy in Late Qing China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1979), 140. Regardless of actual literacy rates (and the means by which such rates were calculated) late Qing policy makers were certainly motivated by a *perceived* literacy crisis, and were alarmed by the incredibly low rates of literacy in China, especially compared to literacy rates in German and Japan.



inculcating a broader spectrum of the public with the traditional values necessary to sustain the empire, including devotion to the monarchy and veneration for Confucius. Others, such as textbook publishers Zhuang Yu 庄俞 (1876-1938) and Jiang Weiqiao 蔣维乔 (1873-1958), argued for the creation of a radical new curriculum designed to produce physically healthy, scientifically trained, and morally upright modern citizens capable of defending a new Chinese nation on the global stage. Still others, such as *The Educational Review* [*Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育杂志] editor Lufei Kui 陆费逵 (1886-1941), saw education for citizens as an expression of the state's newfound responsibility to provide all Chinese people with basic, fundamental skills, and advocated for the development of simplified curricular materials. The diversity of answers to the question of how to provide "education for citizens" reveals that the 1906 decree was not the end of a debate among Qing officials on how to prioritize Chinese education, but rather the start of a new debate about the meaning of citizenship itself. Was citizenship simply a new name for the moral community of loyal Qing subjects? Was it a new standard of knowledge and behavior toward which a future generation of Chinese students should aspire? Or was it the basis for new claims on the modern state by an already-existing Chinese national community? This debate only became more important after the collapse of the Qing dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China in 1911, as new political and educational leaders saw popular education as the first and best means of creating a new body of republican citizens (*gonghe guomin* 共和国民).

At the center of this debate was the neologism *guomin*. The word *guomin* was a new term at the turn of the century, having been transliterated from the Japanese and popularized by noted political reformer Liang Qichao 梁启超 (1873-1929) in the late 1890s.<sup>3</sup> Liang believed that

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<sup>3</sup> For a more robust account of Japanese influence on Liang Qichao's political thought (and specifically his conception of *guomin*), see Zheng Kuangmin 郑匡民, *Liang Qichao qimeng sixiang de dongxue beijing* 梁启超启蒙

*guomin* embodied a new kind of relationship between the modern state and its people, but in 1899 he lamented, “Chinese people do not know anything about *guomin*.”<sup>4</sup> This unfamiliarity did not last, as the intervening years saw the term come to occupy a place of prominence in the field of public policy, with one reformer going so far as to claim, “the grandest term that has the greatest attraction and impact on the country is none other than *guomin*!”<sup>5</sup> Yet even as the name *guomin* gained prominence over the following decades as a legal signifier, self-identity, political rallying cry, and eventual party label, a precise definition of the word remained elusive. How could one explain what it meant to be a Chinese citizen when the nation itself remained a work in progress? Indeed, the neologism’s constituent characters *guo* 国 (nation/state) and *min* 民 (people) were both undergoing a radical discursive reconfiguration during the turn of the twentieth century, when the Chinese “state” was attempting to remold itself as a constitutional monarchy (and later a republic), and nationalist revolutionaries redefined the boundaries of the Chinese “people” on the basis of populist ethnic exclusion. Yet despite the contested and multivalent ways in which the language of *guomin* could be applied to China’s early twentieth-century political context, the term’s origins as a foreign standard of citizenship constitutive of

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思想的东学背景 [The Eastern background of Liang Qichao’s enlightenment thought] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian chubanshe, 2003), esp. 170-227; and Marianne Bastid-Bruguere, “The Japanese-Induced German connection of Modern Chinese Ideas of the State: Liang Qichao and the *Guojia lun* of J.K. Bluntshli,” in *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao’s Introduction of Modern Western Civilization to China*, ed. Joshua Fogel (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California Berkeley Center for Chinese Studies, 2004), 105-124.

<sup>4</sup> Liang Qichao 梁启超, “Lun jinshi guomin jingzheng zhi dashi ji Zhongguo zhi qiantu 论近世国民竞争之大势及中国之前途” [The general tendency of *guomin* struggles in the modern age and the future of China], in *Yinbingshi wenji* 饮冰室文集 [Collective essays from the Ice-drinker’s Studio], (Taipei: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局, 1978), IV, 54.

<sup>5</sup> This quote is attributed to future Minister of Education Zhang Shizhao 章士钊 (1881-1973) and originally appeared in an issue of *Shubao* 书报 in 1903. It is quoted here from Sung-chiao Shen and Y.S. Chien, “Turning Slaves into Citizens: Discourses of *Guomin* and the Construction of Chinese National Identity in the Late Qing Period,” in *The Dignity of Nations: Equality, Competition, and Honor in East Asian Nationalism*, eds. Sechin Y.S. Chien and John Fitzgerald (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 4.

social and political modernity often meant that individual reformers read *guomin* as representing a singular and obvious criterion. To be a *guomin* was to be modern.

For their part, late Qing education reformers and policy makers rarely attempted to define the term *guomin* as an abstract political concept. Rather, reformers appropriated, reinterpreted, and occasionally rejected the language of *guomin* in an effort to articulate their own policies and proposals, in effect producing new understandings of citizenship to suit their needs. Some of these conceptions of *guomin*, particularly those that imagined citizenship as a set of learned behaviors and duties to the state, seem to prefigure the nationalist sentiments of May Fourth students and political ideologies of Republican China's nascent political parties. But other education policies, especially those that stressed the duty of the state to provide the people with basic skills or those that linked civic values with Confucian social norms, appear to represent alternative readings of the relationship between people and the state. Because education emerged as a primary point of contact between individuals, groups, and new state formations in the late Qing, reformers' discussions about popular education policy and the meaning of "education for *guomin*" transcend the boundaries of semantic debate. Reformers prescribed rights and responsibilities, pioneered new forms of social interaction, and established a framework for a new cultural community of Chinese students. In so doing, they revealed many of the fundamental tensions and possibilities within notions of citizenship as China transitioned from a dynastic empire to a modern nation.

In an effort to characterize these tensions, this chapter examines policy debates among administrators and educators following the Qing Ministry of Education's 1906 memorial to establish *guomin* education. In particular, it examines the conceptions of citizenship produced by two important foci of the educational reform movement: the Qing Ministry of Education's

textbook review board and the professional education journal *The Educational Review*. Within both the Qing administration and the editorial board of China's leading education journal, reformers debated intensely whether "education for *guomin*" should focus on primary education, which attempted to correct China's perceived weaknesses by transforming young Qing subjects into modern Chinese citizens, or whether it should emphasize "Simple and Easy Literacy" (*jianyi shizi* 简易识字), which sought out strategies for spreading basic knowledge, either as a pretext for constitutional governance or as a matter of the state's responsibility to an existing group of citizens. Overall, an examination of popular education proposals from China's administrators and education professionals demonstrates that the assumedly shared discourse on *guomin* masked important contradictions and tensions within the notions of citizenship implied by these reform agendas and suggests that Chinese education reformers were able to read *guomin* in startlingly diverse ways.

Previous scholarship on Chinese education reform in the final years of the Qing has often used developments in the Chinese school system as a barometer of the relative success of Chinese efforts toward modernization. Such histories either praise late Qing educators for first articulating the citizenship ideas of the nationalist May Fourth Movement in 1919 or lament the inability of the new school system to compete with more "traditional" forms of schooling.<sup>6</sup> By

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<sup>6</sup> For examples of scholarship that situates late Qing education reforms as a precursor to modern ideas about state and society that emerged more prominently during the Republican period, see Paul Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes towards Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990); Ruth Hayhoe, ed., *Education and Modernization: The Chinese Experience* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1992); and Sang Bing, *Wanqing xuetaang xuesheng yu shehui bianqian* 晚清学堂学生与社会变迁 [Late Qing modern school students and social change] (Taipei: Daohe chubanshe, 1991). Sang Bing makes the connection between Qing school reform and later political trends even more explicit, as he situates the origins of the May Fourth Student Movement in the student activism of modern school students during the final years of the Qing dynasty. For examples of scholarship that regard the limited success of new-style public schools and the continued prevalence of traditional private academies as evidence of China's "failure" to modernize, see Sally Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China: The Beginnings of the Modern Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1983); Thomas Curran, *Education Reform in Republican China: The failure of Educators to Create a Modern Nation* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005); and Marianne Bastid, *Educational Reform*

situating education reform solely within these broader modernization efforts, these studies often present a rather monotone picture of educators themselves, as the works dichotomize the struggles of the reform movement into a conflict between progressive urban centers and backwards rural areas, rather than focus on the contestations and policy conflicts within the reform movement.<sup>7</sup> More recently, scholars have identified the new-style school as a key site in the working out of broader cultural changes, including increased state control over the body, the adoption of a new solar-based calendar, and the development of modern forms of political organization, but in focusing only on new-style public schools, these studies also present an overly simplified picture of the changes to China's education system.<sup>8</sup> In contrast to these approaches to citizenship, this chapter seeks both to incorporate a broader spectrum of opinions on the issue of popular education, from defenders of the Confucian curriculum to more radical

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in *Early Twentieth-Century China*, trans. Paul J. Bailey (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, The University of Michigan, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> The specific tendency within the historiography of education reform to separate these processes into a conflict between rural and urban areas is reinforced by a more general tendency among historians to explain developments in Republican China along an urban/rural divide. See, for example, Wen-Hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919 – 1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> This type of work is exemplified in Huang Jinlin's *Lishi, shenti, guojia: jindai zhongguo de shenti xingcheng* 历史, 身体, 国家: 近代中国的身体形成 1895 – 1937 [History, body, nation-state: the formation of the modern Chinese body, 1895 – 1937] (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongse, 2000), which examines how new-style schools promoted physical education programs that militarized male students and enacted on their bodies increasing levels of discipline and control. Other examples listed here derive from articles by Stephen C. Averill, Xiaoping Cong, Elizabeth J Perry, and Elizabeth VanderVen that appeared in a special issue of *Twentieth Century China* 32.2 (April 2007) focusing on "Education, Culture and Politics in Modern China: Celebrating Stephen C. Averill's Life and Work." Finally, for a more extended discussion of new-style schools as a site for the development of modern forms of political participation, see Robert Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912 – 1940* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007). While Culp's work is sensitive to the diverse images of the Chinese national and political community as it is presented in many textbooks from the late Qing and early Republican period, he nevertheless settles on a fairly standard reading of citizenship itself as embodied in the notion of popular political participation predicated on the possession of certain social and vocational skills. In this sense, Culp's work provides a history of the social impact of this particular notion of citizenship on Chinese students, especially those attending new-style public schools in the wealthy province of Zhejiang (and, to a lesser extent, Jiangsu). This chapter, in contrast, places questions, tensions, and debates about the meaning of citizenship education at the center of its analysis in order to better explain the extent to which Culp's model of citizenship became a dominant one in the late Qing period.

reformers, and to situate these debates in the specific intellectual and administrative contexts of the late Qing and early Republican periods.

### Defining “Education for Citizens”

By the time the Qing Ministry of Education set out to properly define the goals and contents of “education for citizens,” the term *guomin* had already been subject to vigorous philosophical debate among China’s more radical political reformers. As with many other neologisms of the time, the most immediate linguistic precedent for this debate occurred in Japan. Liang Qichao adapted the word *guomin* from the Japanese term *kokumin*, which itself had only gained prominence in the late 1880s as part of a new suite of nationalist language promoted by Japanese intellectuals seeking constitutionalist reforms to the Meiji state.<sup>9</sup> Although the term *kokumin* is commonly translated simply as “countrymen,” many late nineteenth-century Japanese intellectuals used it to refer not to the inhabitants of a country, but rather to a fully incorporated political and moral community, constitutive of the nation and commensurate to the *Volk* of German political philosophy.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, one Japanese reformer explicitly distinguished between the modern category *kokumin* and a basic demographic descriptor, stating that “just being born and raised in this country is not enough for the masses to be considered *kokumin*. The

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<sup>9</sup> See Carol Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths: Ideology in the Late Meiji Period* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 22-23. The Japanese discourse on *kokumin* is best understood as part of a broader ideation of the modern nation-state in Japan, as ongoing debates about the meaning of *kokutai* (national polity), *kokkateki kannen* (a sense of the nation), *kokkagaku* (science of state), and the like were often just as crucial in reformers’ minds as those about *kokumin*. As Gluck points out, these terms were representative of an effort to project Japan onto a world stage increasingly defined by Western political formations—namely, nation-states.

<sup>10</sup> For an extended discussion of German philosophical influences on Japanese conceptualizations of *kokumin* and, ultimately, on Liang Qichao himself, see Bastid-Bruguère, “The Japanese-Induced German Connection of Modern Chinese Ideas of the State: Liang Qichao and the *Guojia lun* of J.K. Bluntschli,” 105-124.

prerequisite for citizenship is a sound sense of nation.”<sup>11</sup> Liang’s employment of the Chinese term *guomin* reflects a similar concern with nationalism and the affairs of the state. According to an 1899 article on the importance of *guomin* to international competition in the modern age, Liang held that *guomin* do not simply belong to a country, but actively participate in it, “governing the affairs of the country, establishing the laws of the country, planning the triumphs of the country, guarding the weaknesses of the country,” and so on.<sup>12</sup> Over the next decade, *guomin* emerged as a common trope in his serial essay “On New People” [*Xinminshuo* 新民说], wherein he constantly stressed the need for Chinese people to transform themselves into *guomin* as a matter of the state’s political survival.<sup>13</sup>

Yet while Liang saw *guomin* as a community defined by its shared responsibility to the state, others defined the boundaries of *guomin* in less political terms. Liang’s teacher Kang Youwei 康有为 (1858-1927) defined *guomin* as a cultural community bounded primarily by shared values and knowledge.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, Liang’s more radical contemporary Zhang Binglin

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<sup>11</sup> Gluck, *Japan’s Modern Myths*, 25.

<sup>12</sup> Liang Qichao, “Lun jinshi guomin jingzheng zhi dashi ji Zhongguo zhi qiantu,” 54.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Zarrow, “Introduction: Citizenship in China and the West,” in *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920*, ed. Joshua Fogel and Peter Zarrow (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 17-20. By establishing a connection between Liang Qichao’s definition of *guomin* and the Japanese term *kokumin* or the German concept of *Volk*, I do not mean to suggest that Liang’s political philosophy was stable or consistent throughout the political debates he participated in during the final years of the Qing. In fact, as one of Liang’s intellectual biographers Hao Chang has shown, Liang’s political philosophy changed significantly over this period. Most notably, Liang’s travels to the United States in 1903 signaled a shift away from liberalism and towards a more urgent call for national unity and order. See Hao Chang, *Liang Ch’i-ch’ao and Intellectual Transition in China, 1890-1907* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 246-60 and Bastid-Bruguère, “The Japanese-Induced German Connection of Modern Chinese Ideas of the State,” 120-121. Nevertheless, Liang’s basic belief that *guomin* constituted the unified political foundation of the state never wavered, despite his evolution on the issue of what that state should look like. Indeed, Liang’s preoccupation with matters of state consistently differentiated his brand of nationalism from contemporary forms of nationalism organized around cultural or ethnic lines. Liang was not interested in the preservation of Confucianism or in the Chinese race so much as in the preservation of China as a unified geopolitical entity (Shen and Sechin, “Slaves into Citizens,” 65).

<sup>14</sup> For a more detailed description of Kang’s conception of *guomin*, see Shen and Sechin, “Slaves into Citizens,” 56-68. John Fitzgerald notes Kang actually had a lot in common politically with China’s burgeoning anarchist community and indeed “placed little importance in the national state as an institution in its own right.” See John

章炳麟 (1868-1936) used terminology from the ancient text *Zuozhuan* 左传 to link *guomin*—and the Chinese national community more generally—to an ethnically homogenous group defined by shared historical experience rather than modern political ties.<sup>15</sup> Other contemporary conceptions of citizenship, such as those of Lin Xie and Wang Jingwei, fell somewhere in between these statist, cultural, and ethnic conceptions. Lin and Wang drew on internationally circulating ethnographic theories to define the Chinese people in racial terms, but shared Liang’s concern about establishing a strong state as a means of maintaining this otherwise racial community.<sup>16</sup> Thus, under their conception of *guomin*, a strong race was a necessary but ultimately insufficient means of establishing a strong citizenry. Perhaps the only feature uniting these many diverse conceptions of *guomin* was that reformers used the term to denote a specifically new kind of community—and, frequently, a new kind of political order—to contrast with the multi-ethnic, despotic, and weak political order of the Qing government. Yet even within this general embrace of a new kind of national body, more conservative reformers like Zhang Zhidong utilized the language of *guomin* in ways that were still fundamentally supportive of the Qing state.<sup>17</sup>

This kind of philosophical discord over the meaning of *guomin* is indicative of the incredibly broad boundaries within which individual thinkers could understand and articulate citizenship in late Qing China. Just as the signifier *guomin* could denote a multitude of conceptual referents including political, cultural, historical, and racial communities, these

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Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 81.

<sup>15</sup> It is somewhat misleading to suggest that Zhang Binglin viewed the Chinese people as an exclusively “ethnic” group, as he more consistently referred to them as an “historical race” (*lishi minzu* 历史民族). For a full discussion of this term, see Zhang Binglin, *Qiushu Xiangzhu* 卮书详注 (1904; reprint, Shanghai: Shang guji chubanshe, 2001) 17: 215-220. See also the discussion of Zhang in Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992).

<sup>16</sup> Zarrow, “Introduction: Citizenship in China and the West,” 20-21.

<sup>17</sup> Peter Zarrow, *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012), 120-130.



conceptions themselves were situated within vastly differing epistemological frameworks ranging from German political philosophy, to the Darwinist sociology of Herbert Spencer, to Qing evidentiary scholarship and New-Text Confucianism. Previous intellectual histories of Qing and early Republican China have focused precisely on these discrepancies, highlighting the deep political and epistemological crises facing many late Qing intellectuals as well as the diverse ways in which individual thinkers navigated these crises.<sup>18</sup> Yet such abstract intellectual debates often tell us comparatively little about how terms like *guomin* and associated ideas about citizenship came to be legible to a broad group of administrators, reformers, teachers, and students. If anything, the broad spectrum for understanding *guomin* simply underscores the fact that the term remained an unstable signifier, even as it emerged as a prominent lexicographical theme in late Qing policy making. Thus, when post-civil-service-examination education reformers adopted assumedly shared conceptions of *guomin* to promote and articulate their proposals, they were not only drawing from but in fact contributing to an ongoing and dialogical ideation of the very notion of citizenship itself.

Like the term *guomin*, the earliest uses of the phrase *guomin jiaoyu*, or “education for citizens,” derived from direct translations of Japanese articles on education policy and from Chinese students and reformers heavily influenced by the political milieu of Meiji Japan. One of the earliest articles on “*guomin* education-ism” (*guomin jiaoyu zhuyi* 国民教育主义) appearing in a Chinese language journal is attributed to Japanese legal scholar Yaita Hiroshi 矢板寛 and defines *guomin* education in the most general terms as education provided to individuals by the

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<sup>18</sup> A particularly good example of this approach is Hao Chang, *Chinese Intellectuals in Crisis: Search for Order and Meaning, 1890-1911* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987). This sense of intellectual crisis, however, dates back to the foundational postwar intellectual histories of China by Joseph Levenson and Benjamin Schwartz. See Joseph Levenson, *Confucian China and its Modern Fate* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958) and Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

state. Within this broad definition, however, the article argued that the actual goals and contents of *guomin* education varied tremendously from country to country, before arguing that Japan's model of emphasizing "socialism, nationalism, and interventionism" constituted a particularly effective model.<sup>19</sup> Other definitions were a bit more specific. The first Chinese student group to mobilize the term *guomin jiaoyu* was the "Military Citizenship Education Society" (*junguomin jiaoyu hui* 军国民教育会), founded on May 11, 1903 by a group of Zhejiang students studying in Japan with the intent to "cultivate martial spirit and practice patriotism."<sup>20</sup> The students founded the group specifically in response to the threat to China posed by the escalation of conflict between Japan and Russia following Russian refusal to withdraw from Manchuria after intervening in the Boxer affair; hence the explicitly martial tone of the group's founding documents.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, the association of *guomin jiaoyu* with military training soon spread beyond the specific fears of Chinese study abroad students to serve as a template for broader education reform. Liang Qichao in particular became actively involved in efforts to promote physical education programs in primary schools under the pretext of turning Qing subjects into "military citizens" capable of defending the nation.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Yaita Kan, "Guomin jiaoyu zhuyi lun 国民教育主义论" [A discussion of citizens education-ism], in *Hubei Xuebao* 湖北学报 1.1 (1903): 5-8.

<sup>20</sup> "Ji junguomin jiaoyuhui 记军国民教育会" [Records of the Military Citizenship Education Society], in *Zhejiang Chao* 浙江潮 5 (1903): 147-151. The establishment of the group was also reported in the study abroad section of *Jiangsu Magazine*, published in Tokyo.

<sup>21</sup> "Junguomin jiaoyu hui zhi chengli 军国民教育会之成立" [The establishment of the Military Citizenship Education Society], in *Jiangsu* 江苏 2 (1903): 144-146.

<sup>22</sup> Huang Jinlin, *Lishi, Shenti, Guojia*, 19-20. As Huang notes, mainstream scholarly opinion amongst the late Qing policy making community held that there was a fundamental cause and effect link between the existence of healthy bodies and the health of the nation-state as a whole. Even after education reformers abandoned the term *junguomin* (military citizen) when speaking about education, the continued promotion of physical education programs—often in the form of photographs of sports meets in prominent education journals—reflects the continued valence of these early articulations of military citizenship education. For an example of such photos depicting classes in military style uniforms or active physical poses see Suzhou yangyu xuetang Hufu lüxing 苏州养育学堂虎阜旅行" [A portrait of the Suzhou Daycare School's trip to Tiger Hill] in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育杂志 [The Chinese educational review] 1.9 (1909; Reprint, Taipei: Taiwan shangwu yunshuguan, 1975). for physical education see the photographs of

Even beyond the specific issue of “military citizenship education,” Liang’s early formulation of citizenship as an expression of duties to and participation in the state was the most dominant among early explanations of *guomin jiaoyu*. A 1906 article in popular education advocate Liu Mengyang’s 刘孟扬 (1877-1943) vernacular journal *Bi Zhou Qianjin* 弊帚千金 drew a sharp distinction between *guomin* and ordinary *renmin* 人民 (people):

*Guomin* are not like [*renmin*]. *Guomin* form an organic whole with the state. They have a united, loving heart and look after the affairs of the state as if they were their own. The nation’s honor is their honor, the nation’s shame is their shame... they remove the selfish desires from their heart and strive to make the laws of the nation public and equal... can *renmin* really accomplish this? *Renmin* is an ordinary name, but *guomin* is a special name.<sup>23</sup>

Though Liu Mengyang was able to assert a clear and consistent understanding of what was meant by citizenship, his and Liang’s definition of *guomin* was just as clearly one that few, if any, Chinese people could actually claim. Thus, reformers like Liu envisioned *guomin* education as a fundamentally transformative process—one designed to take “ordinary” Chinese *renmin* and teach them the values and skills necessary to become the kind of “special” modern political subjects required to ensure China’s continued military, economic, and political survival in an increasingly dangerous geopolitical climate.

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“Shanghai Zhongguo ticao xuexiao ji xi chunji yundonghui cuoying 上海中国体操学校己西春季运动会摄影” [A portrait of the Shanghai Chinese Gymnastics School’s spring sports meet] in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 1.6. Hereafter material drawn from the 1975 Taiwan reprint of *Jiaoyu zazhi* will be abbreviated JYZZ.

<sup>23</sup> “Jiang Guomin jiaoyu 讲国民教育” [A speech on education for citizens], in *Bi Zhou Qianjin* 弊帚千金 11 (1906): 30-32. Note, the title *Bi Zhou Qianjin* is a classical Chinese phrase meaning “to cherish something of little value” (literally, to cherish an old broom as if it were a thousand pieces of gold). Given the awkwardness of the title in English, I have decided to leave it un-translated in the main body of the text. The specific tone of this article likely derives in part from *Bi Zhou Qianjin*’s larger goal of arousing patriotic sentiment among popular audiences and from Liu Mengyang’s intention that the journal serve as a nationalistic primer. Nevertheless, the ability to associate patriotic fervor and state support with the language of *guomin jiaoyu* still indicates that reformers found the term useful in describing their educational visions. Prior to the publication of this article, Liu Mengyang had proven himself exceptionally devoted to the task of popularizing education, and specifically women’s education, in his hometown of Tianjin. He had previously worked to produce a phonetic script for the Tianjin dialect, which he used in specially designed textbooks intended for use in an evening school for illiterate children that he himself had opened in 1902. See Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education*, 141-142.

When the Ministry of Education delivered its memorial on “the purpose of education” in 1906, it too espoused a vision of *guomin* education that stressed the transformation of a broad group of ordinary people into a new kind of political subject. The memorial’s author, Zhang Zhidong, had by this point established a reputation for cautious reform if not outright conservatism. This was due in no small part to his role in first supporting but ultimately repressing the “Hundred Days” reforms of 1898, and also to his seminal essay *Quanxue pian* 劝学篇 [An exhortation to learning], which attempted to outline a practical path to political reform while preserving the Qing state.<sup>24</sup> Zhang’s conservatism is evinced in the memorial’s assertion that “devotion to the monarchy and veneration of Confucius” were intrinsic to Chinese politics and, therefore, to Chinese education.<sup>25</sup> But beyond this foundation, Zhang argued that the contents of *guomin* education should promote fundamentally new themes: namely, public-mindedness (*shanggong* 尚公), martial skills (*shangwu* 尚武), and practical skills (*shangshi* 尚实).<sup>26</sup> The memorial establishes public-mindedness as a key skill among modern political subjects, who draw their strength from shared patriotism, a spirit of community, and a familiar

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<sup>24</sup> For a recent analysis of the *Quanxue pian* as an act of political triangulation, see Tze-ki Hon, “Zhang Zhidong’s Proposal for Reform: A New Reading of the *Quanxue pian*,” in *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period*, ed. Rebecca Karl and Peter Zarrow (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 77-98. Hon sees the *Quanxue pian* as a sign of Zhang’s cautious reformist tendencies and ultimately as a strategy for implementing Liang Qichao and Kang Youwei’s more radical proposals in a practical way. While Zhang was clearly interested in reforming Qing institutions, I would maintain that his faith in the continued viability of the Qing state and of the imperial social order made him a conservative amongst those arguing for serious reform.

<sup>25</sup> “Zou chen jiaoyu zongzhi zhe,” in XZYB, 543.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 544. In discussing this memorial, Peter Zarrow argues that Zhang was ultimately more concerned with limiting reformist extremism than in championing reform himself, and that these three tasks of promoting public-mindedness, martial skills, and practical skills were ultimately in service of maintaining the “foundational principles” of loyalty to the Qing monarchy and veneration of Confucius (See Zarrow, *After Empire*, 128). While I would agree that conservative allegiance to the monarchy and to Confucian learning may have remained first among Zhang’s personal priorities, his articulation of *shanggong*, *shangwu*, and *shangshi* as goals of the new education system nevertheless represented a radical departure from the aims and methods of private academies under the examination system. In this latter sense, Zhang very much contributed to the broader re-imagining of state-sponsored education as a fundamentally public, nationalistic, and egalitarian enterprise, regardless of Zhang’s original intentions.

devotion to the nation—qualities that very much reflect Liang Qichao’s notion of the modern military citizen.<sup>27</sup> Similarly, Zhang’s argument for promoting martial qualities derived from a belief that all individuals, “from the emperor’s son to the common people,” shared in the responsibility of protecting the nation, a line of argument that closely resembled Liang’s own claim that modern geopolitical conflicts occurred not between states, but between the groups of *guomin* that made up those states.<sup>28</sup> Even the memorial’s advocacy for making practical learning central to the curriculum drew from a new sense of collective responsibility, whereby “the national economy and the people’s livelihood” (*guoji minsheng* 国计民生) could only be ensured once all people had the ability to make a living for themselves.<sup>29</sup> Although Zhang remained steadfast in his support for classical learning and the Confucian canon, he nevertheless maintained that these values could be emphasized in service of these more modern educational goals. As Zhang himself stated, “China’s big maladies are the following: selfishness, weakness, and emptiness. To address these maladies China must uproot the foundation [of education] and build something new.”<sup>30</sup>

Yet Zhang’s call for a new, transformative curriculum for *guomin* schools rested somewhat uneasily alongside the memorial’s other stated priority: the popularization of education. In discussing the importance of promoting practical arts, the memorial argues that new schools should draw only on those textbooks that are “simple and easy to understand”

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<sup>27</sup> For a broader discussion of Zhang Zhidong’s understanding of the term *gong* 公, or “public,” and his differences with Liang Qichao on this issue, see Hazama Naoki, “On Liang Qichao’s Conceptions of *Gong* and *Si*: ‘Civic Virtue’ and ‘Personal Virtue’ in the *Xinmin shuo*,” trans. Matthew Fraleigh, in *The Role of Japan*, 209-210. Zarrow notes that in this particular passage, however, Zhang Zhidong could practically be quoting Liang, so closely does his understanding of the value of public-mindedness mirror Liang’s (Zarrow, *After Empire*, 129).

<sup>28</sup> “Zou chen jiaoyu zongzhi zhe,” in XZYB, 545. Cf. Liang, “Lun jinshi guomin ingzheng zhi dashi ji Zhongguo zhi qiantu,” 56.

<sup>29</sup> “Zou chen jiaoyu zhongzhi zhe,” in XZYB, 546.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 544.

(*qianjin* 浅近) and should teach only those skills that can be practically applied to everyday life.<sup>31</sup> But such gestures toward familiarity and accessibility could not readily be applied to the radically new types of physical education, political training, and “public morality” training prescribed by the commitment to forging publicly-minded, martially adept students. Furthermore, Zhang Zhidong and other early advocates of transformational *guomin* education frequently cited primary school as the single most important channel through which education could be used to construct a new national foundation.<sup>32</sup> As an effort to address China’s ongoing educational inequalities, such a focus seemed to ignore the many millions of adolescents and adults who lacked basic educational skills, such as literacy, and whose financial and work obligations could not support the kind of transformative formal schooling supposedly required of all future Chinese *guomin*. Zhang was undoubtedly committed to popularization, and indeed, his focus on primary education, despite ignoring large sectors of the population, still represented a major shift away from the even more narrow confines of civil and military training academies that had previously dominated the Qing court’s educational investments.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, the ongoing belief that *guomin* represented a new international standard of political consciousness and economic productivity, accompanied by the belief that education should prepare individuals to meet this standard, engendered a set of priorities that diverged from the basic task of broadening access to existing knowledge. This fundamental conflict between making education more suited to the needs of an imagined future Chinese citizenry and more accessible to the current

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 546.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 543. Zhang credited Japan’s recent gains in geopolitical strength and national organization to the power of its primary school system, whereby “first impressions soon become second-nature, and everyone has a sense of public righteousness and feels the urgency to wash away stains on the national honor...” Contemporary articles similarly asserted that the most effective method for constructing a system of *guomin* education lay with “children and young people” (*qingnian zidi* 青年子弟), rather than with the population at large. See “Jiang guomin jiaoyu,” 31.

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, *Reform the People*, 31-38.

population of illiterate “common people” (*shumin* 庶民) was of course not unique to China.<sup>34</sup>

But Chinese education reformers nevertheless struggled with this question in ways that were uniquely produced by the intersection of Qing state goals and colonial discourses about the necessity of modern citizenship, as well as uniquely constrained by Qing financial and administrative shortcomings.

While the 1906 memorial on the goals of *guomin jiaoyu* failed to adequately reconcile the tensions within the signifier *guomin*, it did mark the beginning of a broader administrative effort to create publicly-minded, martial, practical citizens through popular education programs. Furthermore, it provided a political space for professional educators not formally affiliated with the Qing state to suggest a new suite of popular education initiatives on both the local and national levels under the new auspices of providing “education for *guomin*.” Over the next five years, both formal state organs like the Qing Textbook Review Board and national education journals such as *The Educational Review* hosted debates about how to distribute educational

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<sup>34</sup> Many other large-scale public education reform projects (and initial efforts to build public education systems) in France, the United States, Japan, and elsewhere were defined by a fundamental tension between the desire to make education more accessible and the desire to set new standards for modern citizens. This tension is explored in great detail in Robert Roswell Palmer, *The Improvement of Humanity: Education and the French Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), which analyzes the ambiguous legacy of popular education in France during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As Palmer argues, the drive to democratize education in France was often impeded by the tensions between different revolutionary priorities, namely democracy and modernity, or equality and quality. As James Leloudis has shown, similar tensions animated education reform in the southern United States during reconstruction, whereby reformers attempting to build a new South through a modern school system frequently squared off against populist Baptists and African Americans, who argued for a more equitable school system founded on democratic localism. See James Leloudis, *Schooling the New South: Pedagogy, Self, and Society in North Carolina, 1880-1920* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). For an account of how colonial forms of power-knowledge could shape the boundaries in which these tensions played out in a non-Chinese context, see the analysis of colonial Egyptian elementary education programs in Timothy Mitchell, *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). The similar challenges and ambiguities faced by education reformers in these wildly differing contexts, and specifically the conflict between quality education and equality of access, warrant a much deeper comparative analysis than this chapter is able to provide. I would provisionally suggest that the relative ubiquity of this particular struggle reflects a more fundamental tension within the discourse of modernity itself, namely, the simultaneous embrace of progressivism and universalism. In the case of urban-oriented Chinese education reformers, this tension was grafted onto ongoing debates about the relevance of the classical Confucian curriculum and the proper relationship between farmers, workers, and scholars as culturally distinct sociopolitical categories. This tension was similarly exacerbated in unique ways by the perceived threat of national (and even racial) extinction that accompanied colonial dominance of the eastern Chinese coast.

funding, how to entice students to enter the new schools, how to design the new curriculum, and what the contents of textbooks should be. While Zhang's initial memorial could easily elide the differences between *guomin* as a broad, popular signifier and *guomin* as an aspirational criterion—why not aim to transform all of the Chinese people into the most modern citizens possible?—the administrators and educators charged with enacting this system had to argue on behalf of specific policy preferences, many of which reflect narrower understandings of the Chinese political subject. Soon, both the Qing Ministry of Education and the broader community of education professionals were divided between those that favored standardizing and improving primary education for China's youth and those that favored “simple and easy literacy” training for a broader group of students beyond the formal confines of the school system. Within these broad areas of focus, reformers were similarly divided over whether the new education system should maintain a focus on literary texts or abandon the classical curriculum in the name of making schools more popularized and effective. An investigation of these more specific programs and proposals reveals which valences of *guomin* most appealed to late Qing educators or, perhaps more accurately, which valences of *guomin* were applicable to reformers' own policy preferences. Finally, such debates reveal the ongoing tensions within individual understandings of citizenship, particularly when applied to educationally marginalized communities such as adult students and women.

### **Popular Education Textbooks and the Qing Editorial Review Board**

Having established the basic goals for a system of *guomin* education, the Qing Ministry of Education was not at first intimately involved in its day-to-day execution. Rather, the Ministry of Education served primarily in a regulatory capacity, setting curricular standards and resolving



disputes between competing local interests.<sup>35</sup> This status as an arbiter of the broad outlines of China's education system was not new, as the Qing court had previously set the contents of the civil service examinations, which had themselves been determinative in shaping the curricula of many local academies and family-run private schools (*sishu* 私塾) that prepared students to sit for the exams.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the curricular overhaul that accompanied the abrogation of the exams gave the Ministry (itself only formally established in 1905) a new role not just in influencing the emphases of private school curricula but also in prescribing what should be taught, when, and to whom in China's new public schools.<sup>37</sup> Although the Ministry was not always effective in controlling the patchwork of new-style schools, private academies, and home tutors that emerged in the wake of the examination system, it nevertheless made an attempt to make its regulatory presence felt, going so far as to prescribe detailed teaching methods for each level of public schooling, issuing specific regulations outlining the organization of each

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<sup>35</sup> As Sally Borthwick notes, direct supervision by the Ministry of Education went no lower than the county magistrate, and while the Ministry supposedly had no competition in terms of presiding over the school system, both “the highest and lowest reaches of education—study abroad and *sishu*—tended to lie outside the ministry's scope.” Borthwick, *Education and Social Change*, 65-78.

<sup>36</sup> For more on the incredibly close relationship between the traditional private school system and the Qing civil service examination, see Li Shiyu 李世愉, *Qingdai keju zhidu kaobian* 清代科举制度考辨 [A Diagnosis of Qing-era civil service examinations] (Beijing: Zhongyang guangbo dianshi daxue chubanshe 中央广播电视大学出版社, 1999), 127. Li Shiyu stresses that the traditional Chinese education system was by no means static and that the Qing specifically represented the point during which the contents of the examinations and the school system itself were most closely entwined. Central curricular goals such as “moral education” (*pinde jiaoyu* 品德教育) and cultural education (*wenhua jiaoyu* 文化教育) were deemed the most important elements of education in both official discourse and in popular practice (pp. 145-148).

<sup>37</sup> This process began before the establishment of the Ministry itself in 1904, when Zhang Zhidong and Zhang Baixi 张百熙 (1847-1907) first submitted memorials to the throne suggesting that new-style schools be established in every large village to teach literacy (*shizi* 识字), ethical principles (*lunli* 伦理), and the foundations of patriotism (*aiguoji de genji* 爱国家的根基) to all children over the age of seven. For an example of such early primary school regulations, see “Zou ding chudeng xiao xuetang zhangcheng 奏定初等小学堂章程” [A memorial establishing regulations for lower primary schools] in *Zou ding xuetang zhengchang – chudeng xiao xuetang zhangcheng* 奏定学堂章程—初等小学堂章程 [Memorials on primary school regulations—lower level primary school regulations] (Wuhan: Hubei Education Department, 1904), 1-26; Reprinted in XZYB, 300-315.

individual school day, and especially emphasizing new educational foci like math, science, and calisthenics.<sup>38</sup>

One of the most important methods through which the Qing government tried to oversee *guomin* education was by editing and censoring textbooks.<sup>39</sup> The early twentieth century witnessed an explosion in the publication and distribution of modern textbooks in China, as newly founded commercial publishing houses like the Shanghai Commercial Press (*Shangwu yinshuguan* 商务印书馆) and later the Zhonghua Book Company (*Zhonghua Shuju* 中华书局) competed to furnish new-style schools with materials featuring the most “up-to-date” information.<sup>40</sup> These textbooks played an important role in defining the basic contents of the new school system, in part because, unlike previous teaching materials, they covered specific subjects

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<sup>38</sup> For a representative example of the Qing Ministry of Education’s efforts to exert greater control over primary education through revisions to primary school regulations, see “Zou qing biantong chudeng xiao xuetang zhangcheng zhe 奏请变通初等小学堂章程折” [Memorial requesting revisions to the regulations for lower level primary schools], in *Da Qing xuantong xin faling* 大清宣统新法令 4 (1909); Reprinted in XZYB, 551-555. For an example of the daily schedule for primary schools dictated by the ministry, see *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyu shi liao hui bian (wan Qing juan)* 中國近代教育史料匯編 (晚清卷) [A compilation of modern Chinese education historical materials (late Qing volume)] (Beijing : Quan guo tu shu guan wen xian suo wei fu zhi zhong xin, 2006), 207-253.

<sup>39</sup> For a general history of textbook production in early twentieth-century China, see Wang Jianjun 王键军, *Zhongguo jindai jiaokeshu fazhan yanjiu* 中国近代教科书发展研究 [Research on the development of modern Chinese textbooks] (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe, 1996), esp. 158-190.

<sup>40</sup> Peter Zarrow, “The New Schools and National Identity: Chinese History Textbooks in the Late Qing,” in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, ed. Tze-ki Hon and Robert J Culp (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 21-22. Following Peter Zarrow, I define modern textbooks as short volumes focusing on specific subjects like “history,” “geography,” etc. and intended for use by specific age groups. Among the most profitable new textbooks produced during the first decade of the twentieth century was the “up-to-date textbook” series (*zuixin jiaokeshu* 最新教科书), whose popularity reflects a desire for new knowledge in an accessible format. Drawing from James Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Zarrow claims that “large-scale textbook publication created a ‘textual community’ of students and teachers reading the same kinds of materials.” While the impact of these textbooks on certain communities of publishers and readers is undeniable, I would argue that the lack of a codified system for studying these textbooks (and the still limited penetration of textbook adoption outside of the formal school system) should caution us against drawing large conclusions about the intellectual milieu such textbooks may have created. Instead, they are more useful as instances of “official knowledge” approved by political and intellectual elites, which help define the boundaries of what type of knowledge was acceptable within a given subject area during an otherwise volatile decade. That is, early twentieth-century textbooks represent the type of “textual community” that states and publishers wished to create more than any “textual community” that actually existed.

and targeted specific ages and grade levels.<sup>41</sup> Realizing the importance of textbooks to the new curriculum, the Ministry sought to censor their contents, both to protect against heretical material and to better ensure relative uniformity among an increasingly diverse array of publishers. On their own, these censorship efforts were largely ineffectual. Although the Review Board may have played an important role in hastening the rate of textbook adoption among newer public schools, many schools continued using locally produced textbooks that had not been vetted by the Ministry.<sup>42</sup> Seeing its influence wane, the Ministry moved in 1909 to launch its most active intervention into the new education system since 1906: not only would it censor the contents of textbooks from the leading commercial presses, but it would now also actively edit and compile its own textbooks. Minister Zhang Zhidong personally oversaw two key textbooks—*The Essential Reader for Guomin* (*guomin bidu* 国民必读) and *The Simple and Easy Literacy Text* (*jianyi shizi keben* 简易识字课本)—which were to serve as the nationwide foundational teaching materials for primary school education and adult education, respectively. While the Ministry was still content to merely establish guidelines for more specialized textbooks, even those dealing with politically sensitive topics such as history, the state's heavy-handed role in the creation of these two books reflects their importance to the broader process of instituting *guomin*

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<sup>41</sup> Indeed, in many late Qing and Republican-era public schools, graduation was tied to the completion of a specific text rather than a set timetable.

<sup>42</sup> For a general appraisal of the overall effectiveness of the Qing's textbook review board, see Zhang Yunjun 张运君, "Qingmo jiaokeshu shending yanjiu 清末教科书审定研究" [Research on late Qing textbook examination and review], *Hunan shifan daxue jiaoyu kexue xuebao* 湖南大学教育科学学报 [The journal of educational science of Hunan normal university] 9.2 (March 2010): 29-33. Zhang demonstrates that while the Qing editorial review board was instrumental in promoting the modern publishing industry and hastening textbook adoption among certain sets of modern schools, it lacked the resources and reach to control the ideological contents of late Qing textbooks as a whole.

education.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the books reflect the Ministry's conservative articulation of citizenship centered on a moral, Confucian community loyal to the Qing state.

The curricular cornerstone of the new national system of primary schools was *The Essential Reader for Guomin*, the first draft of which was produced in January 1909 and reported on in education journals throughout the country.<sup>44</sup> According to the editors of the text, *The Essential Reader for Guomin* was primarily an ethics textbook and thus consisted of “an arrangement of imperial edicts and sagely classics as well as their commentaries, so as to indicate proper standards of behavior and the means of abiding by them.”<sup>45</sup> The text itself consisted of two volumes: the first focused on Confucian classics and their commentaries, the second an arrangement of imperial edicts covering the most important regulations of the Qing state, organized to resemble the *Shengyu Guangxun* 圣谕广训 [Amplified instructions on the sacred edicts], a 1724 collection of imperial edicts from the Kangxi Emperor distributed to

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<sup>43</sup> As Zarrow notes, the Ministry of Education's relative lack of oversight vis-à-vis history and geography texts, despite their political nature, may have been due to the fact that such topics were seen as more objective disciplines. Or perhaps it was simply easier for history textbook authors to comply with Qing government themes of national unity in a time of political crisis. Or, perhaps the Ministry was simply not very effective in censoring the diverse array of history texts available. Either way, the Ministry of Education definitely concentrated its limited political resources on ethics textbooks and general readers (like *Guomin bidu* and *Jianyi shizi keben*) more so than other textbooks. (See Zarrow, “The New Schools and National Identity,” 28).

<sup>44</sup> Almost all of the Qing Ministry of Education's memorials to the emperor were published in the nationally circulated journal *Xuebu guanbao* 学部官报 [The official journal of the Ministry of Education], and the memorial announcing the editing of *Guomin bidu* was no exception. See “Xuebu zou bian guomin bidu keben, jianyi shizi keben da gai qingxing zhe 学部奏编《国民必读课本》《简易识字课本》大概情形折 [Qing Ministry of Education memorial on the general condition of the *Essential Reader for Guomin* and *The “Simple and Easy” Literacy Text*] in *Xuebu guanbao* 78: 1-3. The memorial announcing the editing of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* was reprinted in *Jiaoyu zazhi* 1.2 (1909), *Sichuan jiaoyu guanbao* 四川教育官报 [The official education journal of Sichuan] 3 (1909): 2-4, *Zhejiang jiaoyu guanbao* 浙江教育官报 [The official education journal of Zhejiang] 8 (1909): 65-66, and *Guangyi cong bao* 广益丛报 [Good advice miscellany] 198 (1909): 1-3. Other journals such as *Datongbao* 大同报, based in Shanghai, reported on the publication of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* as a matter of “vital national news.” See “Guonei jinyao xinwen: *Guomin bidu* keben zhi bianzuan chu 国内紧要新闻:国民必读课本之编纂处” [Vital national news: On the compiling of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* textbook], in *Datongbao* 11.16 (1909): 1-3. Like other aspects of late Qing education reform, the title *Guomin bidu* has its origins in Japanese publications such as Yoshijirō Iida, *Miyo no hikari: kokumin hitsudoku* 御代の光：国民必読 (Tokyo: Iida Yoshijiro, 1895).

<sup>45</sup> “Xuebu zou bian guomin bidu keben, jianyi shizi keben da gai qingxing zhe,” in PTJY, 46.

educate common Qing subjects on moral and legal issues.<sup>46</sup> This second volume also included more recent edicts on the structure of the current government, contemporary political affairs, and advice on how to make the nation prosperous and strong.<sup>47</sup> Together, the editors saw these two volumes as “a convergence of new and old teaching methods” and a vital step in the broader project of popularizing education and inculcating the “entire nation’s people” (*quanguo renmin* 全国人民) with the proper norms and values of citizens.<sup>48</sup>

The Confucian contents of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* make clear that while *guomin* represented a new political and ethical criterion for a broader contingent of the Chinese national subject, it did not reflect a wholesale adoption of foreign models of civic engagement. Indeed, it hewed closely to the ethical standards of the Confucian canon that had previously served as the basis for the examination system and would now serve as the basis for *guomin* education. As the editors argued, “despite the myriad challenges in the world, these perfected principles are unalterable, and given that the morals of the people today are not yet pure, along with the fact that competing schools are secretly sprouting all the time, we should especially

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<sup>46</sup> In many respects, the *Shengyu Guangxun* itself represents an early instance of Qing state efforts to popularize education. The Yongzheng emperor, who was responsible for the distribution of *Shengyu Guangxun*, felt strongly that education was central to the pacification of recently acquired Qing territories, and hoped to distill the essence of Kangxi’s views on morality into a more accessible format. While the actual contents of *Shengyu Guangxun* would have still been inaccessible to most of China’s illiterate population, the text was intended to be distributed to schools throughout the empire and to be delivered as public lectures in village meetings. See Victor H. Mair, “Language and Ideology in the Written Popularizations of the Sacred Edict,” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, ed. David Johnson, Andrew J. Nathan, and Evelyn S. Rawski (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 336-337. *Shengyu Guangxun* constituted an important touchstone for several late Qing and early Republican efforts at popularizing education and was one of several books to be printed in the Mandarin syllabary developed by Wang Zhao 王照 (1859-1933) and first presented in 1903. Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, 138.

<sup>47</sup> “Xuebu zou bianji *Guomin bidu keben* fenbie shixing zhe 学部奏编辑《国民必读课本》分别试行折” [Ministry of Education memorial on the testing of different edits of *The Essential Reader for Guomin*], in *Xuebu guanbao* 学部官报 114 (1910); Reprinted in PTJY, 57-59. The description of these latter contents come from a separate memorial on the editing of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* published in February 1910. It is unclear whether the original 1909 draft of the textbook included these more contemporary issues or whether they were added as part of the yearlong revision process that preceded the book’s broader distribution.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 58.

emphasize the Confucian ethical code so as to avoid confusion.”<sup>49</sup> As with the Ministry’s earlier censorship efforts, the production of this textbook was motivated in part by ongoing fears that other new-style textbooks, and especially foreign textbooks, were “filled with absurdities” and “not yet suitable for use” by the broader public. Zhang Zhidong admitted that *The Essential Reader for Guomin* could be used in conjunction with contemporary texts covering current national law, politics, and global affairs in an effort to “broaden the minds of readers” and to better apply “the virtue of the ancients” to modern affairs (*jinshi shiqing* 今世事情).<sup>50</sup> Yet the clear role of this foundational text was not to enable a new body of readers to access the modern knowledge contained within these contemporary political volumes, but rather to proactively ward against any deviation from normative values such texts might contain.

Despite the conservative understanding of what sort of ethical knowledge was most essential for citizens, the Ministry of Education still understood *The Essential Reader for Guomin* to be a thoroughly new, and even scientific, endeavor. The editors’ skepticism about new or foreign curricular contents was accompanied by a great enthusiasm for new or foreign pedagogical methods, especially those emphasizing simplicity, standardization, and a greater awareness of how students actually responded to the text. Editors criticized previous textbooks for mixing different terms, erroneously employing constructions from local dialects, relying too heavily on obscure literary content, and generally lacking in standardized explanations. In order to correct these faults, Ministry officials conducted an official survey of all lower primary school textbooks currently in use, assessed their respective strengths and weaknesses, and compiled a first draft of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* based on their findings. After producing an initial draft, the Ministry oversaw the first pilot program of its kind to actually test the suitability of the

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> “Xuebu zou bian guomin bidu keben, jianyi shizi keben da gai qingxing zhe,” in PTJY, 46.

text when used in the newly established public schools around the capital.<sup>51</sup> Despite the delays such rigorous testing standards required, editors were nevertheless steadfast in their commitment to publishing, testing, and then re-evaluating the contents of their textbook, noting that it “contained many pioneering ideas” and was simply too important to the foundation of the new system to rush out quickly.<sup>52</sup> The publication of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* was also accompanied by a robust institutional effort to get private schools (*sishu*), especially those around the capital, to adopt Ministry-approved textbooks on a more regular basis, and while the central government acknowledged that differing circumstances within individual provinces might require different approaches to popular education, the ultimate goal was for official schools (*guanxue* 官学) and private schools to meet the same basic educational standard.<sup>53</sup> Thus,

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 45, 47. The process of editing the books actually proved so thorough that many provincial governors charged with establishing a system of *guomin* education in their own provinces wrote to the central government to complain that the supposed flagship of this grand new educational enterprise was not being issued in a sufficiently timely fashion. See, for example, Wu Zhongxi 吴重熹, “Henan xunfu Wu Zhongxi zou Yu sheng choushe jianyi shizi xueshu banli qingxing zhe 河南巡抚吴重熹奏豫省筹设简易识字学塾办理情形折” [Henan provincial governor Wu Zhongxi’s Memorial on the Situation Regarding Yu (Henan) Province’s efforts to establish simplified literacy schools], in *Xuebu guanbao* 105 (1909); Reprinted in PTJY, 164-165. Wu Zhongxi’s memorial illustrates the limits of practical Ministry control over the implementation of *guomin* education in outlying provinces beyond the capital. Wu notes that he has been successful in raising money from local gentry to fund the construction of twenty new schools in the countryside around the provincial capital, but that the schools themselves are still waiting on regulations and textbooks to be issued by the ministry. In lieu of suitable Ministry-edited copies of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* and *The “Simple and Easy” Literacy Textbook*, Henan moved ahead in drafting its own regulations and editing its own textbook of the 1600 most commonly used characters. The memorial includes assurances that “When in the future the Ministry of Education promulgations reach Henan, we will once again comply and change our textbooks and regulations in an effort to return to uniformity,” but the fact remains that while the Ministry itself debated how best to draft textbooks for citizens, a patchwork of different textbooks and school regulations were cropping up all across the country. For another example of local governors and educational inspectors complaining about the delays in the publication of Ministry-approved textbooks, see “Jiangsu xunfu duanfang zou kaiban jianyi shizi xueshu pian 江苏巡抚端方奏开办简易识字学塾片” [The Jiangsu provincial governor’s formal memorial on the opening of simplified literacy schools], in PTJY, 163.

<sup>52</sup> “Xuebu zou banbu chudeng xiao xuetang jiaokeshu 学部奏颁布初等小学堂教科书” [Ministry of Education memorial on the publishing of lower primary school textbooks] in *Xuebu guanbao* 133 (Jan 1910); reprinted in PTJY, 55-56.

<sup>53</sup> “Xuebu tongxing jingwai fan ge sishu ying anzhao benbu zou ding biantong chudeng xiaoxue jianyike kecheng banli wen 学部通行京外凡各私塾应按照本部奏定变通初等小学简易科课程办理文” [The Ministry of Education’s instructions for every private school in the area around the capital to, in accordance with this Ministry’s imperially approved decree, adopt simple and easy curricula for lower primary schools], Dec. 1909; Reprinted in *Xuebu zongwusi* 学部总务司, *Xuebu zou zi jiyao* 学部奏咨辑要 [A summary of memorials from the Ministry of Education] Vol. 2 (Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1986) and PTJY, 48.

as both a basis for school curricula and as a focal point for broader reform efforts, the *Essential Reader for Guomin* distinguished itself from nearly all other textbooks by the research-oriented and uniform means through which it was developed and distributed.<sup>54</sup>

The standardization promised by the widespread adoption of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* allowed the Ministry's editors to reconceive the volume's otherwise conservative contents in new ways. The values associated with venerating Confucius and devoting oneself to the monarchy may have been timeless, unalterable principles, but they were also legitimate and effective strategies for promoting new forms of Qing nationalism on the global stage. Japan in particular provided a model for how Confucian values might be repurposed as a modern strategy for consolidating popular sentiment and promoting the state. Zhang Zhidong boasted that Japan's "Honor the Emperor and Repel the Generals" (*zunwang daomu* 尊王倒幕) movement was inspired by Han scholars, and that even as Japan's *guomin* had caught up to their European and American counterparts in terms of knowledge and technical skills, they still looked to the wisdom of Confucius as a guide for moral fortitude and as a means of promoting loyalty.<sup>55</sup> In addition to this evidence that Confucianism was fully compatible with other modern nation-states, Zhang also saw Japan as evidence that "every nation's education must derive from a respect for and preservation of that nation's spoken language, written language, history, customs, and

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<sup>54</sup> The one concession the textbook made to previous education structures was that it allowed for a range of time in which students could complete each text. For example, the editors declared that a student of "high natural intelligence" could likely complete the first volume of the text in a single year, while lesser students could take up to a year and a half. Such gestures toward the flexible schedule of many local schools does not, however, detract from the overall goal of the text, which was to impose uniformity through standardization.

<sup>55</sup> "Zou chen jiaoyu zongzhi zhe," XZYB, 544. As Zhang notes, "[The Japanese] treat the Confucian classics as an obligatory topic of study, sing songs praising Confucius, and work to change decadent customs and stop the deterioration of good customs. On Confucius' birthday and on the Spring and Autumn holidays, students offer sacrifices and compose music to express their feelings of elation. Beyond their efforts to implement the true meaning of the Classics, they thoroughly understand the relationship of Heaven and Man, and those who assist in annotating and speaking about the Classics, must analyze them meticulously and compile their efforts into the curriculum, which are promulgated as standards in every school."



religious teachings.”<sup>56</sup> In the eyes of the Qing Ministry of Education, the power of Confucian principles to create Chinese citizens lay not just in the ethical contents of those principals but also in their power to constitute a singular, unifying “state religion” (*guojiao* 国教) with which to inculcate the broad group of lower primary school students who would later become Qing citizens.<sup>57</sup>

Overall, *The Essential Reader for Guomin* represents one of the earliest and clearest institutional articulations of what the Ministry of Education felt every Chinese citizen should be. This particular notion of citizenship did not represent a fundamentally new or imported field of knowledge, nor did it represent a wholesale reproduction of the curriculum of the former examination system. Students and parents who were exposed to the textbook for the first time would likely have found many of its values familiar, even if the title of the textbook was not. Similarly, even as the Ministry used the textbook to advocate for a host of new educational goals (such as esteeming the public and emphasizing martial and practical skills), it also assured the throne that such goals could be accomplished by emphasizing the same norms that had previously contributed to the stability of the Qing state—respect, obedience, filial devotion, tranquility, and the proper differentiation of roles.<sup>58</sup>

As a statement of political and educational philosophy, *The Essential Reader for Guomin*’s status as a new container for old ideas nicely complemented the Qing government’s own efforts to retain its authority by remaking itself as a constitutional monarchy after 1906. But as a concrete education policy, the textbook’s contradictions undermined its effectiveness.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Again, Zhang Zhidong felt it was especially important to inculcate these values when students were young. As he argued, “we believe that lower primary school constitutes what the ancients called the ‘foundation of raising children,’ and what the constitutional government of modern times calls ‘*guomin* education,’ and thus we see it as especially important.” See “Xuebu zou banbu chudeng xiao xuetang jiaokeshu,” in PTJY, 55.

<sup>58</sup> “Xuebu zou bianji *Guomin bidu* keben fenbie shixing zhe,” in PTJY, 58.

Despite being positioned as an instrument for popularizing education, it consisted of texts written in classical Chinese (*wenyan* 文言), many of which were several centuries old or more. The editors acknowledged that if the text were to be used in remote villages, local public officials would likely have to explain the book's contents to illiterate villagers using a simplified vernacular.<sup>59</sup> Even if local officials were able to use public lecturing to provide the moral lessons essential to being a citizen, the editors remained reserved about the text's relevance to the lives of farmers and other rural workers. As Zhang noted, "at least a few rustic fools (*xiangqu yumeng* 乡曲愚氓) will be able to understand the meaning of loyal gentlemen who serve their country, and if their knowledge of characters is a little better and their intellect a little sharper, it might even provide them with the means of learning a trade and seeking a livelihood."<sup>60</sup> Zhang's cautious optimism aside, the fact remained that *The Essential Reader for Guomin*'s usefulness in popularizing education was ultimately limited by the fact that it was intended to be studied in a formal classroom and relied upon a classical grammar still unfamiliar to most illiterate Chinese. While *The Essential Reader for Guomin* never explicitly states that literacy in classical Chinese is among the intellectual criteria required of citizens, or that only urban residents and those already familiar with classical learning could be citizens, it clearly did little to overcome these barriers. If the Ministry were to achieve its stated aim of inculcating *all* the nation's people with the values necessary to be citizens, it would need to rely on a different sort of text for use outside the classroom—the *Simple and Easy Literacy Reader*.

As its title would suggest, the *Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* consisted of a sequence of short, relatable texts that were intended to teach basic literacy along with knowledge and skills

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>60</sup> "Xuebu zou bian guomin bidu keben, jianyi shizi keben da gai qingxing zhe," in PTJY, 46.

for everyday use. The Ministry first drafted the text in 1909 as three separate editions, which were not meant to be studied in sequence but rather targeted different groups of potential students within the “ignorant masses” (*shumin* 庶民).<sup>61</sup> The editing of these three editions proved especially difficult, for whereas *The Essential Reader for Guomin* followed more or less directly from the Ministry’s stated goals to create a public education structure for inculcating new *guomin*, the simplified literacy text represented a much more radical endeavor.<sup>62</sup> Together, the three editions of *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* represented an entirely new genre of textbook—one that didn’t merely make concessions to accessibility in its selection of moral and ethical lessons, but actually prioritized accessibility for the sake of making literacy a universal skill.<sup>63</sup> Such a position did not arise organically from the otherwise conservative Ministry of Education, but rather was a reaction to political and educational developments beyond the Ministry’s purview—developments that forced the Ministry to recast its own view of the relationship between literacy and citizenship.

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<sup>61</sup> The first edition was intended for use by young children of poor families who could not afford to send them away to “public” schools, which taught a standardized curriculum but were not fully subsidized by the government and thus still charged high tuition rates. Written under the presumption that there may be one educated person in the family already who could serve as an instructor, this first text covered basic vocabulary and grammar, but also included texts on morality, history, geography, and the natural sciences. In total the three volumes that made up this edition contained 3300 characters and could be completed in three years. The second edition represented a simplification of the first, covering only 2400 characters and requiring only two years to complete. It targeted the children of adults who had themselves been denied an education, and it eliminated longer articles in favor of lessons based on classical idioms [*chengyu* 成语] whose meaning was easy to grasp. The third and simplest edition was meant to educate illiterate adults who had been denied an education and only required a single year to complete. The editing of this final edition targeting illiterate adults proved to be an especially difficult task, and after initial testing found that the original printing was still too difficult, a revised edition had to be released the following study period. See “Xuebu zou *Jianyi Shizi Keben* bian jun zhe 学部奏《简易识字课本》编竣折” [Ministry of Education memorial on the completion of editing *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader*] in *Xuebu guanbao* 114 (1910); reprinted in PTJY, 56; For a general overview of the original 1909 draft of *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* see “Xuebu zou bian *Guomin bidu keben Jianyi shizi keben* da gai qing xing zhe,” in PTJY, 45-46.

<sup>62</sup> Tellingly, the final, published edition of *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* did not appear until several months after Zhang Zhidong’s death in October 1909.

<sup>63</sup> “Xuebu zou bian *Guomin bidu keben Jianyi shizi keben* da gai qing xing zhe,” in PTJY, 45.

Prior to the publication of the “simple and easy” curriculum, the Qing government had made no real efforts to spread literacy beyond the narrow confines of the academies that trained scholar-officials. In surveying earlier Qing efforts to popularize education, Evelyn Rawski has bluntly suggested that “traditional China had no concept of mass literacy.”<sup>64</sup> In fact, a more bounded, parochial literate community was broadly beneficial to Qing officials under the examination system, because their membership in the socio-political elite was defined by their status as degree holders and their rarified access to the cultural contents of Chinese literary texts.<sup>65</sup> The abrogation of the examination system marked a cataclysmic shift in the conditions of elite society in that it decoupled a classical education from the social, political, and material benefits afforded to degree holders, but such a shift itself does not explain the effort to make popular literacy a state priority.<sup>66</sup> Indeed, in the four years following the Qing state’s declaration to pursue popular education, it focused its efforts entirely on setting regulations and screening textbooks for public schools rather than on funding or promoting what future education departments would later call “social education” (*shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育), that is, half-day schools, night classes, and mass literacy campaigns.

So why was the Qing Ministry of Education suddenly so eager to spread literacy? Within the Qing government, demands for universal literacy were most often tied to broader constitutional reforms. Efforts to reorient the Qing government toward constitutionalism began

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<sup>64</sup> Rawski, *Education and Popular Literacy*, 1-2.

<sup>65</sup> Elman, *A Cultural History of Civil Examinations*, 618-619. As Elman demonstrates, the examination system did not merely perpetuate but actually *created* an entire elite class of degree holders, all of whom shared a common language, common cultural values, and a common interest in perpetuating the examination system.

<sup>66</sup> Even as early as 1932, historians of China have had a sense of the profound shift marked by the collapse of the examination system, as Cyrus H. Peake claimed “[the abolition of the examinations] dealt the death-blow to Confucianism.” See Cyrus H. Peake, *Nationalism and Education in Modern China* (New York: New York University Press, 1932), 71. Scholars like Benjamin Elman have shown that the examinations themselves and Chinese culture more broadly were certainly not coterminous with Confucian learning, and Zhang Zhidong’s tenure at the Ministry of Education reveals that many Confucian ideals lived on after the formal end of the examinations. Peake’s statement nonetheless expresses the readily perceptible magnitude of the decision to abrogate the exams.

in earnest in 1904, and on September 1, 1906, Empress Dowager Cixi 慈禧 (1835-1908) released the “Proclamation for Preparing a Constitutional Government,” which announced the Qing court’s intention to establish a constitutional monarchy in the next few years.<sup>67</sup> Following the announcement, various cities and provinces began to set up experiments in local self-government, the earliest of which required that voters be able to write their own names and addresses to participate in local elections.<sup>68</sup> When the central government promulgated the *Principles of Constitution* [*Xianfa Dagang* 宪法大纲] on August 27<sup>th</sup>, 1908, it clarified that full literacy in classical Chinese (*shiwenyi* 识文意) was a prerequisite for suffrage, but other local governments followed the more generalized prerequisite of “recognizing characters” (*shiwenzi* 识文字).<sup>69</sup> By the end of the first decade of the twentieth century, there was a groundswell of political support for popular literacy, particularly among members of the Qing Constitutional Commission

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<sup>67</sup> A full discussion of the fascinating political struggles preceding the Qing court’s decision to pursue a constitutional government lies beyond the bounds of this chapter. For the classical studies on constitutional reform efforts within the Qing government itself, see Meribeth E. Cameron, *The Reform Movement in China 1898-1912* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931) and Norbert Meinenberger, *Emergence of Constitutional Government in China (1905-1908): The Concept Sanctioned by the Empress Dowager Tz’u-hsi* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1980). For our purposes, it’s worth noting that Japan played an incredibly important role in modeling available forms of constitutional government, much as it had served as an early model of *guomin* education. As Douglas Reynolds has observed, the constitution of Meiji Japan served as a direct blueprint for Qing constitutional proposals, and the victory of constitutionalist Japan over autocratic Russia in the Russo-Japanese war helped to strengthen Cixi’s advocacy of constitutional reformers within the Qing state. According to Reynolds, Zhang Zhidong’s private secretary Zhao Fengchang played an instrumental role in forwarding a Chinese translation of the Meiji constitution to Cixi’s office. See Douglas A. Reynolds, *China 1898-1912: The Xinzhen Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 186-192.

<sup>68</sup> Citing Shen Huaiyu 沈懷玉, “Qing mo difang zizhi zhi mengya 清末地方自治之萌芽 (1898-1908)” [The emergence of self-government during the late Qing] in *Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo jikan* 中央研究院近代史研究所集刊 [Bulletin of the institute of modern history, Academia Sinica] 9 (1980): 291-320, Elizabeth Kaske notes that the city council of Tianjin, first elected on July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1907, served as a model for later experiments in local self-government. The regulations drawn up by election officials stipulated that eligible men had to be able to sign their ballots with a full name and address—thus establishing literacy as an important criterion for voting. See Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, 266-277.

<sup>69</sup> Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, 277-278.

(*Xianzheng Bianchaguan* 宪政编查馆), who positioned basic literacy as a necessary function of a constitutional society and thus a central goal of the new school system.<sup>70</sup>

Universal literacy was also a political winner within the context of growing anxieties about the statistical representation of China on the world stage. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, organizations on the periphery of the British Empire such as the Royal Asiatic Society, the Foreign Office, and the Royal Geographic Society began to produce robust enumerative accounts and statistical surveys to supplement the records of colonial administrators in treaty port cities like Tianjin and Shanghai. As James Hevia has argued, this “great cascade of paperwork produced in the colonies” helped to create a new “China,” which could serve as an object of analysis, classification, and comparison for various colonial regimes.<sup>71</sup> Amidst the many international comparisons framing and motivating the creation of a new national education system, Chinese administrators and education reformers were acutely aware of literacy rates as an important new comparative measure for assessing China’s national body.<sup>72</sup> One provincial governor quoted Qing Education Minister Kong Xianglin 孔祥麟 as stating, “we should take the number of people who are literate as a measure for judging the ‘level of *guomin*’ (*guomin chengdu* 国民程度).”<sup>73</sup> Other provincial governors echoed this equation of literacy rates and the overall “level” of *guomin*, often establishing modest literacy rate goals as a measure for

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 283-284.

<sup>71</sup> James Hevia, *English Lessons: The Pedagogy of Imperialism in Nineteenth-Century China* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 123-124.

<sup>72</sup> The Qing government itself sought to participate in this growing body of statistical knowledge about China by sponsoring a national census in 1909. As Tong Lam has argued, the most profound aspect of this new census was the acknowledgement that the individual constituted a “basic enumerative unit and hence the foundational building block of the social body.” Literacy was especially important among the statistical measures generated by these efforts, since countable “autonomous, free, and politically aware citizens” were vital to the construction and maintenance of the political order that Qing reformers envisioned. See Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>73</sup> “Henan xunfu Wu Zhongxi zou Yu sheng choushe jianyi shizi xueshu banli qingxing zhe,” in PTJY, 164.

determining the success of popular education projects within their provinces.<sup>74</sup> For such administrators, the fact that fewer than one in twenty Chinese men was fully literate in the Chinese language was alarming. Such statistical measures had special relevance for the constitutional reformers seeking to create a national body of literate citizens, as the Constitutional Commission claimed, “the degree of civilization is measured by the ratio of the literate population, which is even more important for a country like China that is the father of civilization and culture and is unmatched in the world in terms of its population numbers.”<sup>75</sup> Despite certain ambiguities about whether literacy should be measured according to familiarity with classical or vernacular texts, the continual equation of literacy with the “level of *guomin*” demonstrates that Liang Qichao’s attention to the collective status of *guomin* as a measure of national worth was becoming common wisdom at all levels of Qing government. Similarly, the continual references to China’s low literacy rates reflect the massive influx of statistical information on the education systems of other nations, against which China’s own literacy figures were found to be woefully lacking.

The growing administrative pressure to improve literacy rates led the Constitutional Commission to work with local education officials to begin establishing “simplified literacy schools” (*jianyi shizi xueshu* 简易识字学塾) in district and prefecture capitals. Although in 1906

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<sup>74</sup> For further examples of provincial education reports expressing anxieties about literacy rates and their usefulness in measuring the level of *guomin*, see “Jiangsu xunfu duanfang zou kaiban jianyi shizi xueshu pian,” in PTJY, 163-164 and “Shun tianfu zou choushe Shunshu jianyi shizi xueshu banli qingxing zhe 顺天府奏筹设顺属简易识字学塾办理情形折” [Memorial on the situation regarding efforts to establish simplified literacy schools in Shunshu Self-Sufficient Region] in *Xuebu guanbao* 121 (1910); reprinted in PTJY, 165-166.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, 283. For original, see “Xianzheng bianchaguan huizhou fuhe ge yamen jiunian choubei weijin shiyi zhe, fu qingdan 宪政编察馆汇奏复核各衙门九年筹备未尽事宜摺” [The Constitutional Commission’s collected memorials regarding unfinished matters related to each government office’s nine-year plan], in *Qing mo choubei lixian dang’an shiliao* 清末筹备立宪档案史料 [Historical materials from the late Qing constitution preparation], ed. Gugong Bowuyuan Ming Qing dang’anbu, 1:75. Such handwringing over China’s literacy rates was mired in ambiguity. As with the constitutional proposals and local self-government experiments tying literacy to suffrage, it remained unclear whether literacy should be measured in terms of familiarity with classical texts or with vernacular texts.

the Ministry of Education had approved the founding of half-day schools to better cater to low-income students, these new simplified literacy schools operated completely independently of the central government.<sup>76</sup> According to reports on the literacy schools from provincial governors in Jiangsu, Shandong, Henan, and Guizhou, most such schools used non-standard books that did not teach a set curriculum, and many did not teach any Confucian classics whatsoever.<sup>77</sup> The local administrators charged with actually enacting a system of simplified literacy training continually praised the new schools for their lack of “scientific guidelines” or “compulsory fixed rates of progress, as such flexibility aided in their adaptability to the needs of workers and poor children.”<sup>78</sup> By 1909, these schools had become so popular that they were beginning to displace the new system of official schools teaching a Ministry-approved curriculum.<sup>79</sup>

The rapid profusion of such independently-run “simplified literacy schools,” each with its own textbook, all but forced the Ministry to publish *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* as a means of reasserting central control over a growing fixture of the Qing educational landscape. Indeed, the Ministry’s version of the literacy curriculum, as presented in *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader*, represents a marked attempt to reinsert conservative Confucian principles into the new understandings of citizenship and literacy produced by the local literacy schools. The Ministry itself did not cite constitutionalism, suffrage, or any other political principle when explaining the purpose behind its own literacy text. The goal remained, as it was with *The Essential Reader for Guomin*, to “make everyone know ethical relations, morality, and

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<sup>76</sup> For information on Qing Ministry of Education promotion of half-day schools, see Bailey, *Reform the People*, 102.

<sup>77</sup> See the various provincial reports in PTJY, 163-166.

<sup>78</sup> “Shun tianfu zou choushe Shunshu jianyi shizi xueshu banli qingxing zhe,” in PTJY, 165.

<sup>79</sup> Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, 284.



knowledge that can be applied practically.”<sup>80</sup> Despite the increasing availability of vernacular publications, the Qing editors still fought to base the contents of *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* on classical documents.<sup>81</sup> Furthermore, whereas local efforts to establish literacy schools positioned them as alternatives to the formal school system, the Ministry held out hope that “upon finishing the course, students can enter school, or lacking the will to pursue advanced studies can at least seek a livelihood, without resulting in their being restricted to a heterodox lifestyle.”<sup>82</sup> Such hopes demonstrate that even an unfamiliar proposition like *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* could be seen as a tool for perpetuating Zhang’s vision for a stable Qing society. Because of Zhang’s continued allegiance to the Confucian canon and specifically his support for learning classical texts in schools, contemporaries decried him as a hopeless conservative who contributed to China’s educational stagnation.<sup>83</sup> Historians have been similarly critical of Zhang’s tenure at the Ministry of Education. Elizabeth Kaske in particular has singled out Zhang as an obstacle to the ongoing development of vernacular texts as the basis for efficient literacy training, which was only able to proceed in earnest after Zhang’s death on October 4, 1909.<sup>84</sup>

Though Zhang’s cultural conservatism and constitutional skepticism are undeniable, many of these appraisals underestimate the ways in which *The Essential Reader for Guomin* and

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<sup>80</sup> Many of the short sentences that made up the introductory lessons were drawn from improvised essays on history and travel, as well as selections from the *Three Character Classic* [*Sanzijing* 三字经], a thirteenth century text attributed to Wang Yinglin 王应麟 (1223-1296) and intended as an introductory text for children. “Xuebu zou bian *Guomin bidu keben Jianyi shizi keben* da gai qing xing zhe,” in PTJY, 45. It should be noted, however, that only the first edition of the text (meant for poor children of working families) actually included any special section dedicated explicitly to moral education.

<sup>81</sup> “Xuebu zou *Jianyi Shizi Keben* bian jun zhe,” in PTJY, 56.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid.

<sup>83</sup> For an example of late Qing criticism of Zhang, see “Zhang Wenxiang Gong yu jiaoyu zhi guanxi 张文襄公与教育之关系” [Minister Zhang Wenxiang and education], in JYZZ 1:10 (1909): 19-23. Zhang Wenxiang was the posthumous name assigned to Zhang Zhidong.

<sup>84</sup> Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, 285-286.

*The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* represented a new articulation of the relationship between the state, education, and the broader public. In memorials describing *The Essential Reader for Guomin* and *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader*, Zhang and his followers repeatedly assert that the texts are not concerned with establishing rituals and standards of conduct for a select few, but rather are trying to target the entire nation.<sup>85</sup> Such an endeavor assumed that adherence to a shared moral code represented the best hope for the survival of the Chinese nation-state. Furthermore, it assumed that universal education was not only possible, but was indeed the responsibility of the state, particularly in terms of establishing the proper boundaries of what the Chinese moral community should look like. Future education reformers who were less wedded to the perpetuation of Qing authority or the Confucian canon would swiftly abandon the use of classical texts in primary school curricula, but the belief that universal primary education was the responsibility of the state endured, and future Chinese states, from the Beiyang government of Yuan Shikai 袁世凯 (1859-1916) to the Nationalist and Communist governments decades later, would all publish official copies of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* (with varying contents) in their efforts to explain the moral standards expected of Chinese citizens.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “Xuebu zou bianji *Guomin bidu* keben fenbie shixing zhe,” in PTJY, 58.

<sup>86</sup> For example, see Xu Derong 徐德荣, Wang Fengjie 王凤喈, and Huang Houkun 黄厚坤, eds., *Guomin bidu* 国民必读 [The essential reader for *guomin*] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1922); reprint, 1926. The 1926 version of the text advertises itself as being modeled after American civic education (*gongmin jiaoyu* 公民教育) readers, and highlights the importance of fulfilling one’s aspirations (*lizhi* 励志) and establishing oneself in society (*lishen chushi* 立身处世), in addition to promoting patriotism and other virtues. Rather than focus on Confucian classics and their commentaries, the textbook presents a series of vernacular language articles starting with the individual and moving onto family, society, the nation, and the world. In 1946, the Guomindang published a another primary school text under the title *Guomin bidu* 国民必读 [The essential reader for *guomin*]; however, the contents were completely different from both the 1909 and 1922 editions. The 1946 edition consisted of vernacular texts divided by subject area such as patriotism (*aiguo* 爱国), regulating the family (*qijia* 齐家), dealing with affairs (*jiewu* 接物), establishing a business (*liye* 立业), conducting oneself in society (*chushi* 处世), etc. Unlike the 1922 edition of *The Essential Reader for Guomin*, the 1946 text had a more nationalistic aim, setting as its primary goal “the explanation of China’s innate political philosophy and innate ethical norms.” While some of the ethics espoused in the volume may have born a similarity to the original Qing edition of the text, there was a much clearer focus on giving practical advice for how to be a patriotic and productive citizen of the Republic of China. For a full draft manuscript of the 1946 Guomindang edition of the *Essential Reader for Guomin*, see “Guomin bidu jia biangao (fubiao) 国民必读甲

Rather than serving as evidence for conservative opposition to more radical education reform projects, *The Essential Reader for Guomin* and *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* are more productively understood as expressions of the tensions within understandings of citizenship itself. On the one hand, the Ministry's textbooks appropriated the language of *guomin* to define an aspirational moral community, previously inhabited by the scholarly elite but now inclusive of the broader educated public. On the other hand, the Ministry's pedagogical efforts to make the texts more accessible to this broader public speak to the government's obligation to serve an already existing community of *guomin*, whose low level of literacy was threatening China's political power and moral reputation on the world stage. As the next section will demonstrate, these tensions replayed themselves in debates beyond the confines of the Qing administration, wherein professional educators and textbook publishers declared their allegiance to standardizing public education or to producing more accessible "simple and easy" curricula. Sometimes, these debates mapped directly onto the debates within the Qing Ministry of Education, but just as often they articulated new standards for defining a future community of citizens or provided new justifications for why the Qing state should broaden access to basic skills like literacy. Because many of these professional educators would themselves become educational administrators, albeit in the new Ministry of Education established under the Republican government of 1912, their divergent articulations of what it meant to provide "education for *guomin*" also carry

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编稿(附表)" [First draft manuscript of *The Essential Reader for Guomin* in *Guomin Jiaoyu zhidao yuekan* (Guilin) 国民教育指导月刊(桂林) [Guomin education directives monthly (Guilin)] 4.1-2 (1946): 23-39. A later draft of this manuscript was printed in *Guomin jiaoyu zhidao yuekan* (Yong'an) 国民教育指导月刊(永安) 4.7-8 (1946): 7-20. For a more general discussion of this textbook and its uses see Wei Bingxin 魏冰心, "Guomin bidu zhi bianji yu yongyong 国民必读之编辑与应用" [The editing and intended uses of *The Essential Reader for Guomin*], in *Guomin jiaoyu zhidao yuekan* (Chengdu) 国民教育指导月刊(成都) [Guomin education directives monthly (Chengdu) 4.1-3 (1945): 21-27. Other texts with titles similar to *Guomin bidu* have been published throughout the first half of the twentieth century, including Dai Jitao 戴季陶, ed., *Zhonghua guomin bidu* 中华国民必读 [The essential reader for Chinese *guomin*] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1915).

significance for future configurations of the public school system and the fledgling Republican state.

### **Teaching Citizenship and Teaching Citizens in the Pages of *The Educational Review***

The end of the examination system, coupled with the Qing Ministry of Education's plethora of new reform goals, created a wealth of opportunities for a new class of public intellectuals in late Qing China: professional education reformers. Before the fall of the examination system, demographic pressure and the dwindling availability of official posts within the government meant that many successful examination candidates sought out careers as private tutors, classroom teachers, or principals of local academies.<sup>87</sup> Even after the examinations were officially abolished, many former examination candidates continued to work in these traditional educational roles, mostly in the service of literati families who hoped that the examinations would soon return.<sup>88</sup> But the years after 1905 also saw well-educated literati taking on new roles in education: as new-style textbook publishers, education policy advocates, analysts of foreign education systems, and reporters on China's new efforts to establish "education for *guomin*." Although the official Ministry of Education claimed a role in nearly all of these tasks, its inability to practically govern the content of the new education system established a discursive opening for reformers unaffiliated with the Qing government to debate educational issues among themselves.

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<sup>87</sup> Benjamin Elman, *From Philosophy to Philology: Intellectual and Social Aspects of Change in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 67-137. As Elman points out, the demographic revolution of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries meant that even provincial and metropolitan examination candidates could not be guaranteed an official appointment.

<sup>88</sup> Curran, *Educational Reform in Republican China*, 83-119. Curran makes a compelling case that the specter of the civil service examinations repeatedly threatened the establishment of a new education system.

One of the most prominent forums for this new area of public policy debate was *The Educational Review* [*Jiaoyu zazhi* 教育杂志], China's leading national education journal. First published and distributed by the Shanghai Commercial Press (*shangwu yinshuguan* 商务印书馆) in 1909, *The Educational Review*'s status as a well-circulated, independent journal for professional educators makes it uniquely well suited to illustrate the boundaries within which reformers understood and articulated the meaning of "education for *guomin*." While the readership of the journal would likely have still been confined to a relatively small literary elite, the profusion of jobless intellectuals and the early twentieth-century publishing boom meant that journals such as *The Educational Review* were distributed more widely and with more contributors than ever before.<sup>89</sup> By the time the journal published its first issue in January of 1909, the education reform suggestions contained within the Qing's New Policy had been in place for several years, allowing the journal's contributors to comment not only on their hopes for China's educational future but also on the effectiveness of those education reforms that had already been implemented.<sup>90</sup> Following the 1911 Revolution, the journal continued to remain influential and several of its chief writers and editors obtained prominent positions in the new Republican Department of Education, narrowing the distance between the journal's interests and those of the state. Yet for the first year of its publication, the journal was more distant from and

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<sup>89</sup> Most of the printed media related to education, including professional journals, textbooks, and other education materials, grew out of a publishing boom in Shanghai at the turn of the twentieth century. Driven by both printing technology innovation and increased literacy rates, publishing houses like the Shanghai Commercial Press became successful businesses (Bailey, *Reform the People*, 64-65). Many elite intellectuals saw textbook writing and journal submissions as both a means of disseminating their ideas to a broad audience and as a way of successfully earning a living. Tze-ki Hon and Robert Culp, "Introduction," in *The Politics of Historical Production in Late Qing and Republican China*, 5.

<sup>90</sup> *Jiaoyu zazhi* was preceded by the journal *Jiaoyu shijie* 教育世界 [Educational world], which began publishing in 1902, but consisted mostly of translated work from Japanese authors. Given that its contributors could not yet discuss the merits of education reform beyond the examination system, and that the journal as a whole contains less original debate, an analysis of *Jiaoyu shijie* lies beyond the scope of this essay. For more information on this particular journal, see Bailey, *Reform the People*, 5, 64-83.

at times even openly critical of the Qing government.<sup>91</sup> As such, it is this inaugural year that proves most useful for illustrating the diversity of understandings of *guomin* among the broader community of professional educators.

For the most part, contributors to *The Educational Review*'s editorial pages did not explicitly critique one another's conceptions of *guomin*, largely because reformers were not concerned with the abstract political issue of *who* could be considered a *guomin* or *what* defined them as such, but rather with the practical difficulty of *how* to institute and popularize "education for *guomin*." Within these more explicit disagreements on policy and process, however, one nonetheless finds important differences in the implicit assumptions each author holds about what it means to be *guomin*. Some authors—most notably future editor Zhuang Yu—stressed the fundamental importance of primary education and the need to establish strict standards by which China's political community could be molded into modern citizens. Others, such as Lu Erkui 陆尔奎 (1862-1935) and the promoters of "simple and easy literacy" (*jianyi shizi*), advocated for the simplification of education standards so that the new school system could benefit all those who currently belonged to the community of Qing subjects. At first glance, these division lines seem to map closely onto the difference between the Qing Ministry of Education's flagship textbooks *The Essential Reader for Guomin* and *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader*, but closer inspection reveals important differences in the ways that reformers understood the need

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<sup>91</sup> Despite the revolutionary language with which some educational reformers explained their projects, the overall tone of the journal was decidedly reformist rather than revolutionary. Still, this did not dissuade contributors from being openly critical of the Qing government. In an article on primary education, Zhuang Yu lamented that "those above (*zai shang zhe* 在上者) are not promoting education comprehensively" and established several reform goals, such as standardization of tuition and establishment of school districts, that only government entities could enact (JYZZ 1.2: 19-20). Other articles criticized the current laws for mandating certain levels of education that simply remained out of reach for most people (JYZZ 1.5: 64). Nearly all argued that education was underfunded by the central state, and Zhuang was particularly engaged with budgetary issues. See, for example, JYZZ 1:2, 20-21 and his exhaustive article, "Lun difang xue wu gongkuan 论地方学务公款" [Local public funding of education] in JYZZ 1.7: 83-96.

for primary education and non-formal education respectively. Whereas Ministry conservatives like Zhang Zhidong wanted to use primary schooling to ensure that more Chinese students understood Confucian values through classical texts, reformers like Zhuang Yu were willing to embrace entirely new standards of moral and physical fitness that had never before been expected of the Chinese people. Similarly, whereas *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader* reflected a Qing strategy to inculcate moral truths through non-formal, accessible means, professional educators seized the banner of “simple and easy” in order to articulate the state’s responsibility to provide farmers, workers, and poverty-stricken *guomin* with practical knowledge. Beyond these differing perspectives on primary education and literacy education, contributors to *The Educational Review* were free to take on new projects, such as women’s education, that were never a focus of the Qing government’s more conservative organs.<sup>92</sup>

Of the various reformers writing for *The Educational Review*, the one seemingly most in step with the Ministry’s articulation of *guomin* education was Zhuang Yu, one of the magazine’s most frequent contributors.<sup>93</sup> Although Zhuang wrote articles and editorials on a great diversity of topics, including curriculum development, local school budgets and the administration of local school boards, his reform agenda was encapsulated by his frequent refrain that “if we want to popularize education, then we must first resolve to popularize *primary* education.”<sup>94</sup> For Zhuang, the best way to popularize primary education ventures was through increased regulation and

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<sup>92</sup> The Qing Ministry of Education did issue regulations on women’s education in 1907, as a supplement to the 1904 memorial first regulating modern schools; however, this was largely in response to pressure from other departments such as the Ministry of Works, which were interested in promoting women as teachers in new-style kindergartens. The 1907 memorial on “Regulations on Women’s Normal Schools and Girls’ Elementary Schools” [*zouding nüzi shifan xuetang ji nüzi xiaoxuetang zhangcheng* 奏定女子师范学堂及女子小学堂章程] was the first document to even officially recognize a place for women in the public school system. For more on late Qing institutional support for women’s education (or the lack thereof), see Xiaoping Cong, *Teacher’s Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 52-60.

<sup>93</sup> Wang, *Zhongguo jindai jiaokeshu fazhan yanjiu* 116-117.

<sup>94</sup> JYZZ 1.2: 19.

standardization. Zhuang believed firmly that the success of the educational project lay in the strength of the institutions responsible for molding young students, and he wrote numerous articles explaining the proper roles and functions of local school administration, the benefits of teacher training facilities, and the need for formal Educational Associations (*jiaoyu hui* 教育会) in an attempt to establish common national standards.<sup>95</sup> In a lengthy article on the topic of primary schools, Zhuang asks in reference to elementary education, “Now, education is in the process of sprouting, shouldn’t we correct the content at the foundation?”<sup>96</sup>

In addition to echoing the Ministry’s support for primary education, Zhuang Yu also agreed with Education Minister Zhang Zhidong that “education for *guomin*” was embodied first and foremost in proper moral cultivation. For Zhuang, the notion that moral guidance would form the basis of the school system was almost self-evident, such that when actually justifying the centrality of moral cultivation to the curriculum, he only murkily intones that, should proper moral training be lacking, “can we not expect the future trouble that awaits us?”<sup>97</sup> At the same time, Zhuang felt that proper moral education clearly *was* lacking in the new system of public schools. In fact, from a survey of the one hundred or so primary schools in Nanjing and Jiangsu, Zhuang ultimately finds none that train moral character to his liking. He complains that the standards for students in the new educational system remain too lax, and lacking a strong moral education curriculum, “esteemed schools are denounced by society, and sons or brothers who care about themselves refuse to enter these schools.”<sup>98</sup> Thus, in Zhuang’s estimation, the people

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<sup>95</sup> For local school administration, see “On Local Public Funding of Education” in JYZZ 1.7: 83-96. For teacher training facilities see “On Primary Education” in JYZZ 1.2: 24-25. See also “Lun ge difang yi she jiaoyu huiyi 论各地方宜设教育会议” [Every locality should establish an Educational Association] in JYZZ 1.11: 131-135.

<sup>96</sup>JYZZ 1.22: 23.

<sup>97</sup> JYZZ 1.2: 22

<sup>98</sup> JYZZ 1.2: 23.



themselves perceived education to be synonymous with moral instruction, and any school lacking proper moral cultivation would not merely doom its students, but would have no hope of attracting students in the first place.<sup>99</sup>

Although Zhuang Yu's basic focus on moral cultivation and primary school standards reflects a degree of continuity with the Ministry's proposals, his disappointment with the current moral curriculum represents a subtle but profound shift away from the Confucian literary content favored by the Qing administration's cultural conservatives. Rather than reiterate his support for the timeless values of the Confucian classics, Zhuang himself contextualized moral cultivation according to fundamentally new standards that stressed practice and engagement over textual knowledge. Zhuang condemns the overly bookish nature that previously characterized moral cultivation within the examination system, and complains that when teachers emphasize moral cultivation "following the line of the book," then "students are unable to put this into practice and forget the material as soon as it is taught to them."<sup>100</sup> In an article on "The Absurdity of Reading the Classics in Primary School," Zhuang makes his disapproval of classical texts like *The Essential Reader for Guomin* even more explicit and argues that doing away with the classical canon is an essential precondition to establishing the right kind of moral cultivation for

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<sup>99</sup> There was at this time no formally enforced mandate to send one's children to school, and many newly established schools had to compete with one another in order to attract students. This being the case, the fact that very few schools placed moral cultivation at the front of their curricula suggests that the promise of a moral education was not quite as useful in attracting students as Zhuang might think, otherwise it may have been featured more prominently by schools competing for students.

<sup>100</sup> JYZZ 1.2: 22. Also, one should note that Zhuang Yu had a commercial interest in criticizing the quality of textbooks used by many local schools, as he himself held a position at the Shanghai Commercial Press, which by this time was beginning to publish a wide variety of textbooks on moral cultivation, history, geography, etc., all of which claim to offer more current and "practical" information than the classical primers used to prepare for the examinations. Wang Jianjun 王建军, *Zhongguo jindai jiaokeshu fazhan yanjiu* 中国近代教科书发展研究 [Research on the development of modern Chinese textbooks] (Guangzhou: Guangdong jiaoyu chubanshe 广东教育出版社, 1996), 117.

*guomin*.<sup>101</sup> In place of the old curriculum, Zhuang advocated for the incorporation of moral standards into a new system of “pragmatic education” (*shiyong jiaoyu* 实用教育).<sup>102</sup> As early as 1913, Zhuang Yu wrote an article entitled “Adopt Pragmatism,” which stressed the need to adopt moral cultivation as a subset of necessary, everyday skills for *guomin* rather than simply a means of creating an ethically unified community.<sup>103</sup> For Zhuang, then, *guomin* did not simply represent an expansion of the moral community previously sustained by the classical curriculum, but a genuinely new aspirational standard for all Chinese—one defined not by knowledge of moral values but by practice of moral behavior.<sup>104</sup>

Zhuang Yu’s complex relationship with the values and methods of the former examination system is also reflected in another one of his educational goals: the targeted abolishment of the traditional school structure, and the reduction of traditional private schools (*sishu*) in particular. Zhuang criticized the civil service examinations as being devoid of any real educational content and characterizes the *sishu* as a “malady” whose low tuition rates and “simple pedagogy” created an unfortunate trend whereby teachers were “unable to resist those students who backslide from [new, public] schools into *sishu*.”<sup>105</sup> Yet even as Zhuang held that

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<sup>101</sup> JYZZ 1.4: 58-62 and JYZZ 1.5: 67-70.

<sup>102</sup> Curran, *Educational Reform in Republican China*, 365, 372-377. Zhuang eventually played a leading role in founding the Vocational Education (*zhiye jiaoyu* 职业教育) movement alongside Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 (1878-1965). The Pragmatic and Vocational Education movements were inspired in part by American and European utilitarian educational thinkers and proponents of life education, most notably Herbert Spencer. For a more detailed discussion of the intellectual antecedents of these movements in China, see Huang Yanpei, *Xuexiao jiaoyu caiyong shiyong zhuyi zhi shangque* 学校教育采用实用主义之商榷 [A discussion of the adoption of pragmatism in school education] in JYZZ 5.7 (1913): 59.

<sup>103</sup> JYZZ 5.7: 88.

<sup>104</sup> This focus on behavior and action is also echoed in Zhuang Yu’s strong endorsement of physical education programs. Zhuang began his career as a member of the Physical Education Society, and during his time on the editorial board of *Jiaoyu zazhi*, the magazine frequently published photographs of model school students engaged in physically active poses. For a typical class photograph of students engaged in physical activity, see “Shanghai Zhongguo ticao xuexiao ji xi chunji yundonghui cuoying 上海中国体操学校己西春季运动会摄影” [A portrait of the Shanghai Chinese Gymnastics School’s spring sports meet] in JYZZ 1.6.

<sup>105</sup> JYZZ 1.2: 23.

the perpetuation of the examination system stymied efforts to establish a new educational order (and a new type of Chinese political subject), he seemed to recognize the factors that contributed to its continuing popularity. Several of his policy proposals, such as the creation of local testing centers to reward primary school students who performed well under the new curriculum, were designed specifically to replicate the reward system of the civil service examinations and thus to woo students (and their parents) away from the *sishu*.<sup>106</sup> In simultaneously stressing the need to overcome the shortcomings of the traditional school system and appealing to the literati elite who had benefited most directly from that system, Zhuang Yu reveals several key assumptions about the role of the elite in the education system and the relationship between education and *guomin*. Although he clearly wanted to expand and popularize (*puji* 普及) education, Zhuang was especially concerned with targeting those who currently enrolled their children in the private school system, the majority of whom would have already participated to some degree in the elite society engendered by the examinations. In this sense, his efforts are not so much an expansion of the whole education system as an effort to get its current participants, the literati, to adopt a new educational structure, thereby transforming themselves into *guomin*.<sup>107</sup> This line of thinking

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<sup>106</sup> Under Zhuang's plan, local educational leaders would create a countywide test, to be held in a public space, in which all of the students from both public schools and private schools would compete, but the content of which would reflect the new curricula provided by the public schools. Zhuang argued that those who performed best on the test should be given rewards in the hope that the prestige granted to the public school students would be enough to sway other families to send their children to the new school. In many ways, this system of testing and rewarding the top students was merely an imitation of the civil service examinations that Zhuang hated so much, only with fewer real material benefits for those who took the test (JYZZ 1.2: 24).

<sup>107</sup> Again, it is worth reminding the reader that while China's modern schools were considered "public" by virtue of the fact that they were conducted outside of the home and conformed to certain curricular standards dictated by the central government, they still charged exceedingly high tuition rates, such that only the wealthiest families could actually afford to send their children there. Zhuang Yu himself was not ignorant of this issue. He often acknowledged the financial inaccessibility of the new schools, even as he proposed regulations that inevitably drove up tuition prices. He called on the Qing central government to send more money on local schools and alleviate the financial burden on local governments and new school students, often to no avail (See, for example, JYZZ 1.2: 21). Nevertheless, the schools depicted in the photographs at the front of *Jiaoyu zazhi* are exactly this type of new "public" school—they are located in Suzhou, Nanjing, and other wealthy urban areas, and the quality of their facilities reflects the typically high tuition rates they charged to the elite students they served.

retains the notion upheld by the civil service examinations that the literati elite formed the center of the Chinese national subject; it also assumes that their participation in the new system would serve as the primary means by which new schools could broaden their appeal. In reasserting the centrality of the literate class to which he himself belonged, Zhuang furthered the paternalistic notion that new public schools were responsible for creating a conception of *guomin* primarily among the elite, who could then spread it to the masses of Qing subjects.

With regards to issues of curricular standards and the intended participants in *guomin* education, fellow *Review* contributor Lu Erkui presents a stark contrast to Zhuang Yu. Lu, a proponent of “simple and easy” education, argued that when it comes to educational content, “if you try to popularize education by first increasing its level [of difficulty and sophistication], then this plan will be stifled.” When speaking of the struggling people that make up the majority of the population, Lu refers to them specifically as “fellow countrymen (*tong guoren* 同国人)” and wonders, “are we really going to burden them by requiring that they receive five or six years of education?”<sup>108</sup> In this latter sense, Lu was openly critical of the many new standards put in place by the Ministry of Education, and although his support for “simple and easy” education adopted language from the Ministry’s own literacy education textbook, Lu and his allies actually went much farther in prioritizing the accessibility of basic literacy education.<sup>109</sup> A postscript to Lu’s original article on “Simple and Easy Literacy,” likely written by the magazine’s first editor-in-chief Lufei Kui 陆费逵 (1886-1941), states that reformers should simplify education much more than even the most basic edition of *The Simple and Easy Literacy Reader*, teaching only a few

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<sup>108</sup> JYZZ 1.5: 63-64. To clarify, Lu is not arguing that education itself is burdensome, only that five or six years is too long of a time period for most Qing subjects to devote to it.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 66.

hundred of the most useful characters in order to appeal to the broadest possible audience.<sup>110</sup>

Unlike the editors of the Ministry's literacy reader, and in contrast with the Qing *Principles of Constitution*, Lu and his allies also felt strongly that literacy education should be based on mastery of the vernacular language rather than classical texts. Jiang Weiqiao 蒋维乔 (1873-1958), the head of the school textbook department of the Shanghai Commercial Press, wrote a series of articles advocating that "the national language" (*guowen* 国文), not classical language (*wenyan* 文言), be made the primary language for textbook instruction in all schools.<sup>111</sup> Lu and his allies did not deny the importance of literacy; in fact, they strongly believed that it was a prerequisite to constitutional government. They were, however, willing to rethink the contents of literacy training so that it might aid the broadest possible number of *guomin*.<sup>112</sup>

To this end, the proponents of "simple and easy" education in *The Educational Review* were strongly committed to ensuring that "education for *guomin*" included a broad cross-section of the population. They called for the expansion of public lecturing campaigns, night schools, half-day schools, and specialized literacy training centers, which were often cheaper and easier to staff than traditional schools, but could reach a much broader population.<sup>113</sup> After all, in Lu's words, "popularizing education means spreading it to the people of the entire country, not just

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid, 67.

<sup>111</sup> JYZZ 1.3: 37-40. As head of the school textbook department at the Shanghai Commercial Press, Jiang Weiqiao also had a vested interest in producing new sets of textbooks to be distributed to schools (Bailey, *Reform the People*, 67). Jiang would later serve in the 1912 Ministry of Education and played a key role in the production of modern, vernacular textbooks that "disseminated, standardized, and legitimated a modern, compound lexicon" that increased national unity while making textbooks more accessible to the masses. See Robert Culp, "Teaching Baihua: Textbook Publishing and the Production of Vernacular Language and a New Literary Canon in Early Twentieth-Century China," *Twentieth-Century China* 43.1 (2008), 4-41.

<sup>112</sup> For Lu's assertion that literacy was a prerequisite to constitutional governance, see JYZZ 1:5, 66.

<sup>113</sup> In a later issue of the journal, reformer Zhou Jiachun 周家纯 argues that night schools in particular are vitally important to the nation (*guojia* 国家) because they grant opportunities to those otherwise denied an education. Again, this reflects a change in educational participants rather than curricular content. (JYZZ 1.11: 139). For Lu's advocacy of public lecturing, see "Lun puji jiaoyu yi xian zhuzong xuanjiang 论普及教育宜先注重宣讲" [Popular education should focus first on public lecturing] in JYZZ 1.1: 4.

those who are of school age.”<sup>114</sup> Similarly, while *The Essential Reader for Guomin* and the anti-*sishu* programs largely sought to redefine the content of “education for *guomin*” for elite society, the proponents of “simple and easy” education were much more explicit in targeting those who had previously been too poor to enter the education system. Lu Erkui repeatedly mentions these lower classes by name, lamenting that “farmers, workers, and merchants were left out of the traditional education system,” and asks, “will the ignorant masses in the countryside, the errand boys, and menial servants be counted as part of the country?”<sup>115</sup> When farmers appear in an article by Zhuang Yu, they do so as objects of mockery from unruly school students, and they remain firmly outside the educational sphere.<sup>116</sup> Although Lu ultimately does not invoke the idea of *guomin* any more or less than the various other contributors to *The Review*, he consistently defines the term in ways that challenge other reformers to support projects that expand the total number of educated people, regardless of age or status. Such a concern reveals that, for Lu, the goal of popular education was not to train the Chinese people to *become* a community of *guomin* through educational ventures, but rather to fulfill the state’s obligation to extend education to a community of *guomin* that already existed under the proposed Qing constitution.

The debate on how best to popularize education in the pages of *The Educational Review* far exceeded the scope preferred by the Ministry of Education, as almost all contributors were fully prepared to leave behind the classical curriculum favored by Zhang Zhidong and his conservative allies. At the same time, the debate between Zhuang Yu and Lu Erkui also reflects an externalization of the same tensions underlying the Ministry’s efforts to create textbooks suitable for a new system of *guomin* education. At the heart of the debate was the question of

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<sup>114</sup> JYZZ 1.1: 1.

<sup>115</sup> JYZZ 1.1: 2 and JYZZ 1.5: 64.

<sup>116</sup> JYZZ 1.2: 22.

whether education for *guomin* should define an aspirational standard for a future Chinese national subject or popularize education among an already extant (and recently constitutionally recognized) political community. For Zhuang Yu and the supporters of standardizing primary school, *guomin* education meant “teaching citizenship,” whereby citizenship constituted a set of new behaviors and practices that did not yet exist among the Chinese people, but which were required in order for them to fulfill their duties to the modern state. For Lu Erkui and the advocates of “Simple and Easy Literacy,” *guomin* education meant “teaching citizens,” whereby citizens constituted a group of people who already existed and whose membership in the sociopolitical category *guomin* was not determined by any particular educational achievement, but instead was presumed to derive from their status as members of a constitutional monarchy. These competing conceptions of citizenship were not themselves the products of deeply thought-out articulations of what it meant to be a citizen, but rather emerged from the ways in which reformers understood China’s concrete educational problems, including the lack of standardized textbooks, the abundance of private academies, the cost of education, and the burden of illiteracy.

Despite these key differences in the understanding of citizenship implied by these reforms, it would be a mistake to assume that the reformers themselves intended or even recognized these divisions. Though reforms that stress moral cultivation might strike the current reader as “conservative” or “elitist” because they target only those already participating in the traditional school system, all of the reforms proposed in *The Educational Review* were constitutive of a radical shift away from the political community sustained by the imperial examination system. Furthermore, all of the reformers were able to claim that the central goal of the new education system was to popularize education and establish education intended for citizens. Precisely because terms like *guomin* and *puji jiaoyu* 普及教育 (“popular education”)

were new signifiers for concepts that had yet to be firmly established, these neologisms themselves were able to elide or otherwise obscure many of the key differences present among reformers. Even more importantly, the conceptual ambiguity of the term *guomin* even allowed reformers to embrace contradictory understandings of citizenship within individual education policies. To illustrate the degree to which *guomin* was sufficiently ambiguous as to contain multiple competing notions of citizenship, we turn to a subject ignored by both Zhuang Yu and Lu Erkui: women's education.

Previous Qing law forbade women from participating in the civil service examinations, and thus the establishment of several government-run girls' schools in the late 1890s represented a de facto expansion of those able to participate in education.<sup>117</sup> Despite tentative steps to incorporate women into the educational system—particularly following the promulgation of regulations for women's schools by the Qing government in 1907—women still remained largely absent from elite discourse on education.<sup>118</sup> Although China's leading education journal occasionally featured photographs of girls' school classes, women were consistently left out of the textual discussion of many reformers. When Zhuang Yu refers to the younger generation on whom he pins his own hopes for the future of the Chinese nation, he consistently uses the term *zidi* 子弟, literally meaning “sons and younger brothers.”<sup>119</sup> While one cannot take the usage of this common word, which also appears in official Ministry regulations, to be a conscious

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<sup>117</sup> Du Xueyuan 杜学元, *Zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu tongshi* 中国女子教育通史 [A comprehensive history of Chinese Women's Education] (Guiyang Shi: Guizhou jiaoyu chubanshe, 1995), 308-309.

<sup>118</sup> In the original educational regulations (drafted by Zhang Zhidong) established in 1903, there was no specific mention of women's education. A special section on the regulation of girls' schools was added to the Qing educational regulations in 1907, though it was still focused almost entirely on normal schools that trained women to become teachers both in and outside the home (Su Yunfeng, *Zhongguo xin jiaoyu*, 99). Still, 1907 was the year in which the Qing Ministry of Education formally integrated women's education into the rest of the education track and began to take control over locally run women's schools to enforce new curriculum standards as they had done for men several years earlier (Du Xueyuan, *Zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu tongshi*, 338).

<sup>119</sup> This usage of *zidi* can be found throughout Zhuang's article on primary education in JYZZ 1.2: 19-26.



decision to establish men as the exclusive participants in the new education system, it is nonetheless casually and linguistically exclusive of women, and this gendered appellation is supported by an absence of women elsewhere in Zhuang's writing. Even though Lu Erkui mentions the "wives and children (*nu 孥*)" of servants and messengers as objects of previous educational discrimination, he similarly does not give women an independent status as participants in "simple and easy" education.<sup>120</sup>

To the degree that women's schools continued to grow during the first decade of the twentieth century, the nature and content of their education was still geared towards pedagogical training designed to help women become better educators for their (male) children. This focus on pedagogical training situated women as both students and teachers within the education system, each role carrying with it a competing implication for women's role in China's body of *guomin*. Joan Judge has fruitfully presented this question in the very same terms so central to educational discourse in *The Educational Review*: were women to be citizens, or merely mothers (and teachers) of citizens?<sup>121</sup> Indeed, these two fundamental categories reflect the basic difference in visions of *guomin* offered by Lu Erkui and Zhuang Yu—the former as a natural status for Qing subjects and the latter as a set of behaviors that must be taught.<sup>122</sup>

The sixth issue of the journal contains an article by Shen Yi 沈颐 on women's education, which criticizes the lack of attention paid to this issue by other reformers in the journal. While

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<sup>120</sup> JYZZ 1.5: 64.

<sup>121</sup> Joan Judge, "Citizens or Mothers of Citizens?: Gender and the Meaning of Modern Chinese Citizenship," in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, ed. Merle Goldman and Elizabeth Perry (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 23-43.

<sup>122</sup> Feminist historians and political scientists have been at the forefront of developing better theoretical frameworks for discussing citizenship and its gendered dimensions. For useful explorations of the differences between citizenship as a status and practice/experience (with a particular focus on the place of women), see Ruth Lister, *Citizenship: Feminist Perspectives* (1997. Reprint, Washington Square, NY: New York University Press, 2003) and Linda Kerber, "The Meanings of Citizenship," *The Journal of American History* 84.3 (Dec. 1997): 833-854.

other contributors argued over the merits of moral cultivation or basic literacy, Shen Yi noted that, “[w]hile today we allow the entire nation’s men to receive an education, both the knowledge *and* moral character of women has not been raised from what it was before.”<sup>123</sup> Indeed the very fact that there was an article specifically addressing “Girls’ Elementary Education” indicates that the students of the new education were assumed to be male, and thus the editors of the journal regarded the issue of girls’ education as involving separate and distinct goals from the task of “educating *guomin*.” Because women could represent an expansion of the participants targeted by “education for *guomin*” as well as a pedagogical tool by which the future generation of Chinese people might become modern citizens, women’s education forms an important arena in which differing visions of citizenship rested uneasily alongside one another.

In justifying women’s education, Shen tellingly argues that, “Within a nation (*guo*), men and women each form half of the population, and are similarly represented in the census registration of the countryside.”<sup>124</sup> In this sense he is employing the same rhetorical strategy as Lu Erkui and takes a similar view of *guomin* as including all of those who are registered by the state, assuming that women’s citizenship, like the community of Chinese *guomin* more generally, is self-evident. In fact, by the final years of the Qing state this conceptualization of women’s citizenship was not entirely new. During the 1898 reform period following the Sino-Japanese War, female reporter Lu Cui 卢翠 argued that women should be allowed to participate in the civil service examinations so that they might be able to submit memorials to the emperor and participate in government. Although this argument does not specifically invoke *guomin*, it fundamentally links women’s participation in education with a broader assertion about women’s political participation. Furthermore, Lu Cui’s justification that “women are also called ‘the

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<sup>123</sup> JYZZ 1.6: 71. Emphasis mine.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

people” prefigures Shen Yi’s own claims about women’s inclusion as *guomin*.<sup>125</sup> From this context it would follow that women of all ages should be able to participate in “education for *guomin*” on the grounds that they are also subjects of the Qing empire, and that the new education system has a responsibility to extend education to them just as it has to the farmers and workers highlighted by Lu Erkui. Shen complains that as long as the new education system only focuses on men’s education and “lets [women] rely on vulgarities, [believing that] their forte lies in being ignorant,” then there will be no way for Chinese society to advance.<sup>126</sup>

Despite using an inclusive definition of *guomin* to justify the need for women’s education in its opening lines, the article quickly reverts to standard images of women as mothers and wives of citizens rather than as citizens themselves. When Shen Yi outlines the effects of women being denied an education, he claims, “This has a direct effect on the family, and an indirect effect on society.”<sup>127</sup> The conclusion of the article makes the point more explicit: “Today’s young girls will someday all become someone’s wife and someone’s mother. If we want them to influence society and pass on customs, then we must popularize education.”<sup>128</sup> In elaborating on this claim, Shen argues that women are important to the educational system precisely because early childhood education, which takes place in the home, is a determining factor in the success of future (male) school students.<sup>129</sup> Ultimately, the article’s focus on women’s education

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<sup>125</sup> Du Xueyuan, *Zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu tongshi*, 305. Lu Cui’s full quote is “皆得上书,夫民也者,男谓之民,女亦谓之民也 [All should submit memorials to the emperor, and [all] are the people; men are called ‘the people,’ women are also called ‘the people’].” Also like Shen Yi, Lu Cui drew inspiration from overseas policies on women’s education, specifically Japan’s. Significantly, the Japanese women’s schools and co-ed schools that Shen Yi admires are not exclusively pedagogical training institutions, reinforcing Shen’s belief that women should be incorporated into education not just as teachers of boys, but also as students themselves.

<sup>126</sup> JYZZ 1:6, 72-73.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 71.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 72.

primarily in the context of elementary schools and normal schools mirrors the Qing Ministry of Education's focus on women as instructors of children, both inside and outside the home.<sup>130</sup>

This conception of women seemingly deems them important to the nationalist project only insofar as they contribute to the strengthening of educational achievement among the male population. This notion of *guomin*, whereby the Qing's male subjects are to be measured by the quality of their female-led instruction, suggests the notion of emergent/aspirational citizenship espoused by Zhuang Yu. Because the burden of transforming Qing subjects into modern *guomin* rested with the contents of education itself, Zhuang Yu placed particular emphasis on pedagogical instruction, and Shen Yi's focus on this topic seems to confirm the basic notion that women have a role to play in creating *guomin* rather than being (or becoming) *guomin* themselves. That a single article can simultaneously define new types of students in such remarkably different ways—both as representatives of a pre-existing body of *guomin* and as essential tools for constructing a community of *guomin* that does not yet exist—speaks to the way by which late Qing concepts of *guomin*, “the people,” and “popular education” came to define many different conceptions of citizenship all at once.

### **Conclusion: *Guomin* Education in the Early Republic**

The 1911 Revolution, which resulted in the formal abdication of the Qing government and the establishment of a new constitutional republic on January 1, 1912, forced a re-evaluation of the terms by which individual actors connected to and conceived of the Chinese state. Just as administrators, reformers, and teachers had spent the previous half-decade trying to remake Qing

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<sup>130</sup> Shen Yi's article specifically requests increased government funding for the establishment of women's normal schools (*nüzi shifan* 女子师范), which were at this time a central feature of the Qing government's efforts to expand women's education. Historian Du Xueyuan heavily criticizes this focus on women's roles in “assisting their husbands and educating their children” as representing the continuing patriarchal nature of the early Republican education system (Du Xueyuan, *Zhongguo nüzi jiaoyu tongshi*, 346).

subjects into *guomin*—literally, people of the nation—the 1911 revolutionaries had been successful, at least nominally, in remaking the Qing dynastic empire into a *Minguo* 民国—literally, a nation of the people. Such a sweeping political change carried immediate implications for how individual Chinese actors performed “citizenship.” As Henrietta Harrison has shown, the first years of the Republic witnessed the proliferation of many new public rituals through which individuals expressed new political identities, ranging from the celebration of public holidays to everyday behaviors such as shaking hands in greeting, wearing Western clothing, cutting one’s queue, or unbinding one’s feet.<sup>131</sup> Such behaviors allowed elite and urban individuals to inhabit both new standards of Chinese-ness and new standards of self-consciously cosmopolitan modernity, reflecting the extent to which the cultural practice of citizenship was at least partially embedded in the categories produced by colonial modernity in China. More recently, David Strand has argued that in only a few years after the fall of the Qing dynasty, republicanism became entrenched as “a political way of life in which citizens confronted leaders and each other face-to-face in a stance familiar to republics worldwide.”<sup>132</sup> Yet while many groups and individuals began to act, dress, and behave like the citizens of other (Western) republics, the profusion of these particular cultural and political practices among a small band of the urban elite did little to clarify the meaning of *guomin* as a legal signifier, social group, national body, or object of governance. Similarly, they did little to define the broader relationship between the people (*guomin*) and the state (*Minguo*) in social services and institutions like education.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of The Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>132</sup> David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 1-2.

<sup>133</sup> Contra Harrison and Strand, several historians have argued that the 1911 Revolution did not mark a significant shift in China’s social, political, or intellectual landscape, at least not in comparison to the large cultural and political shifts already well underway in the late Qing. Peter Zarrow, for example, argues that many of the political crises that afflicted the early Republic (particularly vis-à-vis the conception of the Chinese state) reflect a continuation of the

Indeed, in education reform, one finds that the 1911 Revolution did not resolve the tensions at the heart of popular education, as many of the same debates that characterized late Qing discussions of “education for *guomin*” re-emerged in the earliest educational ventures of the Republican government under Yuan Shikai. First of all, the architects of China’s education system could not decide the extent to which education for citizens should derive from classical learning. Education would clearly no longer strive to inculcate among its students a “devotion to the monarchy,” but the Republic’s central administrators were reluctant to abandon the veneration of Confucian texts even as they increased efforts to make education more universal. While the Provisional Constitution of 1912 made no mention of Confucianism, the draft constitution of 1913 proclaimed that “in the education of *guomin*, Confucianism (*Kongzi zhi dao* 孔子之道) is the basis of moral training.”<sup>134</sup> Early Republican statesman Tang Hualong 汤华龙 (1874-1918), who served as chief Minister of Education from 1914 to 1915, practically quoted the then deceased Zhang Zhidong when he argued that school curricula must focus on the Confucian classics in order to counteract “the confusing contentions of many different schools” and establish uniform national character (*guomin xing* 国民性).<sup>135</sup> At the same time, private

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struggles between reformers and revolutionaries in the late Qing. See Zarrow, *After Empire*, 212. Arguing from the perspective of class conflict, Joseph Esherick similarly argues that the 1911 Revolution was one in which the actual conditions of the Chinese “masses” changed very little, despite the victories achieved by urban reformist elites. See Joseph Esherick, *Reform and revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998). While the present study argues against the overly monotone depiction of urban elites, Esherick’s study nevertheless indicates the limits of change occasioned by the fall of the Qing state.

<sup>134</sup> Quoted in Zarrow, *After Empire*, 252. For the original, see “Zhonghua minguo xianfa an 中华民国宪法安” [The draft constitution of the Republic of China] (section 3, article 19), in Zhang Yaozeng 张耀曾 and Cen Dezhang 岑德彰, eds. *Zhonghua minguo xianfa shiliao* 中华民国宪法史料 [Historical data on the constitution of the Republic of China] (Taipei: Wen hai chubanshe, 1981).

<sup>135</sup> Tang Hualong 汤华龙, “Chi jing neiwai ge xuexiao zhong xiao xue xiushen ji guowen jiaokeshu caiqu jingxun wu yi kongzhi zhi yan wei zhigui wen 飭京内外各学校中小学修身及国文教科书采取经训务孔子之言为旨归文” [An order that moral cultivation and national language textbooks in schools around the capital adopt classical teachings and treat the language of Confucius as the most important] in *Jiaoyu gongbao* 教育公报 1 (1914); reprinted in Qu Xingui 瞿鑫圭 and Tong Fuyong 童富勇, eds., *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyushi ziliao huibian: jiaoyu*

publishing companies continued to marshal their capital against difficult classical texts. The already successful Shanghai Commercial Press was swiftly joined by other presses such as the Zhonghua Book Company (*Zhonghua shuju* 中华书局) founded by *Educational Review* editor Lufei Kui, and they competed against one another to produce popular “Republican textbooks” explicitly conceived and marketed to suit the new era.<sup>136</sup> Thus, while the new Republican Ministry of Education continued to envision a moral community of *guomin* defined by adherence to Confucian virtues, many local schools adopted textbooks that promised the creation of a new intellectual community of *guomin* united in their knowledge of political and global affairs.

In some ways, Zhuang Yu’s belief that standardized primary school should transform a new generation of young students into modern *guomin* appeared to become the new orthodoxy of the public education system. In 1915, the Ministry of Education promulgated new regulations dubbing all primary schools “*guomin* schools” (*guomin xuexiao* 国民学校), and requiring that they teach young children “the foundation of *guomin* morality and the ordinary knowledge and skills required for a *guomin* lifestyle.”<sup>137</sup> That *guomin* education became virtually synonymous

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sixiang 中国近代教育史资料汇编: 教育思想 [A collection of modern Chinese education history materials: educational thought] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2006), 896-898.

<sup>136</sup> Culp, *Articulating Citizenship*, 44. Drawing from Dai Ren’s history of the Shanghai Commercial Press, Culp estimates that the Commercial Press and the Zhonghua book company produced close to 15 million volumes of textbooks per year, and that the “Republican Textbook” series (*gongheguo jiaokeshu* 共和国教科书) formed the core of their business.

<sup>137</sup> “Jiaoyu bu gongbu guomin xuexiao ling 教育部公布国民学校令” [The Ministry of Education public decree on *guomin* schools] 1915; reprinted in Zhongguo di’er lishi dang’anguan, ed., *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang’an ziliao huibian* 中华民国史档案资料汇编 [A collection of archival materials from Republican China] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 460-466. Detailed regulations for these schools established direct links between each individual school subject and students’ future status as *guomin*. For example, study of the Confucian classics should not only edify children regarding the “correct principles of sages,” but should also “arouse the patriotic spirit of the people,” while courses on arithmetic and handicrafts aimed to “cultivate habits of industriousness.” Even greater emphasis was placed on physical education, which would “strengthen their constitution [and] enliven their spirit while simultaneously cultivating the habits of observing the law and cooperating in teams.” For a detailed explanation of how each of these subjects contributed to knowledge required of *guomin*, see the revised detailed regulations on *guomin* schools issued on January 8, 1916 and reprinted in *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang’an ziliao huibian*, 478-492.

with primary school training reflects Zhuang Yu's fundamental belief that *guomin* constituted a new standard of moral and physical fitness that had yet to be achieved. At the same time, the Republican government also announced the founding of a new department of "social education" (*shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育), which helped to establish "open-air schools" (*lutian xuexiao* 露天学校), public lectures, common libraries (*tongsu tushuguan* 通俗图书馆), and other so-called "popular education" (*tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育) initiatives designed to educate the entire nation about "the rights and duties of *guomin*, various practical and martial skills, and especially the morals of public citizens (*gongmin* 公民)."<sup>138</sup> These programs clearly built upon the "simple and easy" literacy schools first established in the provinces and endorsed by Lu Erkui. And even as they too sought to establish a particular moral and behavioral standard, they used new language (*gongmin*) to distinguish this standard from a broad national body that inherited certain rights and duties under the new Republic.

Thus, even as "*guomin jiaoyu*" became more closely associated with moral cultivation, civic training, and primary schooling, the social category *guomin* itself remained an unstable signifier. Whereas advocates of fixed regulations, compulsory schooling, and a continued focus on Confucian learning envisioned a nation-state that could be established only after the proper development of its people into modern citizens, the many new social education programs, like the "simple and easy" literacy initiatives before them, spoke to a community of *guomin* that was already self-evident, and to the belief that the government had an obligation to provide these citizens with accessible education. Furthermore, to whatever extent shared understandings of

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<sup>138</sup> As early as January 1912, the weeks-old Republican Ministry of Education sent a telegram to every provincial governor's office instructing them to begin setting up these sorts of "social education" programs. See, for example, "Jiaoyu bu tongdian ge sheng dudufu chouban shehui jiaoyu 教育部通电各省都督府筹办社会教育" [Telegram from the Ministry of Education to the governor's office of each province regarding arrangements for social education], in JYZZ 3.10 (1912); reprinted in PTJY, 987.



*guomin* did exist in the imaginations of late Qing and early Republican education reformers, the fact remains that many of these understandings of citizenship were likely not shared by the main participants in popular education: the students. Due to the high cost of new facilities, the unfamiliarity of the curriculum, the consistent attraction of private academies, and, increasingly, military disruptions from local warlords, many of the so-called *guomin* education projects of the late Qing and early Republican period were practical failures.<sup>139</sup> While the new school system was able to claim some small success in producing nationally-minded, politically active young students, predominantly in institutions of higher learning in urban centers like Shanghai and Nanjing, the fact remained that most early twentieth-century strategies for spreading education were not welcomed with reciprocal excitement.<sup>140</sup>

That such a large portion of the education reform community remained committed to an aspirational standard of *guomin* despite the obvious failures of specific “*guomin* education”

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<sup>139</sup> Indeed, *guomin* education was, from the outset, beset by a host of financial, administrative, and socio-cultural obstacles. Unlike traditional *sishu*, which were often located in the home, the new school system required new buildings, facilities, and teaching materials that forced local governments to draw money away from religious processions and festivals to fund new schools. Many local governments were often forced to take the unpopular step of appropriating temples and other public structures in order to house the new schools necessitated by Qing and Republican regulations. For a first hand account of this, see JYZZ 1.2: 21. Similarly, while the aura and prestige associated with a mastery of the content of the civil service examinations endured, the thought of sending one's children to a public school building to learn an unfamiliar curriculum with strangers was simply not appealing to many parents in the first decades of the twentieth century. The appropriation of religious buildings and festival funding, combined with skepticism of the new curriculum, made many new *guomin* schools extremely unpopular and in some cases even sparked violent resistance within certain peasant communities. For a series of interesting accounts of what it was like to attend a public school for the first time, as remembered by some of the foremost intellectuals of the Republican period, see Tzi-ke Hon and Robert J Culp, eds., *The Politics of Historical Production*, 1-3. Although the sample represents a diversity of opinions, it is clear that many found the schools to be frightening and bewildering places. For examples of local resistance to the new schools, including a print of peasants actually ransacking one of the new school buildings, see Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China*, 100-103.

<sup>140</sup> Sang Bing has convincingly argued that, whatever their other failures, the new public schools of the late Qing and early Republican period did help to produce “students” as a new, distinct social category, which existed between the intellectual class and the common people, rather than as a subset of the common people themselves. The absence of effective forms of mass media in early twentieth-century China meant that these students were often the first to see and hear new dramas, attend revolutionary lectures and speeches, and pass this information on to their friends and family. In Sang's estimation, studies that see the May Fourth Movement as the first instance of student activism often overlook the decisive role played by student activist groups a decade earlier. See Sang, *Wan Qing xuetaang xuesheng*, 376-378, 392.

projects reflects the increasing role played by colonial discourses in determining modalities of modern citizenship. In general, China's educational leaders were more eager to articulate conceptions of *guomin* that resonated with increasingly prescriptive international norms of what a *citizen*, *citoyen*, or *kokumin* should be than they were to articulate notions of *guomin* that resonated with the broad community of farmers, workers, and women previously barred from participation in the examination system. Those reformers who were interested in educating these so-called "common people" increasingly began to seek out new conceptual categories for defining popular education, including *pingmin jiaoyu* 平民教育 (commoners' education) and later *minzhong jiaoyu* 民众教育 (mass education), each of which nevertheless contributed to the boundaries within which students, teachers, and reformers understood the meaning of *guomin*. While understandings of citizenship and its relationship to education certainly narrowed over the next few decades, the intense debates within the Qing and Republican Ministries of Education and on the pages of *The Educational Review* provide us an example of the ways in which the first decade of the twentieth century marked a moment of historical possibility for a citizenry that had not yet been truly defined. Within this particular debate, *guomin* remained a fundamentally unstable category whose internal tension manifested itself in the disjuncture between and within specific education reform projects. Although reformers like Liang Qichao worked persistently to define the guiding principles of *guomin* that would shape educational policy in the waning years of the Qing, he was ultimately unsuccessful. It was not, after all, any singular definition of citizenship that gave new meaning to the scope and intent of Chinese education; rather, it was precisely the practical dimensions of individual reform projects that gave new meaning to *guomin*.

## CHAPTER THREE

### TEACHING COMMONERS: STUDENT GROUPS, EDUCATIONAL SOCIETIES, AND THE ADVENT OF *PINGMIN* EDUCATION IN THE MAY FOURTH ERA, 1917-1925

By 1919, both the Republic (*minguo* 民国) and a national system of “citizen schools” (*guomin xuexiao* 国民学校) had been in place for nearly a decade, yet both were largely considered failures. Although the 1911 Revolution had established several important republican political institutions, including a parliament, a provisional constitution, and a suite of new government ministries, such trappings of republican governance were soon subsumed by factional politics, corruption, and the failed imperial revival of Yuan Shikai.<sup>1</sup> The professors and students who spearheaded the May Fourth Movement frequently insisted that China was not in fact a true *minguo* because it lacked any form of popular government or civic society.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the push for *guomin* education had successfully led to the establishment of thousands of new schools and many more newly trained *guomin* education teachers, but these efforts failed to produce any kind of broad change in China’s educational landscape. Indeed,

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<sup>1</sup> For a general overview of the challenges faced by the early Republican government, see James Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949* (New York: Free Press, 1975).

<sup>2</sup> Recent scholarship from David Strand has suggested that the revolution of 1911 did, in fact, produce a lasting repertoire of republican political practices, not in the realm of institutions but rather in the arena of everyday practice. In particular, Strand highlights the shift in political posture away from presumed hierarchy and toward face-to-face interactions between political parties and between political leaders and ordinary citizens. Such new republican political practices were typified by speech making, political debates, and even more routine meetings and assemblies, all of which endured as important components of popular politics even after the ascent of more authoritarian political parties. See David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010). Despite these important changes in political practice, however, the fact remains that most activists of the May Fourth Movement perceived China as fundamentally lacking a republican political culture.

while individual *guomin* schools had successfully produced a new graduating class of modern citizens by incorporating new courses on patriotism, physical education, and social science into their curricula, the additional textbook resources and teacher training required by such schools had actually made them more expensive than traditional private academies (*sishu* 私塾) and thus exacerbated pre-existing educational inequalities throughout the country, particularly those between rural and urban areas.<sup>3</sup> Although the initial *guomin* education initiatives were largely founded on the notion that education should extend to all people in the nation and not just men of talent, the system of *guomin* schools had not been able to produce a national political body truly worthy of the name *guomin*. By the early 1920s, increasing numbers of educators began to ask themselves, “How many of the Republic of China’s *guomin* have actually received an equal education? If a great number of them still cannot even recognize one character, then can the foundation of the Republic really be stable?”<sup>4</sup>

One of the central themes of the broader May Fourth Movement (lasting from approximately 1915 to 1921) was that these two failures—of the Republican state on the one hand and of *guomin* education on the other—were deeply interrelated. In a 1915 article on “Patriotism and Autonomy,” one of the foremost leaders of the May Fourth Movement, Chen

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<sup>3</sup> For a broader analysis of the failures of the *guomin* education program during the first decade of the Republic, see Sally Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China: The Beginnings of the Modern Era* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983) and Thomas D Curran, *Educational Reform in Republican China: The Failure of Educators to Create a Modern Nation* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2005). Borthwick and Curran both argue that the costs associated with *guomin* education initiatives undermined the ability of reformers to popularize such schools, particularly among local political figures who failed to see the value of the new curriculum. Borthwick additionally argues that the modern curriculum of the *guomin* school, in shifting attention away from Confucian norms of filial piety and loyalty to the state, actually exacerbated the problems concerning the early Republican state’s lack of legitimacy.

<sup>4</sup> See “Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui zai jing kai chengli dahui han 中华平民教育促进会在京开成立大会函” [Letter to the opening plenary of the National Association for the Promotion of *Pingmin* Education in the capital], delivered August 1923, reprinted in Zhongguo Di’er Lishi dang’anguan, ed., *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang’anguan ziliao huibian* 中华民国史档案馆资料汇编 [A collection of Republican era Chinese historical materials] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 811. Hereafter, *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang’anguan ziliao huibian* will be abbreviated ZMDZ.

Duxiu 陈独秀 (1879-1942), argued that China was not really lacking dedicated patriots, but rather lacked those with the autonomy, self-consciousness, and education necessary to address China's specific problems. As such, those who were truly interested in "saving the nation" (*jiuguo* 救国) should withdraw from politics and devote themselves instead to education reform.<sup>5</sup> Indeed, many of the university students who occupied Tiananmen Square on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 1919 cut their political teeth organizing clubs and associations such as the Beijing University *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps, whose primary function was to expand access to education.<sup>6</sup> To varying degrees, both of these concerns arose from the specific conditions of colonial modernity in China. Not only did the ongoing threat of colonial domination posed by recent global events such as the Shandong crisis compel political reformers to hasten popular education efforts in the name of national "awakening" (*juewu* 觉悟), but the ongoing critiques that China was not yet a *Minguo* and its people were not yet *guomin* were themselves couched in the colonial contexts and translated terminology by which students and reformers came to understand what true republican citizens *should* look like.<sup>7</sup> For May Fourth reformers, the effort to expand education

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<sup>5</sup> Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 38. This article is also discussed at some length in Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 21-26.

<sup>6</sup> For two more recent accounts of the important role played by Beida students in the May Fourth Movement, see Timothy B. Weston, *The Power of Position: Beijing University, Intellectuals, and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1929* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004) and Fabio Lanza, *Behind the Gate: Inventing Students in Beijing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010). Weston's account emphasizes the continuity of May Fourth with previous eras by arguing that Beida inherited the institutional function of the Qing Taixue and experienced the pull of national politics almost since its inception, while Lanza in contrast views the political actions of May Fourth-era students as marking a more profound break with the past—establishing "students" as a political subject for the very first time. Lanza, in particular, argues that the earliest forms of student activism at Beida occurred "at a distance" from the state, and that it was only through organizing literary clubs and philanthropic endeavors that Beida students created an everyday space in which to envision themselves as overtly political actors (Lanza, *Behind the Gate*, 9).

<sup>7</sup> For a broader discussion of "colonial modernity" as an analytical framework for understanding the May Fourth period in Chinese intellectual history, see Tani Barlow, "Introduction: On 'Colonial Modernity,'" in *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia*, ed. Tani Barlow (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997), 1-20. See also the discussion of this issue in Joshua Goldstein, *Drama Kings: Players and Publics in the Re-creation of Peking Opera, 1870-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 4-8.

was part and parcel of the broader task of transforming not just individuals but the entire national body into modern political subjects.

To both expand the scope of education reform and better articulate its connection to the fate of the Chinese Republic, students needed a new language of education reform—one that retained the universality and communitarian connotations of *guomin* but also refocused attention specifically on those groups that had been denied access to the educational opportunities provided by *guomin* schools. They found the solution to this rhetorical problem in *pingmin jiaoyu* 平民教育, or “Education for Common People.” *Pingmin* 平民 itself is a transliteration of the Japanese term *heimin* 平民, which was originally used in Japanese legal terminology to refer to commoners. At the same time, *pingmin*’s political association with popular May Fourth terms like “democracy” (frequently rendered in Chinese as *pingminzhuyi* 平民主义) and “equality” (*pingdeng* 平等) allowed students who mobilized this signifier to retain an engagement with broader political projects. Popular education itself was not a novel idea. During the first decade of the Republic, countless Republican Ministers of Education, local gentry-controlled education boards, and national education organizations had made attempts to promote “popular education” (*tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育).<sup>8</sup> The novelty of calls for *pingmin jiaoyu* derived from the intersection between a broad conception of such popular education efforts and the assertion that hitherto uneducated “common people” had an important role to play in the collective task of establishing a more democratic and egalitarian society. In this latter sense, *pingmin jiaoyu* could serve as a means of redefining the scope of previous popular education initiatives, including public lectures, half-day schools, reading rooms, and adult education programs; however, in its engagement with

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<sup>8</sup> For an overview of these efforts to institute popular education (*tongsu jiaoyu*) in the years after 1912, see Paul Bailey, *Reform the People: Changing Attitudes Toward Popular Education in Early Twentieth-Century China* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1990), 185-226.

China's imagined political future, *pingmin jiaoyu* could also serve as a means of redefining the character of all Chinese education, whereby all schools would become *pingmin* schools.

The language of *pingmin* education was so successful that it quickly became the dominant means of talking about popular education reform. Early student groups in Beijing such as Beijing University *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps and the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society were swiftly joined by broader organizational efforts, such as those of recently returned student Yan Yangchu 晏阳初 (1890-1990), who drew from his own experiences studying and organizing in the United States and France to start pilot *pingmin* education programs in cities like Changsha, Yantai, Jiaying, and Hangzhou.<sup>9</sup> When American education philosopher John Dewey traveled to China to deliver a series of lectures at major Chinese universities on the subject of “The Relationship Between Democracy and Education,” his discussion of education was frequently translated and later published under the heading of *pingmin jiaoyu* or *pingminzhuyi zhi jiaoyu* (“democratic education”), further conflating education reform and the language of *pingmin*.<sup>10</sup> By August of 1923, the Chinese National Association for the Improvement of Education established a separate subcommittee for the Promotion of *Pingmin* Education and several national conferences on *pingmin* education soon followed.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Tang Maoru 汤茂如, “Pingmin jiaoyu yundong de jingguo 平民教育运动的经过” [The Development of the Commoners’ Education Movement], *Jiaoyu Zazhi* 19.9 (1927): 2. Hereafter *Jiaoyu Zazhi* will be abbreviated JYZZ.

<sup>10</sup> As the chapter will later discuss at length, a leading student journal entitled *Pingmin Jiaoyu* in Chinese and *Democracy and Education* in English published notes from many of Dewey’s lectures while he was a resident lecturer at Beijing Higher Normal School. One of Dewey’s very first lectures, delivered on May 3-4 to the Jiangsu Provincial Education Association, was published under the heading “Pingminzhuyi, pingminzhuyi de jiaoyu, pingmin jiaoyu zhuyi de banfa 平民主义, 平民主义的教育, 平民教育主义的办法” [Democracy, democratic education, and methods of democratic education-ism,” in *Xuedeng* 学灯 [Academic lamp], itself a supplement to *Shishi xinbao* 时事新报 [The China Times], *Chenbao fukan* 晨报副刊 [Supplement to the Morning Post], *Jiaoyu Chao* 教育潮 [Educational Tide], *Jiaoyubu gongbao* 教育部公报 [Bulletin of the Ministry of Education], and *Xin Jiaoyu* 新教育 [Xin Jiaoyu]. See Barry Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China: Educational Reform and Political Power in the Early Republic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977), 169. The appendices to Keenan’s work provide an exhaustive table of Chinese publications of Dewey’s lectures delivered in China (see p. 163-228).

<sup>11</sup> On the establishment of the preparatory committee for promoting *pingmin* education, see ZMDZ, 811-813.

Yet even as a new consensus emerged around *pingmin* education as the centerpiece of the popular education movement, particularly after the founding of the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education in August 1923, the term itself remained almost as contentious as the term *guomin* was before it. This chapter focuses on the various ways in which student groups, professional education societies, and national reform leaders defined and applied the concept of *pingmin* in their educational programs and activities. An examination of the publications of these organizations, along with a consideration of the activities of these groups as recalled by various members, reveals key differences in the types of education actually offered under the framework of *pingmin* education. The implicit goals behind these choices, along with the ways that group members explained the necessity of such projects, reflect a large diversity in the broader vision of a democratic society that such *pingmin* education initiatives were intended to produce.

The first student groups to effectively utilize the language of *pingmin* were, at the most basic level, responding to local concerns about their communities, and while they retained an unquestionably elitist and paternalistic attitude towards the intended objects of their educational programs, their embrace of *pingmin* discourse expressed a radical belief in equal access to the university as the ultimate goal of the modern education system. When speaking about the need to provide members of the community with the same educational opportunities they had, these students continued to emphasize new areas of knowledge including international affairs and social science, even as their chosen tactic of public lecturing eschewed the need for more traditional educational skills like literacy. Later student organizations, such as Beijing Higher Normal School's *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society, understood the language of *pingmin* primarily through the prism of the international discourse on "democratic education," and they frequently tried



(unsuccessfully) to reorient discussions of popular education away from the subject of “poor people’s education” and toward a new educational standard shared by commoners and elites alike. As the language of *pingmin* gained prominence as a more broadly accepted education reform slogan, first through the influence of Dewey’s translated lectures and then under the direction of Yan Yangchu and other national-level boosters, education leaders began to tie the needs and goals of the *pingmin* education movement more directly to matters of national prosperity. These latter campaigns, led by scholars returned from abroad (many of whom had studied directly under American professors at Columbia Teacher’s College), effectively utilized the language of *pingmin* not to better connote democracy, but rather to better identify “the common people” as an educational problem preventing the Chinese nation-state from achieving its cultural and geopolitical goals. Yet even as these national groups re-evaluated the intended political consequences of a broader *pingmin* education movement, they returned to more familiar educational goals like literacy in order to accrue local support for their endeavors and measure their successes for the benefit of donors. All of these groups shared a belief that China’s social and political destiny was tied to the educational fortunes of those “commoners” who had thus far been left out of the modern *guomin* school system, and all were committed to the principles of equality and democracy to varying degrees; but differences in the scope, intent, and orientation of such projects nevertheless reflect ongoing tensions in the way May Fourth thinkers envisioned the modern Chinese political subject.

When histories of the *pingmin* education movement began to see publication in the late 1920s, first in special issues of education journals like *Jiaoyu Zazhi* [The Education Review] and *Xin Jiaoyu Pinglun* [Commentary on New Education] and later in pedagogical training textbooks like The China Press’ *Mass Education for a New China* series, these histories frequently elided

the activities of early student activist groups in favor of a more institutionally grounded narrative that closely followed the careers of national figures like Yan and Dewey.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, as the earliest domestic pioneers of the language of *pingmin* education, these early student groups helped establish the conditions of possibility for understanding popular education and its relationship to community, democracy, and class inequality. They did this first by responding to the perceived needs of their own communities, and then by projecting their efforts onto an imagined democratic future in which all people could be like them. Thus, the story of *pingmin* education and its ability—or lack of ability—to better define the Republican Chinese political subject must include their efforts.

### Defining *Pingmin*

Not long after the founding of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society on the campus of Beijing Higher Normal School in October of 1919, a student named Man Zhi 曼支 wrote to a founding member of the group and editor of the new magazine *Pingmin Jiaoyu* inquiring about the precise meaning of the term *pingmin*. His letter, dated October 24, asks, “Is the meaning of the characters *pingmin* really the same as the meaning of this word in Japanese? The Japanese term *heimin* comes from notions of class difference, whereby... those of a lower class are called ‘*heimin*.’ I’ve hear that in the past there still existed a distinct underclass (*jianmin* 贱民), but that this class no longer exists today.”<sup>13</sup> One of the editors of the journal, Lang Gong 佺工,

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<sup>12</sup> For an example of such a history, see Tang, “Pingmin jiaoyu yundong de jingguo” JYZZ 19.9 (1927): 1-9. A condensed version of this same article appears in Gan Yuyuan 甘豫源, ed., *Xin Zhonghua Minzhong Jiaoyu* 新中华民众教育 [Mass Education for a New China] (Shanghai: The China Press and the New Citizen Book Society, 1932): 59-61. The latter textbook was intended for use in upper-level normal schools.

<sup>13</sup> Lang Gong 佺工, “Taolun ben bao de zongzhi 讨论本报的宗旨” [A discussion of this paper’s aims], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 5 (Nov 1919), reprinted in WSST 3:13.

responded, “Our use of the two characters *pingmin* refers to DEMOCRACY and not to some kind of specific class distinction,” with the word “democracy” itself written out in capital English letters and left untranslated. Lang later clarified that indeed the primary aim of the group was to promote a doctrine of “democratic education,” this time using the transliteration *demokelaxi jiaoyu* 德谟克拉西教育.<sup>14</sup> Both the reader’s original question and Lang Gong’s reply help illustrate that in Fall 1919, *pingmin* remained a vague and contested category that, despite its prevalence in Japanese legal and political discourse, did not connote a specific people group or political subject. Even so, the term was part and parcel of a broader international exchange of ideas linking education, class, and politics, as evidenced by Langs’s own invocation of *demokelaxi* to better define the political goals of educating *pingmin*. Ultimately, the editorial board’s decision to publish both letters within the public pages of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* illustrates that, for many students interested in “education for *pingmin*,” the broader social struggle of popularizing education relied in part on a semantic struggle to define the term *pingmin* itself.

Like *guomin* before it, the most immediate and obvious linguistic precedent for the term *pingmin* is found in Japanese. The Japanese word *heimin* was first popularized alongside the Meiji Restoration in 1868 and had since been employed in a variety of legal and political contexts, frequently in connection with calls for broad social change. True to Man Zhi’s statement, the term *heimin* was originally used in Japan to denote the “common people” who had been left out of the formal hierarchy of princes, dukes, marquis, and other ranks established under the new Meiji Emperor. In a legal sense, the term “heimin” connoted a group of Japanese political subjects who lacked the right to vote or the ability to serve in the upper house of the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 13-14. As we will see below, Sun’s decision to render the neologism “democracy” in a variety of ways (including leaving the word untranslated) mirrored the approach of many other more prominent May Fourth intellectuals, including Chen Duxiu 陈独秀 and Li Dazhao 李大钊, who continued to favor the English term “democracy” until the early 1920s when he switched to *pingminzhuyi*.

Japanese Diet, and who stood in contradistinction to the class of wealthy property owners, dubbed *komin* 公民, who could participate in public life.<sup>15</sup>

However, the simple assertion that *heimin* referred exclusively to notions of class distinction obscures the contested way in which the term was later politicized by liberal Japanese reformers and socialists in the decades surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Popular journalist and liberal reformer Tokutomi Sohō 徳富 蘇峰 (1863-1957) frequently used the term *heiminshugi* (平民主義) to summarize his own advocacy for democratic rights and the adoption of a British-style parliamentary system in Japan. He even went so far as to proclaim *heiminshugi* the ideological standard of his 1880s magazine, *Kokumin no tomo* (国民の友), in which he affirmed the basic concept of human equality and rejected what he termed the “artificial” class distinctions in Japan’s feudal system.<sup>16</sup> Over a decade later, the Japanese socialist Kōtoku Shūsui 幸徳秋水 (née Kōtoku Denjirō, 1871-1911) used the inaugural issue of the popular periodical *Heimin shimbun* 平民新聞 to pledge himself to the ideals of *heiminshugi*, *shakaishugi* 社會主義 (socialism), and *heiwashugi* 平和主義 (pacifism). Here Kōtoku’s invocation of *heiminshugi* (later translated simply as “commoner-ism”) was meant to complement a broader effort to arouse popular opinion in order to effect (non-violent) political change.<sup>17</sup>

While the popularity of the term *heimin* among Japan’s leading radical and reformist authors reflects its political usefulness, the reception of the term among readers of journals such as *Kokumin no tomo* and *Heimin shimbun* reveals a certain degree of ambiguity that

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<sup>15</sup> For a very early analysis of the place of *heimin* within Japanese society, see William H. Newell, “The Comparative Study of Caste in India and Japan,” *Asian Survey* 1.10 (Dec 1961): 3-10.

<sup>16</sup> John D Pierson, *Tokutomi Soho, 1863-1957, A Journalist for Modern Japan* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 177-180.

<sup>17</sup> F.G. Notehelfer, *Kotoku Shusui, Portrait of a Japanese Radical* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 93-94.

accompanied its popularity. As early as the 1880s, various Japanese intellectuals complained about the overall lack of ideological clarity in Sohō's writing, and in an 1893 essay, fellow reformer Kunikida Doppo 國木田 獨歩 (1871-1908) complained directly that "When asked to give its definition even those who support *heiminshugi* have difficulty answering. I believe not even [Sohō] himself can make it clear... Is *heiminshugi* only the ideology of being the people's friend?"<sup>18</sup> Sohō neither defined *heiminshugi* in his magazine nor attempted to explain the broader theoretical framework behind this central political philosophy.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, when a member of the Heiminsha group who edited and published Kōtoku's *Heimin shimbun* reflected on the guiding philosophy of the group, he called the paper "a small crater for the whirling gaseous passions of...young people" rather than a concrete ideological statement, socialist or otherwise.<sup>20</sup> From the examples of Sohō and Kōtoku, one finds clear evidence that in the decades following the Meiji revolution, *heimin* became both a vague and powerful signifier in Japan. Indeed some of its political potential seems to have derived from its ability to attach a patina of populism to a broad diversity of social and political claims. No matter the specific context in which *heimin* was employed, the fact remains that the term did extend far beyond class-based legal distinctions to find an active career in the field of Japan's reformist discourse, a pattern that would prefigure *pingmin*'s role in the language of China's May Fourth leaders.

Thus *pingmin*, like *guomin*, derived its initial linguistic potential from a transliterated Japanese term. Unlike *guomin*, however, the neologism *pingmin/heimin* did not create immediate political waves upon its introduction into Chinese reformers' lexicon in the late 1890s and early 1900s. In a 1905 article explaining socialism in the pages of *Minbao* 民報, Tongmenghui

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<sup>18</sup> Pierson, *Tokutomi Soho*, 177.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

<sup>20</sup> Notehelfer, *Kotoku Shusui*, 94.

member Zhu Zhixin 朱执信 (1885-1920), who had studied abroad in Japan the previous year, explicitly rejected *heimin* as being too vague to properly signify the working people of China.<sup>21</sup> While some education reformers did use the term *pingmin jiaoyu* as early as 1914, they did so infrequently and typically with reference to educational programs in foreign countries such as Britain or Germany.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, *pingmin jiaoyu* was not a part of the formal, legal lexicon for discussing education policy, and those efforts that did deal directly with reaching people outside of the formal education system (including night schools, remedial schools, vocational programs, and public lecture series) were frequently discussed under the rubric of *tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育 (popular education) or *shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育 (social education), rather than as “education for *pingmin*.”

When *pingmin* did finally gain traction among the lexicon of Chinese political reformers, it did so primarily in the context of discussions about “democracy” or *pingminzhuyi*. On November 15, 1918, Beijing University president Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868-1940) gave a speech before an assembled crowd at Tiananmen Square, in which he claimed “the decline of militarism (*wuduanzhuyi* 武断主义) and the rise of bright democracy (*pingminzhuyi* 平民主义)”

<sup>21</sup> Robert A. Scalapino and Harold Schiffman, “Early Socialist Currents in the Chinese Revolutionary Movement: Sun Yat-sen versus Liang Ch’i-ch’ao,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 18. 3 (1959): 329.

<sup>22</sup> In an interview with a reporter for *Jingbao* 京报 magazine, early Republican Minister of Education Tang Hualong 汤化龙 (1874-1918) asserted that “to make our level equal [with that of other countries], we must engage in *pingmin* education,” but the term *pingmin* was not central to his assertion, nor is it to be found in the policies that Tang implemented while serving as Minister of Education between 1914 and 1915. See “Tang Zongzhang zhi pingmin jiaoyu tan 汤总长之平民教育谈” [Cabinet minister Tang’s discussion of Commoners’ Education], *Jiaoyu zhoubao* (Hangzhou) 88 (1915): 14-17. For examples of articles discussing *pingmin* education and *pingmin* social programs in foreign contexts see “Guowai jiwen: Bi shishi pingmin jiaoyu 国外纪闻：比史氏平民教育” [Foreign news: A comparative history of commoners’ education], *Jiaoyu zhoubao* (Hangzhou) 51 (1914): 13-14, which focuses primarily on commoners’ education programs in Britain, and “Diaocha: Deguo tongsu jiaoyu pingmin yule shiye zhi shishi 调查：德国通俗教育平民娱乐事业之实施” [Investigation on the state of popular education and commoners’ entertainment in Germany], *JYZZ* 6.2 (1914): 11-19. Even when *pingmin* education became more mainstream among Chinese education reformers, many of the models for such programs were foreign. See, for example, Jiang Qi 姜琦, “Deyizhi zhi pingminzhuyi de jiaoyushuo 德意志之平民主义的教育说” [On Democratic Education in Germany], *Xin Jiaoyu* 2.1 (1919): 44-50.

represented an important new trend in global politics, marking the first of many invocations of *pingminzhuyi* among reformist intellectuals.<sup>23</sup> But even in the context of May Fourth-era excitement about democracy, the term *pingminzhuyi* competed alongside a host of other neologisms and transliterations. In his “Manifesto on the Founding of the *Xiang River Review*,” first published in the summer of 1919, a young Mao Zedong notes that at the time “democracy” was rendered many different ways in Chinese, including *pingminzhuyi* (literally, rule of the common people), *minbenzhuyi* 民本主义 (the people as the base), *minzhuzhuyi* 民主主义 (people’s rule), and *shuminzhuyi* 庶民主义 (rule by the multitude).<sup>24</sup> From Mao’s formation, it’s unclear what separates *pingmin* from *shumin* or even simply *min*. Many May Fourth leaders such as Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao initially preferred to leave the term untranslated, and in Chen’s famous invocation of “Mr. Science” and “Mr. Democracy” in the pages of his journal *New Youth*, his rendering of the latter term as “*de xiansheng* 德先生” directly references the Chinese transliteration *demokelaxi*, rather than *pingminzhuyi*.<sup>25</sup> Beijing University law professor and May Fourth activist Chen Qixiu 陈启修 (1886-1960) supported democracy but rejected *pingminzhuyi* specifically as being too narrow, since it implied a fixed opposition between aristocrats and “common people” rather than a singular collective name for the whole Chinese political

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<sup>23</sup> Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培, “Hei’an yu guangming de xiaozhuang 黑暗与光明的消长” [The Waning and Waxing of the Dark and the Light] in *Cai Yuanpei Quan ji* 蔡元培全集 [Collected works of Cai Yuanpei], ed. Gao Pingshu 高平叔 (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju 中华书局, 1984), Vol 3. 217. The speech was given at Tiananmen Square to celebrate the victory of World War I, and Cai himself began the speech by noting that it constituted a kind of “Commoners College” (*pingmin daxue*), since he was bringing collegiate knowledge to the common people through his lecture. The general novelty of Cai’s terminology is further reflected in his use of the word *wuduanzhuyi*, also a transliteration of a Japanese term for militarism, *budanshugi* 武斷主義. While *budanshugi* remains in use in Japan today, *junguozhuyi* 军国主义 is more common in Chinese.

<sup>24</sup> Stuart Schram, ed., *Mao’s Road to Power: Revolutionary Writings 1912-1949, Vol 1: The Pre-Marxist Period, 1912-1920*, (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1992), 318-319.

<sup>25</sup> For a general discussion of different understandings and translations of democracy during the May Fourth era, see Edward X. Gu, “Who was Mr. Democracy? The May Fourth Discourse of Populist Democracy and the Radicalization of Chinese Intellectuals (1915-1922),” *Modern Asian Studies* 35.3 (2001): 589-621.

subject.<sup>26</sup> Eventually, several May Fourth leaders—notably Li Dazhao—came to adopt *pingminzhuyi* as a standard translation of the English term “democracy” and as an expression of one of the primary goals of the May Fourth Movement. Nevertheless, this understanding of *pingminzhuyi* did not resolve the fundamental tension over whether *pingmin* referred to a specific, bounded class of “commoners” or to the Chinese political subject more generally. Thus *pingmin* and the associated language of *pingminzhuyi* were popular but by no means stable signifiers during the early months of 1919, when student groups like the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society and the Pingmin Education Lecture Corps were first founded.<sup>27</sup>

In many respects, the vagueness of *pingmin* as a political signifier provided the source of both its limitations and its strengths as a buzzword of the May Fourth era. As Edward Gu has persuasively argued, “May Fourth intellectuals worshipped ‘people’ as their God,” and by equating their own policies with the common people and the abstract idea of “the people” more generally, reformers of differing stripes put forth a political vision organized around the idea of populist democracy.<sup>28</sup> This intellectual shift allowed radical anarchists and socialists of the May Fourth period to move decisively away from the strictly nationalistic aims implied by the term *guomin* and adopt a more straightforwardly populist position. It also allowed national organizations such as the National Association for the Promotion of *Pingmin* Education to critique pre-existing popular education projects and signal a new interest in the great majority of

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 599. Indeed, education reformers would later use this very same reasoning to distinguish the *pingmin* education movement from the later *minzhong* 民众 or mass education movement of the later 1920s and early 1930s. (Gan, *Xin Zhonghua Minzhong Jiaoyu*, 8-9).

<sup>27</sup> Schram notes in his annotation of Mao’s “Manifesto on the Founding of the *Xiang River Review*” that *pingminzhuyi* was the preferred translation of Li Dazhao, who was Mao’s primary intellectual influence at Beida. See Schram, *Mao’s Road to Power*, 319. Edward Gu, however, notes that in the summer of 1919, Li was not yet in the habit of using *pingminzhuyi*, although by 1920 Li adopted the term regularly as the most accurate translation of democracy (Gu, “Who was Mr. Democracy?” 598).

<sup>28</sup> Gu, “Who was Mr. Democracy?” 620. In Gu’s analysis, this kind of populist democracy itself served as a “needed utopia” in which these authors could affect intellectual if not political change.



Chinese people who lacked formal schooling. At the same time, ongoing debates about the precise meaning of *pingmin* and its relevance to the Chinese context make clear that the population to whom it referred was not a settled issue. Thus, when reformers and student groups used the word *pingmin* to describe their own political visions and local education projects, they were not simply adopting a popular (and populist) idiom to lend legitimacy to their endeavors, but rather were contributing to the broader intellectual accumulation of what a notion of “the common people” *could* mean for China. Indeed, this ability to shape the boundaries within which *pingmin* was understood is one of the primary reasons that groups like the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society spent so much time and energy defining the journal’s central terms. By the same token, in order to truly understand what these pioneering students and, later, national professional organizations meant when they called for *pingmin* education, one needs to look not only at the inchoate intellectual milieu supposedly shaping their political language, but also at the specific social and administrative contexts in which they used it. Such an investigation reveals that the understandings of the Chinese political subject produced or implied by new formulations of popular education derived as much from the practical dimensions of China’s ongoing social problems as from the inspiration imparted by neologisms like *pingmin*.

### ***Pingmin Jiaoyu* as Community Endeavor: The Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps**

On March 7, 1919, *Beijing University Daily* published an advertisement calling for members to join a new student organization—The Beijing University *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps. The ad proclaimed that “education for commoners” or *pingmin jiaoyu* was the foundation of a republican country and that true popular education required not just bringing people to school, but also “bringing school to the people” through outdoor lectures, vernacular publications,

and other educational initiatives beyond the walls of the classroom. The advertisement stated that the club's main goal was to "increase commoners' knowledge and arouse commoners' self-awareness," a goal it hoped to accomplish by delivering regularly scheduled outdoor lectures on street corners and in temples around Beijing.<sup>29</sup> At least thirty-five students took up the call to action and attended the first meeting of the new club, which was held two weeks later in the administrative offices of the Beida Science Department. While the events of the first meeting were relatively mundane—chief club organizers Liao Shucang 廖书仓 and Deng Zhongxia 邓中夏 (1894-1933) were elected as general secretaries and a group photo was taken—the group would swiftly become a driving force behind educational outreach initiatives at the university.<sup>30</sup>

In organizing explicitly on behalf of *pingmin* education, the Beida Lecture Corps came to represent one of the first forays into a new, more explicitly political relationship between university students, urban residents, and popular education. On a personal level, the Beida Lecture Corps offered several new leadership opportunities for students such as Deng Zhongxia, who would later play a prominent role in the May Fourth Movement and in the early activities of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>31</sup> By entering directly into ongoing debates about the

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<sup>29</sup> "Beijing Daxue Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyan tuan zhengji tuanyuan qi 北京大学平民教育讲演团征集团圆启" [A call for members to join the Beijing University Commoners' Education Lecturing Corps], *Beijing Daxue Rikan* 北京大学日刊, March 7, 1919, reprinted in WSST, 2: 135. Hereafter, *Beijing Daxue Rikan* will be abbreviated BDRK.

<sup>30</sup> "Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyantuan jishi: chenglihui zhi jingguo 平民教育讲演团纪事: 成立会之经过" [Minutes from the Inaugural Meeting of the Commoners' Education Lecture Corps], BDRK, March 26, 1919, reprinted in WSST 2: 137-138.

<sup>31</sup> Deng Zhongxia became politically active at an early age, when he studied alongside Mao Zedong and Cai Hesen (1895-1931) at Changsha Normal College. Daniel Y.K. Kwan, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Chinese Labor Movement: A Study of Deng Zhongxia (1894-1933)* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997), 13. For more on Deng's organizational activities while a student at Beida, see Jiang Ping 姜平, *Deng Zhongxia de yi sheng* 邓中夏的一生 [The Life of Deng Zhongxia] (Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue chubanshe, 1986), 12-23. Despite all of Deng's earlier activity, his involvement with the Beida Lecture Corps still represents the first time his political activities truly brought him outside the walls of universities in Changsha, Beijing, and Shanghai. For an argument about the novelty of the city as a new political space for university students, see Lanza, *Behind the Gate*, esp. Chapter 7: "The Pedagogy of the City," 180-199.

implementation and goals of popular education projects, the group also claimed new levels of participation for university students in the education reform movement more generally.<sup>32</sup> The group was also pioneering in pushing beyond the spatial boundaries of the university to the broader urban community in Beijing, an act which itself signaled a re-evaluation of the relationship between the university and society, and which stood at the center of students' rhetorical insistence upon "bringing school to the people."<sup>33</sup> Finally, the Lecture Corps' rhetoric truly marked one of the earliest instances in which any reformers—student, professional, or otherwise—mobilized on behalf of education for "common people," or *pingmin*, rather than a national body of *guomin*. In using the language of *pingmin* to promote and explain their efforts, the group acknowledged the educational divide separating them from Beijing's many other urban residents, but they also announced their intention to abolish this divide by equalizing access to all levels of education and indeed to replicate their own learning among Beijing's diverse urban milieu.

Yet while the members of the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps were undeniably intellectual and organizational pioneers, their efforts were constructed on a social and organizational framework that had been developing on Beijing's campuses for some time. Most of the organization's chief officers were involved in their university's many other recently established politically-oriented clubs, including the Journalism Club, the Philosophy Club, and the editorial board of *Guomin Zazhi* 国民杂志 [Citizen's Magazine], the latter of which aimed to

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<sup>32</sup> While Beida students had certainly volunteered in community-based popular education endeavors before, the founding of the Lecture Corps marked the first time in which students developed their own independent pedagogical projects of this scale.

<sup>33</sup> Lanza, *Behind the Gate*, 188-199.

spread common knowledge and promote Chinese goods.<sup>34</sup> Many of these organizations were themselves models of a new kind of inter-generational equality, as older university professors sought collaboration with younger students in a joint effort to articulate and spread “New Culture.”<sup>35</sup> Such organizations and collaborations were directly encouraged by Beida President Cai Yuanpei, who stressed greater cooperation between students and faculty (and between faculty and administrators) as central to a modern and intellectually vibrant university.<sup>36</sup> In working with politically engaged faculty members like Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu, younger students such as Luo Jialun 罗家伦(1897-1969) and Deng Zhongxia gained experience editing journals, producing publicity materials, and organizing public assemblies, all of which proved vital to the establishment of the Beida Lecture Corps. Such activities also positioned these younger Beida students as clear leaders in the New Culture Movement itself and allowed them to view their campus activities as important struggles in the broader effort to transform Chinese thought.

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<sup>34</sup> Weston, *The Power of Position*, 167; Prior to founding the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps, Deng Zhongxia was an active participant in Cai Yuanpei’s Philosophical Society, and he had spent the summer of 1918 organizing a “Patriotic Students Society” (*xuesheng jiuguohui* 学生救国会) in Shanghai Kwan, *Marxist Intellectuals*, 14. Deng was particularly involved the publishing arm of this latter society, and worked alongside future Lecture Corps member Xu Deheng on the General Executive Council of its journal, *Guomin Zazhi*. The main activity of the *Guomin* Magazine Society was to publish the eponymous journal once a month, but the organization also held regular meetings to debate and discuss the aims of the magazine, including a bi-annual plenary session. See “Guomin zazhi she zuzhi dagang 国民杂志社组织大纲” [A summary of the organization of the *Guomin* Magazine Society], *Guomin zazhi* 1.1 (January 1919), 1, reprinted in WSST, 2: 17. Another key Beida Lecture Corps member, Luo Jialun was heavily involved in Hu Shi’s vernacular language movement, and he worked with Hu and classmate Fu Sinian 傅斯年(1896-1950) to establish the journal *Xin Chao* 新潮 [New Tide]. Luo was also an avid reader of Western literature, and in early editions of *Xin Chao*, its English title was rendered simply as “The Renaissance.” Luo had by this time also contributed articles to *Dongfang Zazhi* 东方杂志 [Eastern Miscellany], and his translations of several Ibsen plays had been published in *New Youth*. See Chen Chunsheng 陳春生, *Xin wenhua de qishou: Luo Jialun zhuan* 新文化的旗手：羅家倫傳 [Luo Jialun: Standard Bearer of the New Culture Movement] (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1985), 16-26.

<sup>35</sup> Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 57-59.

<sup>36</sup> Weston, *The Power of Position*, 118-128. Weston’s account of Cai’s early tenure at Beida illustrates how Cai tried to demonstrate a commitment to equality as a guiding principle of the university. This commitment extended even to Cai’s personal behavior, as whenever Cai entered the university gates in his horse-drawn carriage, he would make a habit of removing his top hat and bowing to the university students lined up to greet him. As Weston notes, this gesture was extraordinary at the time and shocked those who witnessed it (both faculty and servant alike).

Beyond the basic school regulations and social networks that made this kind of organization possible, student efforts to construct their own educational programs for commoners were also founded upon ongoing changes in the way students and educators thought about the accessibility and social function of education itself. In the two years prior to the founding of the Lecture Corps, Beida President Cai Yuanpei had made several attempts to broaden access to education at Beida, including new, more relaxed requirements for auditing classes and the establishment of a Night School for University Workers (*xiaoyi yeban* 校役夜班), first opened in April 1918 and staffed by Beida undergraduates.<sup>37</sup> The Night School for University Workers in particular played an important role reorienting popular education away from national policy issues and toward more focused local projects, wherein Beida students could serve as central actors in equalizing access to the university and reforming their communities.<sup>38</sup> The school was not meant to embody a new kind of social equality between Beida workers and undergraduates—the night school students themselves were referred to patronizingly as “worker friends” (*gongyou* 工友) and expected to continue their duties as servants in the dormitories.<sup>39</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>37</sup> Lanza, *Behind the Gate*, 31-32, 182-184; Weston, *The Power of Position*, 150.

<sup>38</sup> The school formally opened on April 14, 1918 with around 230 students and offered a broad array of classes on Chinese language, arithmetic, science, and moral cultivation, with the stated goal of “developing the moral sense and increasing the everyday knowledge” of custodians, shopkeepers, and service workers on campus. The immediate pretext for the school was a letter addressed to President Cai and published in January 1918 in the *Beijing University Daily* praising a servant in one of the dormitories and requesting that workers like him be given an education by the university. Cai responded to the letter by criticizing the strict separation of “work” and “study” and arguing for the nobility of performing menial tasks to support one’s learning, a trend Cai reported as common in the United States and Japan. Indeed, as Vera Schwarcz notes, celebrating labor was a common theme among Cai’s early speeches as chancellor of Beida. Though Cai rarely wrote or spoke about workers themselves, he adopted the motto “Labor is sacred” and frequently stressed the “sanctity of work.” Thus the initial letter to Cai in the January 18 issue of the *Beijing University Daily* fit very comfortably within Cai’s pre-established program for the university, whereby the distinction between physical labor and mental labor might be collapsed. Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 131. Ultimately, Cai announced plans to open a school for such workers and called on Beida students to volunteer to teach its courses.

<sup>39</sup> Cai Yuanpei proposed the label *gongyou* as an alternative to the even more classist label of “servant” (*tingchai* 听差). Still, despite his proscriptions to the contrary, Cai himself continued to refer to the students of the Night School for University Workers as *tingchai*, such as when he contrasted them to the broader group of *pingmin* in a speech commemorating the establishment of a more ambitious “Night School for Commoners” (*Pingmin Yexiao* 平民夜校)

curriculum, which included classes on advanced mathematics and Esperanto, reflected a utopian view of educational equality that attempted to teach mostly illiterate students subjects that would have seemed exotic even to Beida undergraduates.<sup>40</sup> President Cai's vision of Beida as the epicenter of a community effort to improve education for illiterate Chinese was reinforced by other editorials and student letters published in *Beijing University Daily* that expanded this vision to the national level. In February 1919, Deng Zhongxia published a letter sent to him by his friend and fellow *Xinmin* study group member Xiong Guangchu 熊光楚, which argued that Beida students could help popularize education by setting up libraries and reading rooms in their hometowns using their own book collections. According to Xiong, if each Beida student were to set up a small library with a few well-chosen books and magazines, then the number of such libraries would eventually reach the tens of thousands and overwhelm the ignorance of local villagers and enable them to seek an education. The letter closed by appealing directly to Beida students' sense of agency and entitlement: "When it comes to doing good, who better than us? You and your noble classmates are all great people who care about the nation, and who have used the opportunity of a college education to shoulder the responsibility of helping people, so can you really say that my suggestion is wrong?"<sup>41</sup> While few such student-sponsored reading rooms ever came to pass, the idea nonetheless reflected a new attitude among Beida students that they had both the ability and responsibility to replicate their own learning among a broader section of the populace through a large mosaic of focused community efforts.

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in January of 1920. See "Beida Pingmin Yexiao kaixue yansuo ci 北大平民夜校开学日演说词" [Statements given on the opening day of the Commoners' Night School], BDRK, January 1, 1920, reprinted in *Cai Yuanpei QuANJI* 3: 380.

<sup>40</sup> The aims and curriculum of the school are printed in "Xiaoyi Yeban jianzhang 校役夜班简章" [Regulations for the Night School for University Personnel], BDRK, April 9, 1918; quoted in Lanza, *Behind the Gate*, 182.

<sup>41</sup> BDRK, Feb 10, 1919, reprinted in Xiao Chaoran 萧超然, *Beijing Daxue yu Wusi Yundong* 北京大学与五四运动 [Beijing University and the May Fourth Movement] (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1995), 307.

Thus, when Deng Zhongxia, Luo Jialun, and Liao Shucang came together to found the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps, it was not the product of a singular or even specific commitment to popular education so much as another front in a broader battle to transform the country, one student initiative at a time. Where the students differentiated themselves most from the university's previous educational outreach efforts was in moving beyond the specific community of Beida workers and staff to provide education to a more nebulously defined group of "common people." The resulting dialogical interplay—between the students' novel rhetorical use of *pingmin* on the one hand and the emergent and ongoing institutional initiatives of their university on the other—helped to produce new understandings of the "common people" grounded in the specific experiences of the young, educated Beijing elite. While the Beida students certainly thought of *pingmin* as a social group whose lack of education distinguished them as fundamentally less enlightened than the Beida students, the perceived urgency of China's ongoing political crises necessitated that this disparity be swiftly remedied. The result was a fleeting vision of *pingmin jiaoyu* that emphasized a radical yet self-centered sense of educational equality, whereby the Beida students attempted to replicate their own recent self-awakening among the urban workers of Beijing and its surrounding suburbs. Such an effort would require not simply bringing education to the people, but bringing a specifically *Beida* education to the people, thus establishing a foundation for a republican state in which all *pingmin* ultimately resembled Beida students themselves.

Despite the fact that many Lecture Corps members understood *pingmin jiaoyu* primarily as a means of "saving the nation" (*jiuguo* 救国), the group's activities were, like the Night

School for University Workers, profoundly local in their orientation.<sup>42</sup> After a month of organizing and planning, the group established a plan to give regularly scheduled lectures on various street corners every Sunday afternoon, as well as to develop special lecture programs on school and national holidays. The very first of these special lecture programs took place over three days in early April at the Pantao Temple near Dongbianmen in Southeast Beijing, followed two weeks later by another special program at the more centrally located Huguo Temple near Di'anmen. The group gradually began to focus more on factory workers in less developed neighborhoods of Beijing like Zhangxindian and Fengtai, but these efforts remained limited. Even a year later, when the group expanded its activities to the countryside as part of a "Summer Vacation Lecture Program," these activities were confined to the hometowns of group members, who gave lectures during their break from school.<sup>43</sup> Thus, even as the project grew to include a wider and wider geographical area, it remained a fundamentally community-oriented project.

One of the primary consequences of this community-oriented approach was that the concept of *pingmin* evolved rapidly from a general descriptor for "the common people" throughout the country to one focused much more explicitly on uneducated Beijing workers. The group's initial call for members on March 7, 1919 referred to the intended targets of *pingmin* education as "the sons and younger brothers of poor farmers as well as those who are constrained by their livelihood and quit school halfway through."<sup>44</sup> Yet by October of that same year, group

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<sup>42</sup> One member of the Lecture Corps, Zhu Wushan 朱务善(1896-1971), later remembered the aims of the group as straightforwardly national, recalling that "the aims of [the Lecture Corps] really began and ended with the idea of 'educating to save the nation' (jiaoyu jiuguo 教育救国)." Zhu Wushan 朱务善, "Beida Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyan Tuan zai 'Wusi' qianhou suoqi de zuoyong 北大平民教育讲演团在"五四"前后所起的作用" [The Role of the Beida Commoners' Education Lecturing Corps around the May Fourth Movement], in WSST 2: 252-255. Zhu's essay was written in Beijing and is dated June 10<sup>th</sup>, 1960.

<sup>43</sup> "Fadong shuqi jiangyan tonggao 发动暑期讲演通告" [Announcing the launch of summer vacation lectures], BDRK, June 17, 1920, reprinted in WSST 2: 182-183.

<sup>44</sup> WSST 2: 135.



member Xu Deheng 许德珩(1890-1990) gave a speech at the organization's Second Plenary Session in which he identified "the common people" as "the office attendants, the rickshaw pullers, and the coolies" who suffer from the oppression of what Xu called "Beijing's bureaucratic society."<sup>45</sup> For the most part, the farmers and rural workers that comprised the primary targets of many later *pingmin* education initiatives, most notably those of the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education, are completely absent from discussions of the Lecture Corps.<sup>46</sup> Similarly, while the Lecture Corps members believed that their responsibility to educate *pingmin* derived from Beida's status as a "democratic" or *pingminzhuyi* university, they did not view the *pingmin* themselves as the basis for a republican state or as an expression of a unified political subject.<sup>47</sup> In contrast to Deng Zhongxia's work at *Guomin Magazine*, which strove to promote common knowledge among a nationally inclusive body of *guomin* precisely because of their presumed status as representatives of the nation, the *Pingmin* Lecture Corps focused on Beijing's workers because of their educational deficiencies and, indeed, because of their perceived right to access Beida's formidable educational resources.<sup>48</sup>

In fact, much of the formal documentation produced by the Lecture Corps reflects a patronizing and paternalistic attitude that would seem to preclude any true sense of equality

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<sup>45</sup> "Jiangyan tuan kai di'er ci dahui bing huansonghui jishi 讲演团开第二次大会并欢送会记事" [Minutes from the Second Plenary and Farewell Party of the Lecture Corps], BDRK, October 14-15, 1919, reprinted in WSST 2:154.

<sup>46</sup> WSST 2: 134. Indeed, in his introductory gloss to the collection of documents from the Lecture Corps in *Wusi shiqi de shetuan*, series editor Zhang Yunhou criticizes the early activities of the group as focusing solely on "the petty bourgeoisie and other urban people" rather than "the working and farming masses," which only began to be included among the audiences of lectures when the group traveled to the countryside in March, 1920.

<sup>47</sup> For the language linking *pingmin* education and Beida's adherence to the principles of a *pingminzhuyi* university, see WSST 2: 135.

<sup>48</sup> For a broader consideration of the aims of the *Guomin Zazhi* society, see Cai Yuanpei's preface in *Guomin Zazhi* 1.1 (Jan 1919), reprinted in WSST 2: 24-25.

between Beida students and urban workers.<sup>49</sup> When the club's initial schedule of lectures did not prove as impactful as club organizers might have hoped, they attributed this failure primarily to the cultural and intellectual differences between themselves and their audience. In December of 1919, the club even published a reminder to all volunteer lecturers that "we are students and so our mouths are naturally filled with neologisms...but the average common person's brain doesn't have these kind of toys."<sup>50</sup> While this latter admission that the neologisms of the students constituted a kind of rhetorical plaything (*wanyi'er* 玩意儿) reflects a certain degree of self-consciousness about May Fourth-era students' overreliance on new and borrowed terminology, the fact remains that students saw *pingmin* as alien in terms of workers' vocabulary and interests.

Yet while the administrative scope of the lectures remained modest and the view of *pingmin* emphasized their educational deficiencies, the students maintained the ambitious hope that public lecturing could wipe away these educational inequalities and enable Beijing's previously uneducated workers to become full participants in the political campaigns sweeping Beijing's college campuses. This ambition is most evident in the topics of the lectures themselves. While some speeches were focused primarily on issues directly relevant to Beijing's urban workers, such as labor and suppressing conflict in the workplace, many others addressed current political topics in vogue among Beida students, such as "Political Rights," "European Peace Treaties and World Peace," or "The Recent Loss of Qingdao."<sup>51</sup> While the Lecture Corps

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<sup>49</sup> Timothy Weston has observed that this sense of paternalistic elitism was evident in nearly all of the social welfare projects launched by Beijing University and was a sentiment expressed frequently in Cai Yuanpei's speeches. Weston suggests that there is a certain degree of tension between the populism and paternalism of many May Fourth leaders associated with Beida, but, as I will argue, this paternalism, coupled with a belief in their own efficacy, is precisely what enabled Beida students to envision a more equal, populist politics amid such obvious economic and social inequality. (Weston, *The Power of Position*, 151, 162).

<sup>50</sup> "Yinshua jiangyan gaoqi shi 印刷讲演稿启事" [An announcement about printing drafts of lectures], BDRK, December 11, 1919, reprinted in WSST 2: 158.

<sup>51</sup> Among the central regulations of the Lecture Corps, which were drafted at its very first meeting in March 1919, was a provision that all lecture topics be published in *Beijing University Daily*. In general, group members were not

maintained a partial focus on literacy, as evidenced by lectures on “The Importance of Reading” and by efforts to establish more permanent “reading rooms” throughout Beijing, the group made sure to stock such reading rooms with politically radical journals like *Xin Shenghuo* 新生活 [New Life], and the general commitment to public lecturing emphasized the rapid inculcation of new ideas over the development of permanent educational skills.<sup>52</sup> The continued focus on themes such as “The Spirit of Republicanism,” “Equality and Freedom,” and a host of anti-Japanese patriotic campaigns when delivering lectures among Beijing’s suburbs demonstrates that Lecture Corps members sought to directly involve the common people in many of the national and international political struggles that had gripped Beida students throughout much of 1919.<sup>53</sup> In an October speech commemorating the efforts of the Lecture Corps thus far, Xu Deheng suggested that the group had already generated a new level of understanding of Beijing’s workers, and he hoped that “from this moment on we will work with them to help each other arouse consciousness and plan all kinds of reforms.”<sup>54</sup> Thus, even while their patronizing tone

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required to prepare or submit full texts of the lectures they gave, and even after organizers published instructions encouraging members to write out printable drafts for their lectures as part of an effort to counteract differences in dialect between club members and local Beijing audiences, the full texts of these lectures were not frequently published. For a sample list of the type of political lectures given just after the initial May Fourth protests, see the list of lectures published in “Pingmin jiaoyu jiangyuantuan jishi 平民教育讲演团纪事” [Minutes from the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps], BDRK, May 14, 1919, reprinted in *Pei-ching ta hsüeh jih k’an* (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981).

<sup>52</sup> Despite the clear enthusiasm for public lecturing as a way to rapidly get Beijing denizens up to date on the latest national political crises, Lecture Corps volunteers also realized that the literacy education so central to their broader political project would require a more sustained effort. Group members were encouraged to locate suitable lecture halls and reading spaces within their hometowns, and if no such space existed, they were told to work with students and local gentry to sponsor reading societies (yue shubao she 阅书报社) and the construction of suitable reading rooms. The group distributed over 400 copies of *Xin Shenghuo* 新生活 [New Life] to be sold in various villages and suburbs in an effort to help sustain these local literacy endeavors (WSST 2: 183).

<sup>53</sup> “Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyuantuan nongcun jiangyan de baogao 平民教育讲演团农村讲演的报告” [Report on rural lectures given by the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps], BDRK, April 10, 1920, reprinted in WSST 2: 164-169. The above mentioned lectures on “Equality and Freedom” and “The Spirit of Republicanism” were given on April 6, as part of a new lecture initiative in Tongxian, now the Tongzhou district of Beijing. As with many other special lecture programs at this time, the lead organizer of the trip, Yang Zhongjian 杨鍾键, also aided in the construction and inspection of a “popular library” (*tongsu tushuguan* 通俗图书馆) in the area.

<sup>54</sup> “Jiangyan tuan kai di’er ci dahui bing huansonghui jishi,” reprinted in WSST 2:154.

continued to envision the objects of *pingmin* as fundamentally poor and uneducated, the students also viewed Beijing's urban workers as potentially equal partners in the broader project of reforming China.

Indeed, at the very heart of the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps efforts was the belief that, through committed effort, Beida's lecturers could help forge a new egalitarian educational landscape by replicating their own learning among the broader populace. The Beida students clearly thought of themselves as the primary models for a new type of political engagement, and by June of 1919, the events of May Fourth became a frequent topic among the organization's regular circuit of street corner lectures.<sup>55</sup> When the Summer Vacation Lecture Program was first announced in June of 1920, organizers spoke of a need to "Beida-ify" (*beidahua* 北大化) all of the provinces and counties in China, suggesting that the assembled audience members listening to such lectures could, one day, become just like the Beida students delivering them. Over time, the Lecture Corps members tried hard to make their lectures more colloquial and "mass-friendly," but club leaders continued to encourage members to focus their talks on complex topics like "the ideologies of democratic countries" and "general accounts of global and domestic politics" rather than just "empty talk about patriotism and saving the nation."<sup>56</sup> Thus, whereas many future *pingmin* education groups followed the lead of the Simple and Easy Literacy schools in offering a simplified curriculum at the expense of true educational equality, the Beida students who lectured on street corners around Beijing remained committed to the notion that China could only

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<sup>55</sup> For example, see the lecture given by member Pan Zonghan 潘宗翰, listed in "Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyantuan jishi 平民教育讲演团记事" [Minutes from the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps], BDRK, June 5, 1919, reprinted in WSST 2: 152.

<sup>56</sup> "Fadong shuqi jiangyan tonggao," reprinted in WSST 2: 182-183. For a discussion of Lecture Corps efforts to make the lectures themselves more amenable to the masses (*dazhonghua* 大众化), see Beijing University History Department, ed. *Beijing daxue xuesheng yundongshi* 北京大学学生运动史 [A history of student movements at Beijing University] (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1979), 61.

be said to have *pingmin* education once everyone had access to the same intellectual content provided by the university.

In assessing the broader legacy of the Beida Lecture Corps, one must concede, as Lecture Corps members themselves did, that the club's various *pingmin* education initiatives did not have a sustained practical impact on the communities they targeted. One group member recalled that when he went to give open-air lectures in suburbs like Zhangindian or Fengtai, "even though we spoke primarily about 'common knowledge' (*changshi* 常识), our listeners did not understand most of what we said, and it did not relate to their lives, so they weren't interested." While lecturers had some success in attracting audiences by staging sing-alongs of popular songs or by playing a gramophone, members questioned the educational value of these activities and did not view them as organizational successes.<sup>57</sup> Indeed, the audience for most public lectures, including those given in prominent temples on public holidays, remained very small. Even though the organization had originally focused on public lectures as a way to broaden access to education among those who were illiterate, a year after their initial efforts club organizers began insisting that lecturers distribute mimeographed copies of key talking points in hopes that their contents might find a broader audience beyond the paltry numbers physically in attendance.<sup>58</sup> Over the next four years the group continued to extend the geographical breadth of its activities, but ongoing struggles to attract listeners or build any lasting political partnerships with workers or

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<sup>57</sup> Zhu, "Beida Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyan Tuan zai 'Wusi' qianhou suoqi de zuoyong" in WSST 2: 252-253.

<sup>58</sup> "Pingmin jiaoyu jiangyan tuan qishi 平民教育讲演团启事" [Announcement from the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps], BDRK, April 13, 1920, reprinted in WSST 2: 169. Further reflecting the Lecture Corps' limited organizational capacity, the decision to produce printed copies of lectures introduced its own set of budgetary problems. Lacking the capacity to produce and distribute copies of lectures on their own, a later directive encouraged members to submit drafts of particularly important lectures to the vernacular language journal *Xin Shenghuo* 新生活 as an alternative outlet for distributing lecture materials. See "Pingmin jiaoyu jiangyantuan baogao yi 平民教育讲演团报告一" [Report from the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps], BDRK, May 11, 1920, reprinted in WSST 2:174-175.

farmers meant that the educational potential of these programs never came close to matching the group's rhetoric about transforming the country through education.

Yet while the influence of open-air lectures on the urban workers living in and around Beijing was admittedly small, the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps had a substantial impact both on the personal politics of group members and on the conception and organization of future *pingmin* education projects on university campuses in Beijing.<sup>59</sup> A year after the Lecture Corps established the first *pingmin* education program, administrators at Beijing University sponsored the construction of a dedicated lecture hall on the campus periphery in which Lecture Corps members could give regularly scheduled talks.<sup>60</sup> This specially-constructed hall was later converted into a new Night School for Commoners (*Pingmin Yexiao* 平民夜校), which was intended to replace and expand upon the then-defunct Night School for University Workers established two years prior.<sup>61</sup> In a speech commemorating the opening of the Night School for

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<sup>59</sup> A full analysis of the political careers of individual members of the Beida Commoners' Education Lecture Corps is not directly relevant to the ideation of *pingmin* as a sociopolitical category, but is nonetheless instructive for revealing the impact that lecturing activities had on the ideologies of lecturers themselves. Prior to the Lecture Corps, most members with organizational or editing experience had derived said experience from broadly oriented projects, like the journal *Guomin Zazhi*, or from nationalistic endeavors like the boycott of Japanese goods. After their participation in the Beida Lecture Corps, however, many group members became more directly and specifically involved with labor organizing, and it is clear that for many young Beida students the Lecture Corps was a gateway into socialist politics more broadly. Of course, a belief in socialism was also a growing trend among Beida students in the early 1920s, as a survey conducted by the Lecture Corps in 1923 reveals that a majority of students reported believing in "socialism" (*shehuizhuyi* 社会主义) over Sun Yatsen's "Three People's Principles" (*sanminzhuyi* 三民主义) or "democracy" (*minzhuzhuyi* 民主主义). For the specific survey see "Benxiao ershiwu zhounian jinianri zhi 'Minyi Celiang' 本校二十五周年纪念日之民意测量" [A popular survey conducted on this school's twenty-fifth anniversary day], BDRK, March 4-7, 1923, reprinted in WSST 3: 225-243. Beyond this more general embrace, however, Lecture Corps members went on to occupy prominent left-leaning political positions, and many of the group's founding members, including Deng Zhongxia, Luo Jialun, and Xu Deheng, all played important roles in the early Chinese Communist Party. Jeff Wasserstrom has argued that in the case of Shanghai, Commoners' Night Schools and other such *pingmin* education initiatives served as important sites where students organized and formed alliances with local workers, and he credits such institutions with providing the political foundations of major labor initiatives like the May 30<sup>th</sup> Movement. See Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 96-98.

<sup>60</sup> Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 131.

<sup>61</sup> Contemporary accounts linked the establishment of the Night School for Commoners directly to the activities of the Beida Lecture Corps and included it as part of the Lecture Corps' broader legacy at Beida, even though the Night School itself was founded by other student groups on campus. See "Beijing daxue pingmin jiaoyu zhi xin fazhan 北

Commoners in January 1920, Cai Yuanpei praised the school in much the same terms by which the Lecture Corps had come to explain their own efforts to educate Beijing's "common people." Cai explained that the school was a natural outgrowth of Beida students' concern for the less fortunate in their community, and that just as Beida undergraduates would take pity on and feed families whose "bellies are hungry," so too would they "feed" knowledge to those whose illiteracy made them suffer a "hunger of the mind."<sup>62</sup> Yet even as he compared the students of the Night School for Commoners to beggars, he held fast to the notion of equality implied in the school's name. As Cai put it, "*Pingmin* means that everyone is equal. Previously, only university students could receive a university education, and other people could not—this is certainly not equality."<sup>63</sup> The egalitarian aims of the Night School for Commoners is reflected in the curriculum, which very much represented a university education with its inclusion of P.V.N. Myers' *General History for Colleges and High Schools*, English idiomatic readers, and *Kexue yu renlei jinhua de guanxi* 科学与人类进化的关系 [The relationship of science and human evolution] among its textbooks.<sup>64</sup> By suggesting universal access to post-secondary education as the standard of equality at a time when literacy rates remained below twenty percent, Cai went far beyond the community-based paternalism of his remarks at the opening of the Night School for University Workers to echo the idealism of Beida students who believed in their own ability to make all of Chinese society more like them. Not only did the Night School for Commoners adopt the language of *pingmin* first introduced by the Beida Lecture Corps, but it was also itself

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京大学平民教育之新发展” [The new development of *pingmin* education at Beijing University], *Shizhao yuebao* 时兆月报 [Shizhao Monthly] 17.4 (1922): 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> Cai Yuanpei, "Beida Pingmin Yexiao kaixue yansuo ci," reprinted in *Cai Yuanpei Quanji* 3: 381.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> "Pingmin yexiao qishi 平民夜校启事" [Night School for Commoners Announcement], BDRK, August 20, 1920, reprinted in *Pei-ching ta hsüeh jih k'an*.

the inspiration for many similar night schools, work-study programs, and *pingmin* reading rooms established by other colleges in many of China's major urban centers, including Nanjing, Shanghai, and Hangzhou.<sup>65</sup>

Thus, despite their own perceived failures, the radical Beida students who left campus to deliver lectures to *pingmin* helped contribute to a radically new conception of “common people” grounded in both Beijing's urban milieu and the students' belief in their own transformative potential as educators and national saviors. By conceiving of *pingmin* education in local, community-based terms, the students put a specific face to the common people who constituted both the objects of their educational initiatives and their partners in forging political progress. And while they certainly maintained an elitist attitude toward their audience, their belief in the possibility of “Beida-ifying” them speaks to their faith in a notion of *pingminzhuyi* whereby all members of the Chinese national body could be equal. Furthermore, in positioning education as a form of charity, the students and their followers at the Night School for Commoners consistently viewed education as a form of social welfare. Even though students positioned themselves, rather than the dysfunctional Republican state, as the primary guarantors of access to education, their language nonetheless reflected a belief that all common people, however defined, were deserving of an education simply by virtue of being fellow members of the local (if not national) community. In the end, the paternalistic utopianism of the members of the Beida *Pingmin*

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<sup>65</sup> By 1924, the journal *Xin Jiaoyu* 新教育 reported the activities of over twenty *pingmin* education-related societies nationwide, including groups in Harbin, Fengtian (now Shenyang), Tianjin, Shanghai, Nanjing, Changshu, Suzhou, Wujin, Changsha, Hankou, Shangbao, as well as other independent commoners' education groups in Beijing. “Guonei jiaoyu xinwen huibian 国内教育新闻汇编” [A collection of domestic education news], *Xin Jiaoyu* 8.4 (1924): 168-169, and a follow-up report in *Xin Jiaoyu* 9.4 (1924): 192-193. For a discussion of student experiences organizing and staffing “Commoners' Night Schools” in Shanghai, see Wasserstrom, *Student Protests*, 96-98. Wasserstrom argues that these night schools were instrumental in the development of student politics in the Shanghai area, as they provided early opportunities for alliances between students from Shanghai University and other schools, as well as alliances between students and workers, which themselves provided a foundation for the May 30<sup>th</sup> incident in the spring of 1925. Critically, Wasserstrom credits the student-run Lecture Corps of the late 1910s as the primary inspiration behind these later activities.



Education Lecture Corps is the very factor that enabled the populist egalitarianism that animated their idealized conception of *pingmin*. Despite their nearly constant failure to attract an audience, the Beida students remained fully invested in the revolutionary potential of themselves and their listeners. As such, Beida students were able to envision their local activities, and by extension the *pingmin* education project more generally, as the “foundation of a republican country” (*gongheguo* 共和国) wherein everyone was truly equal.<sup>66</sup>

### ***Pingmin Jiaoyu* as Democratic Education: The *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society**

Seven months after the founding of the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps at Beida, students and professors at Beijing Higher Normal School (*Beijing gaodeng shifan xuexiao* 北京高等师范学校, soon to be renamed Beijing Normal University, hereafter “Beigao”) formed the second major student group to directly promote *pingmin* education, the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society. The club spent part of its energies reorganizing various other philanthropic organizations on campus, including the “Education and Society Magazine Group” and the “Practical Education Research Society,” and directing them toward *pingmin* education. However, the club’s primary activity over the course of its existence was the editing and publication of a weekly journal, *Pingmin Jiaoyu*, which ran from 1919 to 1924, with the English title “Democracy and Education.”<sup>67</sup> The journal focused primarily on theoretical and policy issues, and its content

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<sup>66</sup> “Beijing daxue Pingmin Jiaoyu Jiangyantuan zhengji tuanyuan qi” in WSST 2: 135.

<sup>67</sup> For a capsule history of the organization, see Zhang Yunhou’s introductory gloss in WSST 3: 4-5. Unlike the Beida Lecture Corps, there are no major English-language histories of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society or its members. The summary of the groups activities by Zhang is heavily influenced by a Marxist theoretical framework that labels the groups members as “conservative, reactionary” members of the “capitalist intellectual class,” and criticizes the group’s activities, particular in its inaugural year, as being too narrowly focused on primary education rather than on the plight of workers who have been denied access to educational opportunities. While Zhang’s critique is not without merit (indeed it echoes the critiques of several readers of the journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu* during its publication run), the broad criticism of the group under a Marxist framework unnecessarily elides many of the tensions and ambiguities within the group regarding the relationship between education, the state, and the Chinese political

ranged from personal essays and policy proposals submitted by students at Beigao to transcriptions of lectures from visiting professors and translations of foreign-language articles on education. The journal's fifth issue, published on November 8, 1919, laid out the general aims of the journal, and indeed of the group, as follows: "to promote the doctrine of democratic education (*demokelaxi jiaoyu* 德谟克拉西教育), to research methods of implementing democratic education, and to criticize old-style education, old ways of thinking, and old society—in an effort to transform the situation."<sup>68</sup>

The journal's presentation and mission statement reveal two important differences separating the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society from the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps established at Beida half a year earlier. First, while organizations like the Lecture Corps and the Night School for Commoners were focused on practical action in and around Beijing, the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society was clearly more oriented toward policy making and the promotion of new education theory. The journal, although written in a loose, vernacular style, was aimed squarely at fellow university students and education reformers. Indeed, the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society spent much more time drafting white papers, translating articles, and debating the meaning of democracy than they spent actually educating any so-called "common people." Even after the journal shifted from a weekly to a bi-monthly publication schedule and the group created a "Lecturing Department" to supplement the branches of the organization devoted to editing and publishing

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subject. Also, note please note that while the journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu* bore the title "Democracy and Education" on its front cover, the journal was also sometimes referred to in English simply as *Popular Education*. For an example of such a reference in a roughly contemporary English publication, see Wang Tsi Chang's *The Youth Movement in China* (New York: New Republic, Inc 1927), 222. More recently, Paul Bailey and Fabio Lanza (citing Bailey) have referred to the journal as "Popular Education" (see, for example, Bailey, *Reform the People*, 198). Yet despite the seeming scholarly consensus on "Popular Education" as an appropriate English title, the presentation of the journal, along with several photographed events with banners translating the title of the group as the "Democracy and Education" society, really do suggest "Democracy and Education" as the English translation preferred by members of the group.

<sup>68</sup> "Taolun ben bao de zongzhi," WSST 3:13-14.

*Pingmin Jiaoyu*, this lecturing department was tasked with attracting famous professors and visiting educators from abroad to give guest lectures on Beigao's campus and not on drafting or delivering open-air lectures on Beijing street corners.<sup>69</sup> In this way, the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society's lecture department was meant to enhance the basic function of the journal, which was to increase education knowledge among students at Beijing Higher Normal School and perhaps, at the very limit of the students' ambition, to help prepare middle and primary school teachers elsewhere in the country. The editors of the journal were, in its early years especially, so focused on theoretical issues related to *pingmin jiaoyu* that some readers wrote to complain, asking why a journal supposedly devoted to "commoners' education" spent so much time discussing "school-based education" (*xuexiao jiaoyu* 学校教育) and politics rather than the reading rooms and half-day schools typically associated with efforts to educate the common people.<sup>70</sup>

Yet while the sustained focus on theory over action may have limited the immediate impact of the journal on workers and farmers near Beijing, the student editors' consistent efforts to explain the failures of the old education system, to define the goals and functions of education in a new society, and to provide suggestions for how to implement such new forms of education allowed them to stage a bold intervention into ongoing debates within the professional education reform community. In fact, the early editors of the journal, including Xu Minghong 徐名鸿 (1897-1934), Chang Daozhi 常道直 (1897-1975), and Tang Maoru 汤茂如 never saw themselves as engaged in overly abstract or esoteric matters of theory; rather, they viewed a

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<sup>69</sup> "Ben she jiangyanhui de jingguo ji xiwang 本社讲演会的经过及希望" [The aspirations and experiences of this organization's "lecture meeting"], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 41-42 (Nov 1921) and later collected as "Jiangyanlu diyi ji 讲演录第一集" [The First Collection of Lecture Records], reprinted in WSST 3: 31-32.

<sup>70</sup> Examples of questions submitted by readers are provided in Chang Daozhi 常道直, "'Pingmin jiaoyu zhi xin jieshi' 平民教育'之新解释" [A new interpretation of *pingmin jiaoyu*], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 29 (Feb 1921), reprinted in WSST 3: 26-30.

discussion of education reform policy as a relatively more concrete way of addressing the political shortcomings of the Chinese Republic, at least in comparison to leading political theorists of the day. As the forward to the first issue of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* states,

Is it not the case that in order to have popular government (*pingmin zhengzhi* 平民政治), we must first have *pingmin* education?... The Republic of China labels itself as having had a popular government for eight years, and yet the tools of popular government are still not here. Thus we demand a detailed discussion of how to fundamentally reform education, and are unwilling to enter some lofty discussion about a political “castle in the sky” (*kongzhong lounge* 空中楼阁).<sup>71</sup>

Within the students’ efforts to contribute to this more detailed discussion of education reform policy, defining “*pingmin jiaoyu*” itself emerged as a primary task. The journal’s decision to publish the letter exchange between Lang Gong and Man Zhi on the meaning of “*pingmin*,” referenced at the start of this chapter, was accompanied in early issues by similar articles like Chi Ming’s 迟明, “The True Spirit of *Pingmin Jiaoyu*.” Even more than a year after it first hit the press, the journal continued to publish articles refining, revising, and clarifying the meaning of “*pingmin jiaoyu*,” as in Chang Daozhi’s essay “A New Interpretation of ‘*Pingmin Jiaoyu*’” published in the journal’s 29<sup>th</sup> issue in February of 1921.<sup>72</sup> The sustained attention devoted to such definitional issues not only reveals the extent to which “*pingmin*” and “*pingmin jiaoyu*” remained unsettled signifiers in the early part of the 1920s but also demonstrates the students’ belief in the centrality of such debates to broader education reform projects and even to the fate of the Chinese republic. For the student contributors to *Pingmin Jiaoyu*, the debate over the meaning of the journal’s titular concept was not simply a matter of semantics; it was a struggle to define the values of a new education system and a new society.

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<sup>71</sup> “Fa kanci 发刊词” [Forward], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 1 (Oct 1919), reprinted in WSST 3: 6.

<sup>72</sup> See Chi Ming 迟明, “Pingmin jiaoyu de zhen jingshen 平民教育的真精神” [The true spirit of *Pingmin Jiaoyu*] *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 2 (Oct 1919), reprinted in WSST 3: 17, and Chang, “Pingminjiaoyu zhi xin jieshi,” in WSST 3: 26-30.

So how exactly did the members of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society understand the name of their journal? The constant stream of articles addressing and then revising this subject ensure that there is no singular answer, but the journal's English title, "Democracy and Education," and its stated goal of promoting *demokelaxi jiaoyu* provide an important clue and represent the second primary difference separating the *pingmin* education group at Beigao from the *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps at Beida. The Lecture Corps was influenced by the specific campus culture at Beida and by their conversations with a small group of locally minded student activists. Conversely, the language of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society, with their specific embrace of "democracy/*demokelaxi*," reflects a direct, sustained engagement with international discourses on education and politics. In particular, the association of "*pingmin jiaoyu*" with "democracy and education" is taken from the language of American educational philosopher John Dewey, who had come to China at the invitation of Hu Shi and Jiang Menglin to deliver a series of lectures on this subject between May 1, 1919 and July 11, 1921.<sup>73</sup> Over the course of his twenty-six-month stay in China, Dewey addressed education societies in Hangzhou, Nanjing, and Shanghai, yet spent the majority of his time in Beijing, where he taught regular courses at Beijing University and Beijing Higher Normal School.<sup>74</sup> Translations and transcriptions of Dewey's lectures were widely reprinted, both in official sources like the Ministry of Education *Bulletin*, in newspapers like *Chenbao* 晨报, and in independent journals such as *Jiaoyu Yu Zhiye* 教育与职业 [Education and Vocation], *Xin Jiaoyu* 新教育 [New Education], and *Jiaoyu Chao* 教育潮 [Educational

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<sup>73</sup> For a general summary of Dewey's visit and of the contents of his lectures in China, see Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China*, esp. 7-52. See also, Robert W. Clopton and Tsuin-chen Ou, "Introduction," in *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, eds. Robert W. Clopton, et al. (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1973), 1-30. For a more recent account, which considers not only Dewey's impact on China, but also the impact of China on Dewey's own intellectual development, see Jessica Ching-Sze Wang, *John Dewey in China: To Teach and To Learn* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Clopton and Ou, *John Dewey: Lectures in China*, 3.

Tide], all of which used terms like “*pingmin jiaoyu*” or “*pingminzhuyi de jiaoyu*” to convey to Chinese audiences Dewey’s educational and political philosophy.<sup>75</sup> The *Pingmin Jiaoyu* society worked closely with Dewey during his tenure at Beijing Higher Normal School, publishing transcriptions of his lectures and hosting a farewell party upon Dewey’s return to the U.S. in 1921.<sup>76</sup> Later historians of education reform and of early 1920s student politics have continued to associate the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society and Dewey, with Barry Keenan referring to *Pingmin Jiaoyu* as “the most avowedly Deweyan periodical of the May Fourth era.”<sup>77</sup>

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, “*Pingmin jiaoyu zhi zhendi* 平民教育之真谛” [The True Essence of Commoners’ Education], *Jiaoyu Chao* 1.2 (1919): 27-34; “*Pingminzhuyi de jiaoyu (ji duwei boshi zai jiangsusheng jiaoyuhui yanjiang de dayao)* 平民主义的教育(记杜威博士在江苏教育会演讲的大要)” [Democratic Education (A record of the main points of Dr. Dewey’s speech to the Jiangsu Provincial Education Society)], *Jiaoyu Chao* 1.2 (1919): 85-93; “*Duwei boshi yanjiang pingminjiaoyu* 杜威博士演讲平民教育” [Dr. Dewey’s speech on Commoners’ Education], *Jiaoyu yu zhiye* 16 (1919): 55-57; and “*Ji Duwei boshi yanjiang de dayao: Pingminzhuyi! Pingminzhuyi de jiaoyu! Pingmin jiaoyu zhuyi de banfa!* 记杜威博士演讲的大要：平民主义！平民主义的教育！平民教育主义的办法！” [A record of the main points of Dr. Dewey’s speech: Democracy! Democratic Education! Methods for Democratic Education-ism!], *Xin Jiaoyu* 1.3 (1919): 109-114. Many such articles were in fact the same lecture reprinted under different titles. Some of Dewey’s lectures were reprinted as many as nine times across various newspapers, journals, official publications, and bound edited collections. A series of lectures on social and political philosophy sponsored by the Ministry of Education, Beijing University, the Aspiration Society, and the New Learning Society were reprinted in *Xue Deng* 学灯 [Academic Lamp], *Juewu* 觉悟 [Awakening], *Chenbao* [Morning Post] and its supplement, *Chenbao fukan* 晨报副刊, the Ministry of Education *Bulletin*, *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 [New Youth, or “La Jeunesse”], *Guomin gongbao* 国民公报 [Citizens Gazette], *Xin Zhongguo* 新中国 [The New China], and later in the bound volume *Duwei wu da yanjiang* 杜威五大演讲 [Five major lectures of John Dewey], Beijing: Chenbaoshe, 1920 (Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 175-177).

<sup>76</sup> The *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society’s farewell banquet honoring Dewey was reported on by the education journal *Jiaoyu Congkan* 教育丛刊 [Education Collection], which was also founded by Beijing Higher Normal students and published a series of translations of Dewey’s *The School and Society*. See “Beijing gaoshi pingmin jiaoyu zazhi she yu minguo shinian Duanjie ri huansong Duwei boshi yu qi jiashu fanguo jinian 北京高师平民教育杂志社于民国十年端午节欢送杜威博士与其家属返国纪念” [The Beijing Higher Normal School’s *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Magazine Group gives a farewell party for Dr. John Dewey and his family during the 1921 Dragon Boat Festival in *Jiaoyu Congkan* 2.5 (1921): 1. Issues 26 (Dec 1920) through 35 (June 1921) of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* featured translations of Dewey’s lectures at Beijing Higher Normal School based on English-language notes taken by editor Chang Daozhi. After Dewey’s departure, Chang would edit a full 370-page volume of Dewey’s work, *Pingminzhuyi yu jiaoyu: Duwei boshi jiangshu* 平民主义与教育：杜威博士讲述 [Democracy and Education: Lectures by John Dewey] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1921), which billed itself as an interpretation and reading guide for Dewey’s *Democracy and Education* (Originally published by the Macmillan Company in March 1916), and included translations of the original text, Chinese translations of English notes from Dewey’s China lectures, and supplementary material added by Chang to help make the material more understandable to Chinese audiences.

<sup>77</sup> Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China*, 58. In his introductory gloss on the group, Zhang Yunhou also cites the heavy influence of “bourgeois educational philosopher John Dewey” on the group at the time of its founding (Zhang, WSST 3: 4).

A full account of the ideas presented in Dewey's lectures in China could easily span several volumes and would include discussions of political philosophy, the origins of social conflict, the development of modern science, curriculum design, and even occasional commentaries on the ongoing political protests launched by students in Beijing.<sup>78</sup> Yet while the contents of Dewey's lectures spanned a diverse array of issues, he was most well known and most often cited as an advocate of experiential learning, of democratic politics, and of "democratic education."<sup>79</sup> One of Dewey's students, Tao Xingzhi 陶行知(1891-1946), later reduced Dewey's philosophy to just a few key catchphrases such as "school is society" (*xuexiao ji shehui* 学校即社会) and "education is life" (*jiaoyu ji shenghuo* 教育即生活), that emphasized the connection between experience and learning and between education and social change.<sup>80</sup> In narrating the development of democracy in the U.S. and urging for the adoption of an experimental, scientific method as both a tool for learning and a means of solving social problems, Dewey represented the embodiment of "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy" as originally envisioned by Chen Duxiu in the pages of *New Youth*. By advocating that all members of society should have access to education and in establishing the school as the fundamental building block of broad social change, Dewey reflected the dreams of education reformers who saw popular education as a means of national salvation.

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<sup>78</sup> The above list is adapted from the titles of lectures given by Dewey in China and collected in Clopton and Ou, ed. *John Dewey: Lectures in China*. While the lectures collected here do not often reference China directly, they comprise a relatively small portion of Dewey's overall speaking engagements in China, and more recent scholarship has shown that while Dewey's major lecture series focused primarily on issues of theory and technical classroom issues, his other lectures commented frequently on contemporary events in China (Wang, *John Dewey in China*, 22).

<sup>79</sup> While English language scholarship on Dewey's lectures in China has changed substantially over the past four decades, both older and more recent work on Dewey's lectures identifies the scientific method, democracy, and popular education as the three central themes uniting his major lectures in China.

<sup>80</sup> Tao Xingzhi 陶行知, "Shenghuo jiaoyu 生活教育" [Life education], *Shenghuo Jiaoyu* 生活教育 1.1 (Feb 1934), reprinted in *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan* 陶行知黄炎培徐特立陈鹤琴教育文选 [A collection of education essays from Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, and Chen Heqin] (Hefei: Anhui Jiaoyu Chubanshe, 1992), 50.

Dewey's own understanding of "democratic education" focused on the notion that education should not simply pass on knowledge to children without regard for its practical application, but rather should enable students to grow and solve problems encountered in everyday life. In this sense, Dewey argued in favor of education that put the specific needs of individual students first. At the same time, Dewey also argued that the aim of education in democratic societies should be "to create good citizens," that is, "that education must enable every individual both to benefit from the past and present culture of his society and to contribute to the development of the emerging culture by initiating new experience of his own, which may influence others to participate in new kinds of social action."<sup>81</sup> Dewey further explained that being a "good citizen" went beyond the more obvious political aspects of citizenship to include being "a good neighbor" as well as an economic actor "who produces rather than...merely shares in the production of others."<sup>82</sup> As for the ultimate goal of democratic education, Dewey's Chinese interpreters expressed his philosophy in the following way:

I want to emphasize the fact that the end of education is not just the cultivation of scholars or bookworms who are satisfied to spend all their time reading, but rather it is to cultivate useful members of society. Ability to read is not enough to make a good citizen, if by good citizen we mean one who must make a real contribution to his society...[The] school should not merely acquaint students with the needs of society, but must also prepare them to meet these needs.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Clopton and Ou, eds, *John Dewey: Lectures in China*, 210. The following quotes are taken from a lecture on "Cultural Heritage and Social Reconstruction," which was itself part of a series of sixteen lectures sponsored by Beijing University, the Ministry of Education, and the Aspiration Society under the heading "Jiaoyu zhexue 教育哲学" [Philosophy of Education] in late September and early October 1919. Hu Shi served as the interpreter for all of these lectures, which were published in *Xue Deng*, *Chenbao Fukan*, the *Ministry Bulletin*, and other smaller journals throughout 1919 and 1920.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 211.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.* This quote likely marks one particular instance in which Hu Shi embellished on Dewey's original meaning. In the late 1910s and early 1920s, the term "bookworm" (*shudaizi* 书呆子) emerged as a popular means of explaining the failures of the old education system. Tao Xingzhi in particular used the term to deride the products of the classical school system, and as we shall see in the next chapter, the critique of "scholars and bookworms" in the context of "democratic education" eventually led to a much broader re-evaluation of literacy as an educational end. For an example of Tao's critique of "bookworms," see Tao Xingzhi, "Zhongguo xiangcun jiaoyu zhi genben gaizao 中国乡村教育之根本改造" [Fundamental reform in China's rural education], *Zhongguo Jiaoyu Gaizao* 中国教育改造 [Chinese educational reform] (April 1923), reprinted in in *Tao Xingzhi, Huangyanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin*



Thus, in the context of creating “good citizens,” Dewey viewed “democratic education” not simply as a means of serving students but also (indeed primarily) as a means of allowing students to better serve (a democratic) society. In adopting Dewey’s banner of “democratic education” as their own, the editors of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* signaled their attachment to Dewey’s central claim that democracy, experiential learning, and popular education were fundamentally linked. Furthermore, true popular education would require much more than broadening access to learning. It would also require a continued re-evaluation of the goals and contents of education designed to create good citizens.

While the title “Democracy and Education” marks Dewey as the most prominent intellectual forebear behind *Pingmin Jiaoyu*, he was by no means the only American educator to directly influence the students at Beigao. Over time the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society worked closely with the National Association for the Promotion of Education to host several visiting educators from abroad, many of them affiliated with the Teachers College at Columbia University’s Chinese Education Initiative, including Paul Monroe and W. D. McCall.<sup>84</sup> Dewey himself was not the first Columbia-affiliated professor to visit China—Monroe had visited China in 1913—

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*Jiaoyu wenxuan*, 8-9. Versions of these sentiments were widely expressed before Dewey’s visit, particularly among advocates for “vocational education.” See, for example, Huang Yanpei 黄炎培, “Zhonghua zhiye jiaoyu she xuanyanshu 中华职业教育宣言书” [Manifesto of the Chinese Vocational Education Society], *Jiaoyu yu zhiye 教育与职业* 1 (1917): 1-2.

<sup>84</sup> Like the club’s efforts to honor Dewey, photographs of the organization’s reception of these scholars were published in local education journals. See, for example, “Beijing Gaoshi Pingmin Jiaoyu She huanying Menglu Boshi sheying 北京高师平民教育社欢迎孟禄博士摄影” [The Beijing Higher Normal School’s *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society welcomes Dr. Monroe], *Jiaoyu congkan* 2.8 (1922): 1 and “Beijing Gaoshi Pingmin Jiaoyu She huanying Maikeshi Boshi sheying 北京高师平民教育社欢迎麦柯博士摄影” [The Beijing Higher Normal School’s *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society welcomes Dr. McCall], *Jiaoyu congkan* 4.1 (1923): 1. Though Dewey is better known to American audiences, these other Columbia University professors had a profound impact on education reform in China. A 1940s history of Chinese literary education cites McCall’s visit to China in 1923 as a defining moment in the development of a national Chinese language and also cites Columbia educated Chinese scholars such as Liu Tingfang 刘廷芳 (1892-1947) as central figures in the scientific research of literacy education. See Jiang Jianbang 姜建邦, *Shizi xinli 识字心理* [Literacy Mentality] (Beijing: Zhengzhong Shuju 正中书局, 1948), 7-8.

nor was he indicative of a unidirectional exchange.<sup>85</sup> For the past decade, Chinese students had been traveling to Columbia University and its affiliated Teachers College, which boasted nearly a hundred Chinese graduate students in 1918, many of whom would play prominent roles in China upon their return, including Beida Chancellor Jiang Menglin (EdD 1917), Nanjing Teachers College founder P.W. Kuo (EdD 1914), and the president of Beijing Higher Normal School, Li Jianxun 李建勋 (MA 1921).<sup>86</sup> By the early 1920s, increasing numbers of Columbia faculty and other prominent academics and philosophers were following these students back to China, and in hosting such professors and publishing their lectures, organizations like the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society acted as both products and facilitators of this exchange. The continued correspondence between *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society members and American educators not only reflects the sustained interest in overseas education theories among Beigao students but also illustrates that by this time, the “problem” of China’s education system had itself become an object of international discourse and thus a topic subject to the assumptions and prescriptions of educators like Dewey and Monroe.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Monroe was one of the first American educators to travel to China at the invitation of Chinese educational authorities, and he traveled frequently to China over the 1910s and 1920s. In his forward to Monroe’s *China: A Nation in Evolution*, Minister of China to the United States Sao-ke Alfred Sze claims that Monroe “visited places in the interior which had seldom if ever been visited by Westerners since the time of Marco Polo.” See Alfred Sze, Forward to *China: A Nation in Evolution*, by Paul Monroe (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1928). The large numbers of Chinese students attending Columbia Teacher’s College by 1920 can be attributed in large part to interest generated by Monroe’s early visits.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 19-20. The members of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society themselves contributed to this trend, as editorial board members Chang Daozhi and Wang Zhuoran 王卓然 (1893-1975) both studied abroad at Columbia after graduating from Beijing Higher Normal School. For a full biography of Chang Daozhi and Wang Zhuoran see Xu Youchun 徐友春, ed, *Minguo renwu dacidian, zhengdingban* 民国人物大辞典, 增订版 [A biographical dictionary of Republican China: enlarged and expanded edition] (Shijiasuang: Hebei renmin chubanshe, 2007), 111, 497, 1658-1659.

<sup>87</sup> By the twentieth century, China’s perceived political and cultural faults had long been a subject of international discussion and debate, dating back to the reports produced by the Royal Asiatic Society in the lead-up to the first Opium War. For an effective summary of foreign-language critiques of China’s “problems” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as well as an analysis of how Chinese nationalists like Liang Qichao, Sun Yatsen, and Chiang Kaishek appropriated these narratives to nationalist ends, see John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 103-146. Lydia Liu

In this latter regard, the journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu* reveals the degree to which some understandings of “*pingmin jiaoyu*” were circumscribed by the conditions of colonial modernity in China. Because of the status conferred upon American educators in China, and specifically because of the professional networks developed between high-level administrators at various Chinese universities and faculty at Columbia during the 1910s and early 1920s, more American scholars than ever were traveling to China to speak to local audiences about how best to address the problems of Chinese education. Similarly, given the strong overlap between Dewey’s critique of examination-oriented education and the anti-Confucianism of the New Culture Movement, to say nothing of Hu Shi’s robust efforts to publicize his visit, Dewey and others like him found many eager audience members among the radical students of Beijing, Nanjing, and Shanghai, particularly in 1919 and early 1920.<sup>88</sup> At the same time, Dewey’s educational philosophies and

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highlights missionary Arthur Smith’s *Chinese Characteristics*, first published as a series of essays in a Shanghai newspaper in 1889, as one of the foundational texts in the long-twentieth-century discourse on flaws in the Chinese national character. As Liu helpfully observes, Smith’s book was just as influential in promoting among Western (and later Chinese) audiences the idea that there existed such a thing as a definable “Chinese national character”—a notion that was itself derived from nineteenth-century European political theory—as it was in defining what the strengths and weaknesses of this national character were. Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity, China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 51-60. By the early 1920s, many prominent English-language authors were publishing analyses promising an explanation of China’s faults and weaknesses. Dewey’s own visit to China not only gave him an opportunity to speak to Chinese audiences, but also furnished him with experiences and observations he used to speak to international audiences about various contemporary issues in China. Articles by Dewey such as “Old China and New,” “Divided China,” and “As the Chinese Think,” outlined China’s social and political difficulties in English-language journals like *Asia* and *New Republic*, and were later republished in John Dewey, *Characters and Events: Essays in Social and Political Philosophy*, ed. Joseph Ratner (New York: H. Holt and Company, 1929). For a more robust account of Dewey’s writings about China in English, see Wang, *John Dewey in China*, esp. “Dewey as a Learner,” 65-86. Among the English-language writing produced about China in the 1920s, some works, such as Bertrand Russell’s *The Problem of China*, specifically discussed education reform as a central platform in reversing China’s national fortunes. Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* (London: G. Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1922), 214-225. Other works, such as Rodney Gilbert’s *What’s Wrong with China*, first published in 1926, offered a more straightforwardly racist appraisal of China’s problems, dismissing the Chinese as ethnically and biologically inferior “children” in need of colonial stewardship (Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, 140-141).

<sup>88</sup> Wang, *John Dewey in China*, 42-43. As Wang notes, “the Dewey fad” declined somewhat over the course of his visit, due in part to the increased attention paid to Bertrand Russell, who arrived later, and to growth of Chinese communism, which would later develop a focused critique of Dewey’s educational philosophy as not being sufficiently sensitive to class issues. Another important factor enabling and amplifying Dewey’s reception in China was the rapid increase in domestic English-language education among certain Chinese students. Before becoming a student at Beijing Higher Normal School, one of *Pingmin Jiaoyu*’s early editors, Wang Zhuoran, graduated in 1917 from the Shenyang and Nanguan Dual-Level Normal School’s Junior College of English, and in 1919, he took a

political prescriptions were not simply filling an intellectual void left by the rejection of Confucianism, but rather were translated, appropriated, and occasionally rejected to fit the needs of Chinese political and educational reformers invested in multiple ongoing debates on the function and direction of Chinese education.<sup>89</sup> As the leading journal for translating these educational theories and applying them to the Chinese context, *Pingmin Jiaoyu* created an outlet for students and faculty at Beigao to engage in direct dialogue with celebrated figures like Dewey and to lend his name to their own ideas and arguments. The result was a capacious and occasionally contradictory understanding of education, citizenship, and democracy that reflects the difficulty of translating idealized American political theory within the logic of China's ongoing education reforms.

Of the multiple understandings of “*pingmin jiaoyu*” presented in *Democracy and Education*, the one most frequently articulated and most clearly influenced by Dewey was the conception of the school itself as a democratic institution, reinforced by the notion that education should serve students' needs and serve as a means of inculcating students with the values of democracy (*pingminzhuyi*). This understanding of *pingmin* education was most prominent in the journal's earliest declarative statements, when it made the spread of “*demolekaxi* education” a central aim of the society, but this belief in education as a democratic process also asserted itself in the editors' advocacy for student self-government (*xuesheng zizhi* 学生自治). Editorial board member Chang Daozhi described the ideal school by paraphrasing Lincoln's Gettysburg Address,

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position supervising all of the English language instructors at Andong Commercial Middle School. He would later serve as a personal English tutor for the children of famed northern warlord Zhang Xueliang 张学良 (1901-2001), who appointed him as an English professor at Dongbei Provincial University (Xu, *Minguo renwu dacidian*, 111).

<sup>89</sup> For an example of the narrative that Dewey's thought filled an intellectual void left by Confucianism, see Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China*. Jessica Ching-Sze Wang has argued that the process of appropriation and interpretation of Dewey's philosophy began at the site of the lectures themselves, and she provides multiple examples of instances when Hu Shi, serving as Dewey's interpreter, expanded or elided certain elements of Dewey's lectures to promote his own political agenda (See Wang, *John Dewey in China*, 30-40).

stating that schools should be established “of the students, for the students, and by the students.”<sup>90</sup> He went on to criticize those schools where teachers “act like rulers” and students “bow their heads and submit themselves to their duty,” arguing that such schools inherently produce obedient political subjects unfit for democratic society.<sup>91</sup> One contributor to the journal’s fourth issue stated that “the first goal of *pingmin* education is to instill a sense of independence in all people (*renmin* 人民), and thus its educational methods start with developing a child’s inherent abilities and respect the child’s individual personality.”<sup>92</sup> Indeed, it was in arguing on behalf of a new kind of “*demokelaxi*” education that contributors drew a direct connection between the specific conditions of China’s school system and the broader conditions of China’s political destiny.

Yet even as some reformers embraced the language of *pingmin* to describe a new Deweyan educational vision organized around democracy and independence, some authors continued to use *pingmin jiaoyu* as a way of talking about education intended for “commoners” or those otherwise left out of China’s former education system. In the journal’s earliest issues, the editors were at pains to separate their vision for “*demokelaxi* education” from any particular sense of class distinction, declaring plainly that “*pingmin* education is not poor people’s education (*pinmin jiaoyu* 贫民教育).”<sup>93</sup> Yet many contributors to the journal who were not

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<sup>90</sup> Chang, “Pingmin jiaoyu zhi xin jieshi,” in WSST 3: 28. Chang cited Lincoln’s original address in untranslated English, noting that a democratic nation is a “nation of the People, for the People, and by the People,” for which he then provided the translation “you renmin, wei renmin, er sheli zhi renmin de guojia 由人民，为人民，而设立人民的国家.” Chang claimed that those who support democratic education simply substitute “school” for “nation” and “students” for “people.”

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Hong Tu 宏图, “Pingmin jiaoyu tan 平民教育谈” [A discussion of pingmin jiaoyu], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 4 (Nov 1919), reprinted in WSST 3: 19.

<sup>93</sup> This was the title of an article penned by Lang Gong in the journal’s second issue. Lang Gong references this article when explaining the meaning of the term “pingmin” to Man Zhi in a letter published under the heading “A discussion of this journal’s aims.” See “Taolun benbao de zongzhi,” 13.

themselves members of the editorial board used the term in precisely this way, bemoaning the “non-productive, class-oriented, and overly bureaucratic society” produced by an old education system that denied knowledge to the poor.<sup>94</sup> Another appealed to the sympathy of readers by drawing their attention to the “pitiable and bright-eyed but illiterate *pingmin*—in whose hands lies our clothing, food, and livelihood,” further conflating the notion of “*pingmin* education” with the task of providing knowledge to the poor and disadvantaged.<sup>95</sup> Thus while the journal’s editors and those close to Dewey may have continued to insist on the connection between “*pingmin*” and a non-class-specific notion of “democracy,” many other contributors to the journal shared the sentiment expressed by Man Zhi in his letter to Lang Gong, where he suggested that “*pingmin*” simply referred to all of those not considered part of the aristocracy. By the journal’s second year of publication, Chang Daozhi was forced to concede that “*pingmin jiaoyu*” could in fact be understood as a synonym for “commoners’ education” (*shumin jiaoyu* 庶民教育) in that it stood in opposition to the “aristocratic education” (*guizhou jiaoyu* 贵胄教育) of the Chinese past.<sup>96</sup> Yet even as Dewey’s students acknowledged the common connotations of “*pingmin jiaoyu*” and “education for commoners,” they continued to insist on the political implications of this vision, and employed the term to critique not only the expensive private

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<sup>94</sup> Yi Zhen 伊真, “Jiaoyu—pingmin—gaizao 教育—平民—改造” [Education, the people, reform], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 2 (Oct 1919), reprinted in WSST 3: 15.

<sup>95</sup> “Jiaoyu de cuowu 教育的错误” [The errors of education], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 9 (Dec 1919), reprinted in WSST 3: 20-21. The author of this article is unclear, but the penname “Hui 惠” is included in lieu of a byline.

<sup>96</sup> Chang, “Pingmin jiaoyu zhi xin jieshi,” 28-29. Even when conceding that *pingmin jiaoyu* overlapped with the notion of *shumin jiaoyu* (“education for commoners”), Chang himself provided the English translation “popular education,” as the best way of understanding this aspect of *pingmin jiaoyu*. While “Popular education” does capture the degree to which some contributors to the journal saw *pingmin jiaoyu* as a way of spreading educational opportunities to new target groups, the term “popular education” is itself a rather elusive and capacious term that could be applied to a variety of previous education initiatives, including *puji jiaoyu* 普及教育 (literally, “popularized education”) and *tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育 (literally, “common or popular education”). Because “*shumin*,” unlike “*puji*” or “*tongsu*” refers to a people group (“the common people” or “the multitudes”) rather than a descriptor of the education itself, I have chosen to render *shumin jiaoyu* as “education for commoners” rather than “popular education” as Chang himself translated it.

academies of the late Qing but also the ethnic schools and vocational programs that taught specific groups of students and promoted a “clan mentality” at the expense of individual development and social productivity.<sup>97</sup>

A third understanding of *pingmin jiaoyu* frequently presented in the journal was what Chang called “*pingminhua de jiaoyu* 平民化的教育,” or “Education for equalizing the Society [*sic*].”<sup>98</sup> In many respects, a chief goal of *pingmin* education was to address the class injustices produced by the imperial education system, which had divided society into “educated people,” represented by scholars and officials, and “uneducated people,” represented in the Confucian social hierarchy by farmers, workers, and merchants.<sup>99</sup> At the heart of the journal’s critiques of the examination system was a radical call for equality that went above and beyond even the hopes of the Beida Lecture Corps. While Beida students had sought to “Beida-ify” the countryside by granting access to the intellectual resources of the university, members of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society spoke about equality along more economic and social lines. As contributor Chi Ming 迟明 put it, “If these people can live in a massive house and ride cars and carriages, then those people can also live in a big house and ride cars and carriages; if these people can do manual labor, then those people should also do manual labor.”<sup>100</sup> Achieving what Chi Ming called “true equality and true freedom for all people in society” would require much more than outdoor lectures and an expansion of public reading rooms—it would also require a transformation of elite lifestyles and a re-evaluation of the content of elite education as well.

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>99</sup> Yi Zhen, “Jiaoyu—pingmin—gaizao,” 15.

<sup>100</sup> Chi Ming, “Pingmin jiaoyu de zhen qingshen,” 17.

One of the most striking aspects of such calls for “true equality” in education was the critique of classical literature and even of literacy itself. While the social and political usefulness of classical literature had come under new levels of criticism following the publication of Hu Shi’s “Preliminary Discussion of Literary Reform” in the pages of *New Youth* in January 1917, several contributors to *Pingmin Jiaoyu* went much further than previous reformers in questioning the value of literacy itself as a goal of either “elite” or “popular” education.<sup>101</sup> One contributor, writing under the pen-name “Hui 惠,” bluntly asked, “What is a person who reads books? Are they not parasites who do not toil and are ignorant of common things?”<sup>102</sup> Echoing Dewey’s sentiment that a primary goal of education is to cultivate “useful members of society,” Hui sums up China’s educational inequality in the following way: “the useful elements of society have all not received an education, while those who have received an education are all useless people.”<sup>103</sup> For this particular author and those like him, the solution was to unite working and studying into a single, simultaneous, and ubiquitous pedagogical endeavor that would make everyone into a “useful person” through a new, thoroughly equalized education. One should note, however, that

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<sup>101</sup> Hu Shi’s landmark essay, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi 文学改良刍议” has been republished many places, including in Hu Shi 胡适, *Hu Shi Wencun* 胡适文存 (Taipei: Yuandong Tushuguan, 1953), Vol. 1: 5-16. For a more detailed account of the changes in Chinese language education policy that informed and gave context to Hu’s critique of classical Chinese as a viable political and literary medium, see Elisabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895-1919* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). Kaske argues that while the literary activism of Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and others is typically understood in terms of a literary “movement,” it was in fact merely the product of long-gestating shifts in the classical/vernacular dichotomy of the late Qing and early Republican period. (Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, xii-xv). While Kaske is right to highlight education as a central battleground in these debates and to point out the late Qing as a particularly fertile time for the formation of new ideas and attitudes about the social function of language and the relevancy of classical Chinese, think a full analysis of Hu Shi’s writing and of journals advocating “commoners’ education,” reveals that arguments in favor of vernacular writing, while not new, were nonetheless transformed by the encounter with colonial modernity (especially educational philosophers like John Dewey).

<sup>102</sup> “Hui,” “Jiaoyu de cuowu,” 20. Somewhat ironically, Hui’s characterization of those who spend too much time reading classical texts is itself taken from the *Lunyu* 论语 [Analects], and specifically from a passage in which student of Confucius asks an old laborer if the older man has seen the student’s master, and the old man replies, “Si ti bu qin, wu gu bu fen 四体不勤五谷不分, 就为夫子?” [In D. C. Lau’s translation, “You seem neither to have toiled with your limbs nor to be able to tell one kind of grain from another. Who may your Master be?”] (See D. C. Lau, trans., *The Analects* (London: Penguin Books, 1979), 150.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 21.



Hui's piece represented only one answer to the question of what "education for equalizing society" should really look like, and while some prominent reformers like Tao Xingzhi would later continue to question the value of literacy and embrace "work-study" programs as a key component in China's educational future, many educators in the early 1920s continued to view universal literacy as the primary signifier of a truly equal society, including prominent education voices Yan Yangchu, Wang Boqiu 王伯秋 (1883-1944), and Xu Yanqiu 徐养秋 (1896-1972).<sup>104</sup>

Like the discussions of *pingmin jiaoyu* as a synonym for "commoners' education," many of the calls to equalize education by combining work and study were not themselves new, as education reformers had started to publicly question the value of literacy as early as 1913.<sup>105</sup> Since 1917, the Vocational Education Society founded by Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 (1878-1965) had argued on behalf of expanded vocational programs in both elite and popular primary schools as a means of addressing China's growing unemployment problem. The attempt by *Pingmin Jiaoyu* contributors to both define and remedy China's own "class inequality" were typically

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<sup>104</sup> Such was the view of many members of the National Society for the Promotion of *Pingmin* Education, who will be discussed in the following section. The sentiment that literacy remained an important benchmark for defining the success of *pingmin* education was also widespread among regional leaders in the broader education reform movement. In a speech delivered to a Teacher Discussion Conference sponsored by the Nanjing Society for the Promotion of *Pingmin* Education on June 22, 1923, returned student Xu Yangqiu argued that "If you want to get a nation's *guomin* to care about national affairs, the first step is to promote literacy." Another speech given around the same time by Wang Boqiu to the Xuzhou Lecture assembly argued that the most glaring examples of "class consciousness" in Chinese society are found in "the relationship between those who govern and those who are governed, and between those who are literate and those who are illiterate." Both speeches appear in the front matter to *Pingmin xuexiao jiaoshi zhinan* 平民学校教师指南 [A guidebook for commoners' education instructors] (Wuxi, Jiangsu: Nanjing pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui chubanshe, 1924). 5-7, 17-18.

<sup>105</sup> Arguments favoring "pragmatic" or vocational education over literacy training were indeed becoming somewhat mainstream by the mid 1910s. In an article on pragmatic learning, the chief editor of *Jiaoyu Zazhi*, Zhuang Yu 庄俞 (1876-1938), argued that the Republican Ministry of Education's curriculum, which focused primarily upon the mastery of China's literary tradition, was useless and should be replaced with educational practices that lead directly to life skills. See Zhuang Yu, JYZZ 5.7 (Oct 1913), 88. A few months later, Lu Feikui 陆费逵 (1886-1941) further critiqued literacy as an educational end in itself, suggesting that "without... vocational education, even if popular education were to become universal, it would do nothing more than create unlimited numbers of literate vagrants." Originally published as part of an article in *Zhonghua jiaoyu jie* 中华教育界 [Chinese Education Circles] 3.1 (Jan 1914), 1-3. Quoted from Thomas D. Curran, *Educational Reform in Republican China: The Failure of Educators to Create a Modern Nation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2005), 287.

rendered in terms of pre-existing, culturally specific social categories (such as the classical division into scholars, farmers, workers, and merchants) rather than in new terms of a contest between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. When authors referred to class conflict, the most frequently cited division was between “those who govern” and “those who are governed,” or between the educated and the uneducated, rather than between economically defined groups.

Yet the task of solving China’s longstanding inequalities, however defined, was given new urgency by recent world events and by the attention of Dewey and other foreign scholars. Even though the editors of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* did not focus on issues of economic class, they nonetheless prided themselves on being “followers of world trends,” and saw in their own efforts a kind of solidarity with Bolshevism, Socialism, and the International Workers Alliance, all of whom were partners in the joint effort to eliminate social classes altogether.<sup>106</sup> Even as they acknowledged that many of the codified social classes that defined the European experience, including a formal aristocracy or a priestly class, could not be readily applied to China, they nonetheless internalized the language of class conflict and class consciousness in a way that put China’s social problems in line with such global trends and left open the possibility of economic class conflict in the near future.<sup>107</sup> For this reason, economic anxieties about the type of labor potential produced by students of the elite and popular education systems continued to express themselves in the critiques of Hui and others, even while no direct admission of previous class conflict was made. Ultimately, no matter how contributors framed the social issues that *pingmin* education was meant to rectify, their efforts to craft an “equalizing” education went further than

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<sup>106</sup> Chang, “Pingmin Jiaoyu zhi xin jieshi,” 29.

<sup>107</sup> The notion that China’s own “class conflicts” were different but no less disruptive than those between the aristocracy, priests, and commoners of Europe was also shared among regional education reform leaders like Wang Boqiu, whose own understanding of *pingmin jiaoyu* as “equalizing” education was very similar to the definition given by Chang Daozhi in *Pingmin Jiaoyu*. See Wang, “Pingmin Jiaoyu gaishuo 平民教育概说” [An overview of Pingmin Education], in *Pingmin xuexiao jiaoshi zhinan*, 6.

ever before in suggesting that combination work-study programs should come to define all education, rather than just an alternative form of vocational education for those who would be left out of the school system entirely. They saw China's future as one in which "there will be no education other than *pingmin* education; there will be no schools other than *pingmin* schools."<sup>108</sup>

Thus, whether defining *pingmin jiaoyu* as a democratic enterprise in student self-governance, as a synonym for education intended for "commoners," or as a form of education meant to help equalize society, all contributors to *Pingmin Jiaoyu* saw education as the foundation of a new kind of politics, whereby all people would have the prerequisite knowledge necessary to contribute to democracy. In keeping with this shared vision, the basic assumption that democratic politics represented a normative good and the assertion that education's primary goal was the cultivation of "useful" people ran through many different arguments on how best to formulate *pingmin* education. Yet even as contributors shared a vision in which all education was "*pingmin* education," the fundamental tension highlighted by Man Zhi's letter to the editors remained: could *pingmin* truly stand for the entire democratic political body, and could there truly be no education other than *pingmin* education, when so many social, intellectual, and economic inequalities remained in Chinese society?<sup>109</sup> In this latter regard, the same temporal contradictions that haunted the earliest discussion of *guomin* education reasserted themselves in the pages of *Pingmin Jiaoyu*. Despite the editors' continued insistence that "*pingmin*" stood for a new kind of democratic political subject (and perhaps even for the democratic political process itself), they failed to escape the frequent association of "*pingmin*" with "poor people" and found

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<sup>108</sup> Chang, "Pingmin Jiaoyu zhi xin jieshi," 29.

<sup>109</sup> Unfortunately, we are not privy to Man Zhi's response to Lang Gong's suggestion that *pingmin* 平民 means "Democracy" (rendered in English in the original text), but a consideration of the many articles published in *Pingmin Jiaoyu* during its first few months of publication would suggest that Man Zhi's confusion about the relationship between *pingmin* and a specific social class was well-founded and indeed shared by many other writers to the journal.

themselves trapped between articulating a future democratic ideal and addressing a concrete set of social problems and educational challenges. The here-and-now problem of social and economic inequality was itself made more urgent by an emerging global political system that valued equality as a marker of modernity.

While it is difficult to judge the specific impact of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* in shaping Chinese education policy in the early 1920s, the more general role played by such groups in translating and articulating Dewey's ideas is more evident. By 1921, national education organizations were beginning to pressure the Ministry of Education to adopt a new set of nationwide education policies based on the American model. A set of proposals presented at the Seventh National Education Society Conference, convened in Guangzhou on October 26<sup>th</sup>, 1921, prepared by the Guangdong delegation, reads like a summary of Dewey's education philosophy. In it, reformers claimed that education served as the foundation of a republican country, and thus the state should establish the following goals: "[F]irst, promote the spirit of *pingmin jiaoyu*; second, suit itself to the needs of a changing society; third, develop the individual character of young people and encourage free choices; fourth, pay attention to the economic abilities of *guomin*; fifth, allow itself to adjust to local circumstances; and sixth, seek to make education easier and more accessible."<sup>110</sup> Meanwhile, some of Dewey's most prominent students and associates, including Hu Shi, Jiang Menglin, and Tao Xingzhi, came to occupy important roles in the ongoing reform

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<sup>110</sup> These proposals were originally published as "Quanguo Jiaoyuhui lianhehui di qi ci kaihui jilue 全国教育会联合会第七次开会纪略" [A record of the seventh annual meeting of the National Education Society Conference], *Jiaoyu Zazhi* 14.1 (Jan 1922): 1-10; reprinted in *Zhongguo Jindai Jiaoyushi ziliao huibian: Jiaoyu xingzheng jigou ji jiaoyu shetuan* 中国近代教育史资料汇编：教育行政机构及教育社团 [A collection of materials from modern Chinese education history: educational administrative structures and education organizations], eds. Chen Yuanhui 陈元晖 and Chen Xuexun 陈学恂 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2007), 252. In crafting this particular set of proposals, members of the Seventh Educational Society Conference were building off of guidelines established at previous conferences, including the fifth annual congress at Taiyuan, Shanxi, where members drafted a resolution to replace the Ministerial order outlining the aims of education (first adopted in September 1912) and replace it with one that defined education's primary function as "the cultivation of a healthy personality and the development of the spirit of democracy," the latter being clearly influenced by Dewey's lectures. See Lu-Dzai Djung, *A History of Democratic Education in Modern China* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1934), 51-55.

movement, either as presidents of major urban universities or as sponsors of new education experiments in the countryside.

Yet even as the individual contributions of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society members remained slight, their journal served as a useful forum for defining the conceptual boundaries of “democratic education” and for linking the education reform project directly to the democratic political project. The conversation that began in *Pingmin Jiaoyu* continued in speeches and in teacher-training textbooks throughout China, as various reformers attempted to demarcate and define the limits of “*pingmin* education” in ever more precise and useful ways. Some explications, such as the one offered by returned student Wang Boqiu in a speech to the Xuzhou Lecture Assembly, hewed closely to the outline established in *Pingmin Jiaoyu*. Wang noted that “*pingmin jiaoyu*,” despite being an ordinary phrase, represented an unordinary array of meanings, including “education for commoners,” “democratic education,” and “equalizing education.”<sup>111</sup> Other explanations, including the one Xu Yangqiu offered in a speech to a Teacher Discussion Conference in Nanjing, instead encouraged listeners to think of “*pingmin jiaoyu*” through the lenses of nationalism, social evolution, and humanitarianism.<sup>112</sup> The only true constant among such explanations is that just as the early issues of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* sought to define and redefine their titular concept, nearly all such discussions of *pingmin* education in the first half of the 1920s required some degree of semantic explication about what precisely the author or speechmaker meant by this capacious idea. By directly linking the practical implementation of *pingmin jiaoyu* to the broader political project of establishing democracy, the editors of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* extended the debate to include a discussion of what a *pingmin* government (*pingmin*

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<sup>111</sup> Wang, “Pingmin Jiaoyu Gaishuo,” 1-7.

<sup>112</sup> Xu Yangqiu, “Pingmin jiaoyu zhi yi yi 平民教育之意义” [The meaning of *Pingmin Jiaoyu*], in *Pingmin xuexiao jiaoshi zhinan*, 17-20.

*zhengzhi* 平民政治) should look like, requiring future education reformers to more precisely articulate both their specific pedagogical endeavors and the type of political subject such efforts were meant to engender. In this latter sense, many of the journal's internal discussions of the purpose of student government or the usefulness of literacy prefigure later debates among education leaders and China's growing political parties in the late 1920s and early 1930s.

### ***Pingmin Jiaoyu* as “Education for Commoners”: Yan Yangchu and the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education**

Both the Beida Lecture Corps and the Beigao *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society appropriated the discourse of “*pingmin*” to suit their own ideological and practical goals and, in so doing, helped to generate new understandings of “*pingmin jiaoyu*” either as a means of promoting equal access to knowledge or as a means of creating a new democratic society. Nevertheless, neither of these particular understandings of “*pingmin jiaoyu*” would emerge as the dominant association among administrators, textbook publishers, or leaders within the broader education reform community. The organizations themselves are frequently relegated to footnote status in contemporary histories of the *pingmin* education movement.<sup>113</sup> On a policy level, they failed to put any of their

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<sup>113</sup> See, for example, Tang, “*Pingmin jiaoyu yundong de jingguo*,” JYZZ 19.9 (1927): 1-9, which does not mention the Beida Lecture Corps at all and only brings up the journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu* as one of many embryonic “*pingminhua*” movements that anticipated the arrival of Yan Yangchu as the true standard-bearer of the *pingmin* education movement. Even this fleeting mention of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society is likely linked to the fact that the author of this particular account, Tang Maoru, was himself a member of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* editorial board during his days as a student at Beigao. Other accounts of the *pingmin* education movement, such as those penned by Yan Yangchu himself (see Yan Yangchu 晏阳初, “*Pingmin Jiaoyu Xin Yundong* 平民教育新運動” [The New Movement for Commoners' Education], *Xin Jiaoyu* 5.5 (1922): 96-115), neglect to mention any such efforts. Similarly, English language accounts of Chinese education reform from the era tend to focus exclusively on the “Mass Education Movement” of James Yen, rather than on these smaller campus initiatives (see Cyrus H. Peake, *Nationalism and Education in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 72-96). This is not to say that such early *pingmin*-focused campus organizations are ignored entirely. In contrast to their relative absence in accounts of education reform movements, the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps is frequently cited as one of the most important student groups of the May Fourth Period, particularly in its role as an organizational stepping-stone for later members of the Chinese Communist Party. See, for example, Beijing University History Department, *Beijing daxue xuesheng yundongshi* and Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, esp. 55-93.

ideas into practice on a large or even moderate scale, and their activities served more as means of practicing new forms of student organization and student networking than of substantively altering China's education landscape. Even their discursive contributions proved ultimately fleeting—while members of the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society cited a strong desire to move beyond class-based understandings of “*pingmin*” as the inspiration for their education programs, later scholars consistently critiqued the *pingmin* education movement in precisely these terms, arguing that the movement was too narrowly focused on illiterate commoners.<sup>114</sup> Indeed, such analyses of the *pingmin jiaoyu* movement by both supporters and detractors reveal that by the mid to late 1920s, *pingmin jiaoyu* came to be understood primarily, and perhaps exclusively, as “education for common people.”

This particular understanding of *pingmin jiaoyu* can largely be credited to the first truly national association of education professionals focused explicitly on this issue, the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education [Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui 中华平民教育促进会] (hereafter, NAPCE) and to its de facto leader, Yan Yangchu. This particular English translation of the organization's title is not standard and thus warrants further discussion. Both among contemporary sources and among English-language historians, this organization is often referred to simply as the Mass Education Movement or MEM. Indeed, when organization leaders spoke to English-language audiences about their efforts, they used the term “masses.” While I want to be as faithful as possible to the ways in which education reformers articulated their particular vision, the English word “masses” elides the important distinction between the Chinese terms *pingmin* 平民 and *minzhong* 民众—signifiers whose

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<sup>114</sup> For an example of this later critique of *pingmin jiaoyu* as too narrow, see Gan, *Xin Zhonghua Minzhong Jiaoyu*, 8-9. Ironically, such critiques reveal that the inspiration behind the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society's move away from a narrow understanding of “*pingmin*” remained relevant even though their particular interpretation of the term never appeared to reach consensus in the education reform community.

relationship is explored in further detail in Chapter Five. Because I want to highlight this important shift from *pingmin* to *minzhong*, the latter of which is more frequently translated as “masses,” I have chosen to emphasize a more literal translation of the *Zhonghua Pingmin Jiaoyu Cujinhui*, hence the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education.<sup>115</sup>

The organization was founded in August 1923 by Mdm. Xiong Zhu Qihui 熊朱其慧 at the annual meeting of the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education (CNAAE), held at Qinghua University in Beijing.<sup>116</sup> At that time, the CNAAE, itself founded in 1921, already sponsored several subcommittees that addressed popular education issues (including adult education, vocational education, library education, and women’s education), and the subcommittee for promoting *pingmin* education (and later, the independent NAPCE) marked the first major attempt to draw many of these individual projects together under the banner of *pingmin jiaoyu*.<sup>117</sup> The group’s assemblage of executive directors included some of the most prominent names in education reform at the time, such as Yan Yangchu, Tao Xingzhi, Jiang Menglin, and Zhang Boling 张伯苓 (1876-1951), nearly all of whom were educated abroad and many of whom had served in higher administrative positions in China’s top universities.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Furthermore, in its chosen methods and political orientation, the NAPCE was much more similar to previous efforts at *pingmin jiaoyu* or commoners’ education than to later, state-sponsored efforts at *minzhong jiaoyu* or mass education.

<sup>116</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua Minzhong Jiaoyu*, 61.

<sup>117</sup> For a statistical breakdown of the various subcommittees in the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education, including membership levels in each group, see “Zhonghua jiaoyu gaijinshe gezu weiyuanhui renshu bijiaotu 中华教育改进社各组委员会人数比较图” [A Comparative table of subcommittee member numbers for the NCAAE] in Chen and Chen, eds. *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyushi ziliao huibian: jiaoyu xingzheng jigou ji jiaoyu tuanti*, 569. Some of these earlier groups, such as the Women’s Education Committee were quite large, boasting sixty members (the most of any subcommittee) in 1922. Others, such as the committee on adult education were, at only five members, among the smallest within the organization. In founding a new subcommittee for “*pingmin* education,” society members were not establishing new pedagogical territory so much as tying together a diverse group of related education initiatives into a single coordinated vision.

<sup>118</sup> “Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui zonghui zhixing dongshi yilanbiao 中华平民教育促进会总会执行董事一览表” [A Table of the executive directors of the NAPCE], ZMDZ, 814.



Founder Zhu Qihui was herself the wife of Xiong Xiling 熊希齡(1870-1937), former Premier of the Republic of China and board member of the CNAEE.<sup>119</sup> Often said to be the “brains” behind Xiong Xiling’s tenure as Premier, Mdm. Xiong was well known for her sharp wit and charming demeanor, and despite having difficulty standing for long periods of time due to her bound feet, she frequently spoke to large assemblies across the country in her effort to build support for *pingmin* education.<sup>120</sup> Drawing heavily from the institutional support of other national education organizations, the new *pingmin* education group sought to “establish *pingmin* schools, set up *pingmin* reading spaces...and seek out advisors, teachers, reading space chiefs, and teaching assistants” to staff new *pingmin* education schools across the nation.<sup>121</sup> Due in part to the unprecedented scope of the organization’s activities, later observers of Chinese education reform point to the establishment of the NAPCE as marking a transition in the nationwide *pingmin* education from the “embryonic stage” to the “advanced stage.”<sup>122</sup>

Despite occasional references to a broadly inclusive vision of democracy or “*pingmin zhuyi*,” the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education mobilized an understanding of “*pingmin*” that was largely confined to economically and educationally disadvantaged “commoners.” The organization’s original manifesto, delivered at the group’s opening plenary session in August 1923, made the case for popular education by citing the classical maxim “*Min wei bang ben* 民为邦本” [People are the basis of the state] and arguing

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<sup>119</sup> “Zhonghua jiaoyu gaijinshe dongshi mingyu dongshi mindang 中华教育改进社董事名誉董事名单” [Roster of the honorary board members of the CNAEE], ZMDZ, 799.

<sup>120</sup> Pearl S. Buck, *Tell the People: Talks with James Yen About the Mass Education Movement* (New York: The John Day Company, 1945). Reprint, New York: International Institute for Rural Reconstruction, 1984), 39-41.

<sup>121</sup> “Zhonghua jiaoyu gaijinshe pingmin jiaoyu weiyuanhui jianzhang 中华教育改进社平民教育委员会简章” [Regulations of the *Pingmin* Education Subcommittee of the CNAEE], in ZMDZ, 801.

<sup>122</sup> JYZZ 19.9: 2.

that the fate of the Republic “depends upon whether or not its *guomin* have knowledge.”<sup>123</sup> Yet while the organization first characterized China’s educational challenges in terms of a struggle among the entire population, the group quickly shifted away from the broader education system to focus specifically on the estimated 320 million people—80% of China’s total population—who were illiterate. The numbers “320 million” and “80%” appeared in almost all of the NAPCE’s publications, and future references to the expression “people (*min* 民) are the foundation of the state” were often paired with the assertion that “80% of the people (*renmin* 人民) are dregs (*xialiu* 下流)” and “it is the common people (*pingmin*) who truly represent the country.”<sup>124</sup> While lack of literacy, rather than any particular economic or political deficit, remained the primary marker of people targeted by “*pingmin* education” initiatives, NAPCE organizers clearly operated under the assumption that those who were illiterate were also poor. The original vision put forth in the 1923 manifesto called for all fees associated with *pingmin* schools to be borne by the provinces due to anticipated poverty among students, and later

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<sup>123</sup> “Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui zai jing kai chengli dahuihan 中华平民教育促进会在京开成立大会函” [A letter delivered to the opening plenary of the NAPCE], ZMDZ, 812.

<sup>124</sup> Yan Yangchu 晏阳初, “Pingmin Jiaoyu 平民教育” [Commoners’ Education], *Xin Jiaoyu* 7.2 (Oct 1923), reprinted in *Yan Yangchu wenji* 晏阳初文集 [The Collected works of Yan Yangchu], ed. Song Enrong 宋恩荣 (Beijing: Jiaoyu kexue chubanshe, 1989), 2 (Hereafter YYCWJ). The numbers “320 million” and “80%” become central to the popular literacy movement throughout the 1920s and are frequently cited in a wide array of literacy movement documents, including speeches and articles by NAPCE leaders, local literacy movement reports, and Guomindang propaganda materials, where they were often juxtaposed with estimated literacy rates for other countries. See, for example, Zhang Youren 张友仁, “Qingnian jiaoyu yu pingmin jiaoyu 青年教育与平民教育” [Youth education and commoners’ education], *JYZZ* 18.1 (1926): 1-7; *Zhejiangsheng shizi yundong nian bao* 浙江省识字运动年报 [Annual report on the literacy movement in Zhejiang] (Zhejiang: Zhejiangsheng shizi yundong xuanchuan weiyuanhui 浙江省十字运动宣传委员会 [Zhejiang literacy movement publicity committee, 1929], 1-2; *Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu* 中国国民党中央执行委员会宣传部 [The Guomindang Ministry of Propaganda, Central Executive Committee], *Shizi yundong xuanchuan gangyao* 识字运动宣传纲要 [An outline of literacy movement propaganda] (Publisher Unclear, 1929), 24.

analyses of the organization's activities praised their attentiveness to the "economic oppression" of so-called commoners.<sup>125</sup>

Just as a lack of literacy came to define the intended objects of the national "*pingmin jiaoyu*" movement, so too did literacy training emerge as the central goal of any such efforts. By the time group leaders formalized the aims of the organization in December 1923, the executive committee defined the group's primary goal as "taking everyone in a given area who cannot read and making them literate within a set period of time."<sup>126</sup> This focus on expanding literacy and improving nationwide literacy rates placed the work that NAPCE did under the banner of "*pingmin jiaoyu*" much closer to educational efforts associated with *tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育 (popular education) and *shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育 (social education) than any "democratic education" program devised by the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society at Beigao.<sup>127</sup> Literacy training had been a central goal of the Republican Ministry of Education's "*shehui jiaoyu*" Department, which sponsored the construction of a modest number of public "continuation" schools (*buxi xuexiao* 补习学校), half-day schools, and "language-made-easy" schools (*jianyi shizi xuexiao* 简

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<sup>125</sup> ZMDZ, 812. See also, Zhang Zhenong 张哲农, "Pingmin jiaoyu yundong yu pingmin de shenghuo 平民教育运动于平民的生活" [The Commoners' education movement and commoners' lifestyles], *Xin Jiaoyu Pinglun* 3.2 (1926): 6-11.

<sup>126</sup> ZMDZ, 800.

<sup>127</sup> By the late 1910s, the terms *tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育 and *shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育 were themselves relatively interchangeable, although "*shehui jiaoyu*" was typically used as an umbrella term to describe any form of education outside of formal schooling, while the prefix "*tongsu* 通俗" was more typically applied to specific popular education initiatives such as public lecturing, half-day schools, continuing schools, etc. One of the earliest and most prominent municipal education societies, the Beijing Education Society, established a Popular Lecture Research Committee (*tongsu jiangyan yanjiuhui* 通俗讲演研究会), whose stated mission was to "assist the general advancement of social education (*shehui jiaoyu*)." (See "Tongsu Jiangyan Yanjiuhui Jianzhang 通俗讲演研究会简章" [General Regulations of the Popular Lecture Research Committee], in Chen and Chen, eds. *Zhongguo jindai jiaoyushi ziliao huibian: jiaoyu xingzheng jigou ji jiaoyu tuanti*, 338). Other "*tongsu jiaoyu*" initiatives sponsored directly by the Beiyang Ministry of Education were also placed under the heading of "*shehui jiaoyu*"—a classification which extends to the archival organization of these materials today. See *Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'anguan jianmin zhinan* 中国第二历史档案馆简明指南 [A brief guide to the holdings at China Number Two Historical Archives] (Beijing: Dang'anguan chubanshe, 1987), 18-19. For a broader analysis of internal education debates over the nature and direction of "*shehui jiaoyu*" and "*tongsu jiaoyu*" initiatives, see Bailey, *Reform the People*, 185-226.

易识字学校) during the first ten years of the Republic.<sup>128</sup> While lack of funding, lack of local interest, and political instability under various warlord regimes meant that none of these schools was particularly successful in moving the needle on China's national literacy rates, they nonetheless established a basic framework for a nationwide approach to the problem. As such, the NAPCE's advocacy of literacy education as a central plank in the broader popular education platform was not itself radical.

At the same time, the close association of many NAPCE leaders with John Dewey, Paul Monroe, and other international members of the Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education had transformed the way that these leaders approached the task of literacy education. Echoing Dewey's refrain that education should be scientifically constructed and should serve the particular needs of students, the 1923 manifesto asserted that *pingmin* education initiatives should be designed "in accordance with the principles of educational psychology" and should include specially designed textbooks and slide projections to better accommodate the schedules and skills of nontraditional students.<sup>129</sup> Early teacher training manuals produced by local branches of the NAPCE boasted of the modern educational psychology informing their lesson plans and guided teachers in using new visual aids to overcome the difficulties of teaching older students who had never had formal schooling.<sup>130</sup> Over

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<sup>128</sup> By 1915, the Ministry of Education (and various provincial education administrations) had constructed 79 "continuation" schools, 1,614 half-day schools, and 4,599 "language-made-easy" schools across the country. The numbers of such schools in each province or special administrative district varied widely, with Zhili province boasting over 1500 "language-made-easy" schools, while Heilongjiang, Fengtian, Hunan, and Guizhou each had less than ten. See Zexuan Zhuang, *Movement for Educating Illiterates in China* (Beijing: Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education, 1923), 10-13.

<sup>129</sup> ZMDZ, 811-812.

<sup>130</sup> See, for example, *Pingmin qianzi ke jiao'an* 平民千字课教案 [Thousand-character text for commoners lesson plan] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Society for the Promotion of Commoners' Education, 1924), 1. The guide reminds new commoners' education instructors that "many commoners' education students are older people who have been denied an education...each of whom has a tendency to flinch at difficulty or simply lack self confidence...So, when they first arrive it is important to make them understand why reading is so beneficial, and make them know that it is

time, textbook publishing emerged as one of the organization's most important activities, and many of the organization's most widely adopted textbooks, such as *Shimin qianzi ke* 市民千字课 [Thousand-character text for urban people] *Nongmin qianzi ke* 农民千字课 [Thousand-character text for farmers], and *Shibing qianzike* 士兵千字课 [Thousand-character text for soldiers], were marketed to specific subsections of students otherwise considered "*pingmin*."<sup>131</sup> Thus, rather than simply expand the contents of formerly elite education to a broader section of the public, as the Beida Lecture Corps had attempted to do, the NAPCE sought to edit and publish new *pingmin* education materials organized around cutting-edge pedagogical strategies and designed specifically with so-called "commoners" in mind.

Thus, when the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education adopted the language of "*pingmin jiaoyu*," they distinguished it from previous student-led efforts in two important ways. First, rather than equate *pingmin* with an abstract expression of democracy, they signaled a renewed focus on practically educating an extremely large but nevertheless clearly demarcated group of students defined by their lack of literacy and assumed poverty. While many leaders of the NAPCE clearly felt that the educational attainment of *pingmin* was vital to the social, cultural, and political wellbeing of the Republic, the term *pingmin* itself was not tied to a particular political vision, nor did it function as a singular name for the Chinese political subject. Second, NAPCE members used the language of *pingmin* to suggest a transformation in the contents of education itself, away from both the classical curriculum and the intellectual fads of Beijing universities and towards a simpler, scientifically

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not impossible for older people to learn to read." While this journal was written by the local Jiangsu Society for the Promotion of People's Education, it was overseen and approved by Wang Boqiu, who served as the Jiangsu Provincial Director of Commoners' Education, assigned by the NAPCE.

<sup>131</sup> Many of these books did not enter formal publication until the late 1920s or early 1930s, but they represented the fruition of a long-stated goal of the organization.

vett ed curriculum designed exclusively to increase literacy among this particular segment of the Chinese population. By insisting upon a curriculum constructed with “*pingmin*” in mind, reformers hoped to hasten the induction of China’s illiterate commoners into a universal community of well-educated *guomin*, even as the very specificity of this educational program seemed to deny the existence of any true educational equality.

Of all the organizational and intellectual contributors to the NAPCE, none was more important than Yan Yangchu, known internationally as Y. C. James Yen. Yan, like many of his peers in the education reform community, was educated in the United States, although Yan graduated from Yale rather than Columbia. Most of his pedagogical experience derived from his work in the international YMCA during the First World War. At the time of the NAPCE’s founding, Yan was already a well-known popular education leader, having established pilot programs for popular literacy in both France and China. Yan was present at the original meeting of NAPCE, and one year later he took the post of General Secretary of the organization at the request of board member Tao Xingzhi, with whom Yan had built a personal friendship.<sup>132</sup> Many of the organization’s earliest efforts to drum up support for commoners’ education drew directly from Yan’s programs and teaching materials. In his position as General Secretary of the NAPCE, Yan also played an important fundraising role among both the high society clubs of Beijing and the international contacts he made during his time at Yale. Yan was the leading figure behind the NAPCE’s turn toward rural education initiatives, and by the end of the 1920s, Yan Yangchu’s

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<sup>132</sup> Yan was originally elected as Vice Chairman at the August 1923 meeting of the NAPCE and was later appointed by the CNAAE’s Commoners’ Education Subcommittee to serve as the provincial director of commoners’ education in Sichuan province before being elected as General Secretary of the NAPCE in 1924 (see ZMDZ, 815 and Hayford, *To The People*, 51). Tao’s letters from the time reveal his tremendous admiration for Yan, who he claimed was the only suitable person to lead a group of relative amateurs who had been getting by on enthusiasm alone. This admiration was apparently shared by Yan’s other professional affiliations, as the NAPCE actually had to conduct several negotiations with the Chinese YMCA when it also wanted to retain Yan in a leadership position. See also Tao Zhixing 陶知行, *Zhi xing Shuxin* 知行书信 [Letters of Tao Zhixing] (1929; reprint, Washington D.C.: Center for Chinese Research Materials, 1985), 19.

name had become synonymous with the both the NAPCE and the broader *pingmin jiaoyu* movement.<sup>133</sup> Over the first half of the twentieth century, Y. C. James Yen emerged as an education reform celebrity in China and abroad, and in 1943 he was even honored with a Copernicus prize alongside other revolutionary thinkers Albert Einstein, Henry Ford, John Dewey, and Walt Disney.<sup>134</sup> To fully understand the vision of *pingmin jiaoyu* put forth by the NAPCE in the mid 1920s, one must consider the specific administrative and intellectual conditions in which Yan first crafted his popular education programs, as well as the means by which these efforts came to serve as a national model for popular education reform.

In public speeches throughout his early tenure as head of the NAPCE, Yan Yangchu frequently explained his own attraction to commoners' education in terms of his early experiences with the War Work Council of the international YMCA in France, where he worked as an organizer and educator between 1917 and 1918. Yan, a lifelong Christian, first became involved with the international YMCA as a middle school student at St. Stephen's College in Hong Kong, and his connections within the organization helped land him admission to Yale University in 1916.<sup>135</sup> In the summer of 1918, Yan set off with several of his Yale classmates to join the YMCA in France, where he was assigned to work with a group of 5000 members of the Chinese Labor Corps who had been sent by the Chinese Republican government to aid the allied

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<sup>133</sup> See JYZZ 19.9: 1-9 and Peake, *Nationalism and Education*, 72-96. More recently published collections of Yan's work in Chinese also emphasize his role as a *pingmin* education professional. See, for example, Sichuan Provincial CPPCC and Bazhong County Historical Documents Committee, *Pingmin jiaoyu jia Yan Yangchu* 平民教育家晏阳初 [Commoner's Education Expert Yan Yangchu] (Chengdu: Sichuan Daxue chubanshe, 1990).

<sup>134</sup> Hayford, *To the People*, 196.

<sup>135</sup> For a more detailed analysis of Yan's activities and intellectual milieu while at Yale, including his relationship with YMCA leader and secretary of the World Student Christian Federation John Mott, see Wu Xiangxiang 吳相湘, *Yan Yangchu zhuan: Wei quanxiu xiangcun gaizao fendou liushi nian* 晏陽初:為全球鄉村改造奮鬥六十年 [James Yen and his sixty years of struggle with rural reconstruction for the peasant people of the world] (Taipei: Shibao wenhua gongsi, 1981), 19-28.

war effort in Northern France.<sup>136</sup> Yan's initial task was simply to read, translate, and summarize foreign newspapers for the mostly illiterate workers, but he soon found himself helping them to compose letters home and eventually decided to offer a formalized "Chinese Workers Education," which would provide them with basic reading and writing skills. To this end, Yan edited and mimeographed a custom textbook designed to address the specific needs and linguistic backgrounds of the workers under his supervision, and he taught them basic literacy in the evenings after their work shift was over.<sup>137</sup> His efforts proved successful enough to gain Yan recognition from the military authorities in France, who invited him to Paris to direct a broader Chinese Workers Education program and edit a new textbook with fellow reformer Fu Baochen 傅葆琛 (1893-1984).<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> JYZZ 19.9: 1. The guest worker program was born from a joint agreement between England, France, and the acting Chinese Republican government, and was intended to relieve the labor shortages in both European countries, where most able-bodied youth were already serving on the front lines. On the Chinese side, the effort was spearheaded by enterprising Minister of Finance Liang Shiyi 梁士诒 (1869-1933), who had amassed a small fortune recruiting Chinese workers for French factories since 1915. An estimated 200,000 Chinese workers (mostly from Zhili and Shandong province) traveled to England and France during the war, where they constructed roads, transported goods, and dug trenches. While in Europe, some of these workers served in official military capacities, while others worked as translators between Chinese workers and allied military personnel. The majority of workers, however, were young adults who lacked any kind of formal education in Chinese or French and were thus mostly confined to manual labor. For a general overview of Chinese workers in France during World War I, see Xu Guoqi, *China and the Great War: China's Pursuit of a New National Identity and Internationalization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 117-122.

<sup>137</sup> According to Xu Guoqi, these reading classes emerged as one of the most popular services offered to Chinese Labor Corps members by the YMCA in France, and their success is almost entirely attributable to Yan's individual initiative and innovative teaching style. Apparently, the classes proved so popular that Yan soon ran out of suitable teaching material, which was one of the primary reasons behind Yan's effort to begin publishing a weekly paper, *Zhu-fa Huagong zhoubao* 驻法化工周报 [Chinese Workers' Weekly], which in the absence of a Chinese typeset Yan wrote out himself by hand. See Xu Guoqi, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011), 192-193.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid, 1-2. Fu Baochen also returned to China and became a noted proponent of popular education in his own right. Curiously, he is among those later advocates of mass education (*minzhong jiaoyu*) who would critique *pingmin* education as focusing too narrowly on commoners and lacking the transformational scope of later education movements. At the same time, he exempted the NAPCE from this particular critique, as he insisted that all along the leaders of the organization articulated an understanding of "*pingmin*" based on "equality and freedom" (*pingdeng ziyou* 平等自由) rather than social class. Obviously, I disagree with this view, and my analysis here demonstrates that the NAPCE, particularly in its early years, focused on the education of commoners to the exclusion of other social groups. For Fu Baochen's analysis of *pinmin jiaoyu* and its relationship to mass education, see Fu Baochen, *Minzhong jiaoyu yanjiu yu pinglun* 民众教育研究与评论 [Research and discussion of mass education] (Beijing: Beijing wenhua xueshe, 1932), 22-23.



In later accounts of Yan's life, fellow education reformers and biographers cite Yan's concern for the hardship of Chinese workers and his belief in their fundamental intelligence as the primary motivation behind these early education initiatives.<sup>139</sup> Yet, in explaining to other Chinese education reformers his reasons for devoting himself to popular education, Yan frequently cited his own self-consciousness about how Chinese workers, and by extension the Chinese people, were viewed in Europe. In a speech given to the annual assembly of the CNAEE and later published in the prominent education journal *Xin Jiaoyu*, Yan remarked on the poor manners of Chinese workers who spit on trains, covered the floor with their peanut shells, and laughed at French customs. He worried that "French people who had not seen very many Chinese people before... would take a few uneducated people as representative of all Chinese."<sup>140</sup> Yan himself believed that "in actuality, high-society people and those of talent represent China," but nevertheless admitted that "the majority of those traveling to foreign countries are lower class, and so it is such people that represent China abroad."<sup>141</sup> Curiously, Yan concludes his description of the Chinese workers in France by stating, "it was only after I got to France that I

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<sup>139</sup> See JYZZ 19.9:1; Wu, *Yan Yangchu zhuan*, 28-30; Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, 208-209. Yan himself later adopted this stance of concern and respect for the noble Chinese worker, particularly when speaking and writing for Western audiences. Writing for *The Yale Review* in 1929, Y. C. James Yen explained that, prior to traveling to France, he had never really associated with laborers but that once meeting them he found them to be "intelligent and industrious" people whose talents had been unfairly limited by a lack of education (Y. C. James Yen, "New Citizens for China," *The Yale Review* 18.2 (1929): 263-265). Certainly, Yan's lifelong dedication to the education of farmers and workers is a testament to his belief in their capabilities and his concern for their wellbeing. I do not mean to suggest that these were not important motivations for Yan and for those who joined him in the effort to popularize education in China. Rather, I mean to highlight the ways in which "*pingmin*" presented themselves as a complex social and political problem in an increasingly global world and assert that, at least in the early days of the movement, this concern about China's status on the global stage accompanied and perhaps superseded a specific concern for or faith in uneducated laborers, which seemingly lacks the same kind of obvious historical precedent.

<sup>140</sup> YYCWJ, 1.

<sup>141</sup> This quote is taken from the text of the same speech referenced above, although Yan Yangchu had established a similar comparison when first reporting on the commoners' education movement a year earlier. According to Yan, the vast numbers of illiterate Chinese made it such that "China, a country that has one of the most ancient civilizations, the most numerous people, and the richest natural products in all the world has been unconsciously reduced to a lower-class (*xialiu* 下流) country!" See Yan Yangchu, "Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong 平民教育新运动" [The New movement for commoners' education], in *Xin Jiaoyu* 5.5. (1922): 1007.

saw the real China.”<sup>142</sup> Thus, despite whatever attachment he may have had to a version of China rooted in the cultural production of an educated elite, he ultimately equated the “real” China with the illiterate workers that made up the majority of the Chinese Labor Corps and with the image of China they created for members of the international community. By the early 1920s, this anxiety about what constituted the real China and who could represent China on the world stage would have no doubt been familiar to many Chinese radicals and nationalists, from Liang Qichao to Lu Xun, many of whom had struggled to define the Chinese national character in the face of racist ethnographies and cultural critiques by Western scholars.<sup>143</sup> Yan’s personal encounter with foreign appraisals of Chinese workers clearly had a major impact on his belief in the need for national change and served as the impetus behind his desire to pursue popular education reform in his own country.

Yan’s concerns about the perception of Chinese workers abroad also informed his broader consideration of the relationship between the sociocultural category “*pingmin*” and the demographic/political category “*guomin*.” Throughout his career, Yan Yangchu defined “*pingmin*” as the “dregs” of society (*xialiu* 下流) and in more specific terms as “those young people and adults who have been denied a [formal] education” or who “know a handful of characters but lack common knowledge.”<sup>144</sup> His understanding of “*guomin*” was less clearly

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<sup>142</sup> YYCWJ, 1.

<sup>143</sup> Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, 117-146. Yan himself clearly did not agree with English and French perceptions of Chinese workers as inherently uncouth or ignorant, but even his own view of Chinese workers as curious and industrious demonstrates a deep awareness that such appraisals ran counter to European conceptions. For example, in speaking about the establishment of a weekly paper for workers, Yan said to a reporter, “Despite the prevalent belief that the Chinese are as a race incurious,” he discovered a “questioning curiosity about the news of the world noticeable in almost all of the Chinese.” Quoted in Hayford, *To The People*, 27.

<sup>144</sup> For a clear example of this definition, see Yan Yangchu, “Pingmin jiaoyu gailun 平民教育概论” [An Introduction to commoners’ education] in *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 平民教育 (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1928), reprinted in Sichuan Provincial CPPCC, *Pingmin Jiaoyujia Yan Yangchu*, 23. For earlier articles that simply refer to *pingmin* as “lower-class” and suggest education as the primary cause of this status, see Yan, “Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong,” 1007.

articulated. At times Yan adopted an aspirational understanding of *guomin* that appeared to exclude anyone who did not contain the political and intellectual skills—particularly literacy—necessary to fulfill the duties of modern political citizenship. In trying to gin up support for commoners’ education programs in China, he flatly told a group of fellow education reformers, “China has 320 million people who cannot be considered *guomin*, even as America has 100 million people and all of them are *guomin*.”<sup>145</sup> In other instances, however, Yan seemed to acknowledge that *guomin* could refer to any Chinese nationals, regardless of their education level. Indeed, in the very same speech Yan quoted a friend in France who warned him against resting on the laurels of his success with the Chinese Labor Corps and urged him to “not forget about the great majority of *guomin* elsewhere,” clearly referencing those still living in China who could not read. Regardless of Yan’s own murky attempts to define “*guomin*” and differentiate it from the more socially and culturally bounded “*pingmin*,” he clearly understood that the two could be easily elided in the minds of foreign observers, as evidenced by his anxiety over the way Chinese workers were viewed abroad. Yan’s by now familiar refrain that “if you want to know the level of a country, you simply need to look at the level of its *guomin*” drew its political strength from precisely this tension, in that it assumed China’s lowest and least educated individuals could and would be used as a measure of China’s national worth.<sup>146</sup> In this sense, *pingmin* came to represent not an abstract basis for a future republican state, but rather a contemporary problem to be solved. How could reformers turn China’s massive numbers of illiterate commoners into a new national political subject worthy of being called *guomin*? After achieving some success in educating Chinese workers in France, and with this new goal in mind,

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<sup>145</sup> YYCWJ, 3.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 1.

Yan turned his attention to his native China, where he now pledged to dedicate himself to the twin goals of “eliminating illiteracy and forging new people (*xinmin* 新民).”<sup>147</sup>

Upon returning to China in July of 1920, Yan worked with the national YMCA in Shanghai to found a “*pingmin* education department” that would be responsible for researching ongoing popular education initiatives in each province. From 1920 to 1922, Yan surveyed a huge number of local popular education schools (*tongsu xuexiao* 通俗学校), work-study schools, and student-run commoners’ schools, where he often saw a lot of hard work with very little to show for it. As Yan saw it, the largest obstacle to popular education in China was that, unlike the Chinese Labor Corps in France, many potential students did not have a set work schedule that permitted them time to attend lectures, nor were the workers in a given area likely to share the same dialect or educational background.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, most fledgling popular education efforts relied too heavily on the dedication of a few corps leaders and did not do enough to build publicity or invite local support. Drawing on the conclusions derived from this investigation, Yan began to develop a new method of popular education that emphasized short-term basic literacy classes organized around a standardized textbook and presented every afternoon and evening (except Sunday) over the course of a few months. Yan’s new educational vision relied heavily on the cooperation and participation of local business and political leaders, and while the curriculum itself was based on Yan’s own textbook, *Pingmin Qianzike* 平民千字课 [Commoners’

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<sup>147</sup> Yan’s stated goals of “eliminating illiteracy and forging new people” is quoted from JYZZ 19.9: 1. This slogan became closely associated with the broader commoners’ education movement, and when writing for foreign audiences Yan rendered the slogan in English as “Eliminate illiteracy and make new citizens for China.” See Yen, “New Citizens for a New China,” 263. Also, it is worth noting that the YMCA efforts led by Yan in France truly were an astonishing success, as literacy rates among Chinese workers nearly doubled, from 20 percent at the time of their arrival to 38 percent by 1921 (Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, 233). For a more general statistical overview of the Chinese Labor Corps, see Judith Blick, “The Chinese Labor Corps in World War I,” *Papers on China* (from the Harvard East Asia Regional Studies Seminar) 9 (1955): 111-145.

<sup>148</sup> JYZZ 19.9:1, and Yan, “Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong,” 1009.

Thousand Character Text], the instructors for each literacy class were to be culled exclusively from local middle and normal schools.<sup>149</sup> The vast majority of organizational resources for Yan's new program would be devoted not to instruction, but to publicity, including posters and rallies designed to increase local interest in and awareness of the new literacy training programs.<sup>150</sup>

The new curriculum, teaching schedule, and textbook materials served as the basis for the first of several self-described "experiments in commoners' education" carried out in Changsha, the capital of Hunan province.<sup>151</sup> In March of 1922, Yan traveled to Changhsa to meet with the heads of all of the major education associations in the area, and together they organized a Commoners' Education Committee, composed of 70 individuals divided into five subcommittees dedicated to securing funding, finding teachers, recruiting students, developing publicity materials, and locating suitable schoolhouses.<sup>152</sup> The new committee organized a citywide commoners' education rally, and together the group successfully recruited over 1900 students

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<sup>149</sup> In the early 1920s, there were in fact several basic literacy textbooks bearing the title *Pingmin Qianzike*. The first, authored by Yan Yangchu and Daniel C. Fu, was based directly on Yan's custom text for the Chinese Labor Corps in France. It was published in February 1922 by the national YMCA of China and served as the basis for Yan's early educational experiments in 1922 and 1923. See Yan Yangchu and Daniel C Fu, eds., *Pingmin Qianzike* 平民千字课 [Commoners' thousand character text] (Shanghai: National Committee of the YMCA of China, 1922). This text was eventually replaced by another text, edited by Tao Zhixing and Zhu Jingnong, but overseen by Yan. The first volume (out of four) of this second textbook was reprinted over 150 times, and when future NAPCE sources refer to the *Pingmin Qianzike*, they are likely referring to this latter, more collaborative effort. See Tao Zhixing and Zhu Jingnong 朱经农, eds., *Pingmin Qianzike* 平民千字课 [Commoners' thousand character text] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1923). In the second half of the 1920s, the Commercial Press published several more specific textbooks, such as *Shimin Qianzike* 市民千字课 [Townsperson's thousand character text] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1927), *Nongmin Qianzike* 农民千字课 [Farmers' thousand character text] (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1928), and *Shibing Qianzike* 士兵千字课 [Soldiers' thousand character text] (Beijing: National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education, 1928).

<sup>150</sup> Hayford, *To the People*, 42-45, and JYZZ 19.9: 3.

<sup>151</sup> As the following chapter will reveal, the language of science and experimentation (*shiyan* 试验) in particular became extremely important to the broader Commoners' Education Movement. For the initial descriptions of the Changsha movement as an experiment, see YYCWJ, 2.

<sup>152</sup> The most detailed description of the organization of the Changhsa Commoners' Education Committee can be found in Yan, "Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong," 1015-1016.

between the ages of eight and forty-two, including 1400 men and 500 women.<sup>153</sup> Over the course of a little over four months, students read through Yan's *Commoners' Thousand Character Text*, and the following July, the newly formed Commoners' Education Committee held a graduation exam. Of the 1200 students who ultimately sat for the exam, 967 passed and were awarded a certificate of graduation. The graduation ceremony was attended by the Hunan provincial governor, who personally granted the degree-title of "literate citizen" (*shizi guomin* 识字国民) to all graduates.<sup>154</sup> After the graduation ceremony, the YMCA distributed additional books to graduates on topics ranging from economics to social life in the hopes that students would develop a genuine love of learning and continue to develop their skills rather than simply become "half-baked *guomin*."<sup>155</sup> Hopes were so high at the end of the program that the Changsha Commoners' Education Committee swiftly launched a second campaign under the slogan "All Changsha Literate!"<sup>156</sup>

The Changsha model proved so successful that it inspired three other "experiments" in Yantai, Jiaozing, and Hangzhou through the spring and summer of 1923. These programs, founded on Yan Yangchu's particular vision of *pingmin jiaoyu* as providing focused literacy training for urban workers, helped catapult Yan to the attention of many prominent Beijing educators such as Tao Xingzhi and eventually to a leadership position within the newly formed National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education. Yan's influential voice

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<sup>153</sup> These statistics are taken from the description of the Changsha experiment offered by Yan in his speech to the CNAE in YYCWJ, 2. Other accounts of Changsha, such as the one detailed in Tang Maoru's history of the *pingmin jiaoyu* movement, claim there were only 1320 total students (JYZZ 19.9: 2). The more detailed breakdown of students offered in Yan's 1922 article for *Xin Jiaoyu* claims that the majority of students (~60%) were between the ages of 10 and 14, and the most common occupations were laborer, needle worker, and rickshaw puller (Yan, "Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong," 1018).

<sup>154</sup> JYZZ 19.9: 2.

<sup>155</sup> The term "half-baked *guomin*" is rendered "yizhiban jie guomin 一知半解国民." See Yan, "Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong," 1022.

<sup>156</sup> Hayford, *To The People*, 45.

within the organization meant that the Changsha program also served as an early template for the NAPCE's nationwide endeavor to promote commoners' education. While these efforts were ultimately not enough to radically change China's educational landscape in a permanent way, they eclipsed all previous national literacy efforts in scope and thus provided the most influential boundaries under which future reformers conceived, implemented, debated, and critiqued *pingmin jiaoyu*.

Two key reasons help to explain Yan's success in shaping understandings of *pingmin jiaoyu* among both national and local education societies. First, Yan's Changsha model successfully drew from cutting-edge pedagogical fashions popular among China's elite national education leaders and applied them to local administrative conditions. In speaking at national and international gatherings, Yan frequently emphasized the fact that all of NAPCE's education efforts based their curriculum on a new edition of Yan's *Commoners' Thousand Character Text*, edited by Tao Xingzhi and Zhu Jingnong 朱经农 (1887-1951) in August of 1923 and published by the Shanghai Commercial Press.<sup>157</sup> This text was derived from research Yan conducted in France along with a statistical survey conducted by fellow returned student Chen Heqin 陈鹤琴 (1892-1982) on the three thousand most commonly used characters across a range of classical and vernacular writing.<sup>158</sup> In his own descriptions of the textbook, Yan emphasized the text's incorporation of recent developments in educational psychology, as well as the "empirical" and

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<sup>157</sup> See Tan and Zhu, *Pingmin Qianzike*. This text was so central to the broader *pingmin jiaoyu* movement that by 1925 there were some who said, "commoners' education is the *Thousand Character Text*, and the *Thousand Character Text* is commoners' education." Yan Yangchu himself refuted this claim as a misunderstanding of the scope of his educational projects, but the conception, whether correct or not, reveals the degree to which the NAPCE's textbook had become central to the movement. Yan Yangchu, "Pingmin Jiaoyu de zhengyi yu qita jiaoyu de guanxi 平民教育的真义与其他教育的关系" [The true meaning of commoners' education and its relationship to other forms of education], *Chenbao qi zhounian zengkan* 晨报七周年增刊 [Morning Post Seventh Annual Supplement] 12 (1925): 56.

<sup>158</sup> YYCWJ, 2-3.

“scientific” [English in original] nature in which he selected and presented the material.<sup>159</sup> These English-language descriptors of Yan’s methods helped him and the NAPCE establish their bona fides among the education leaders in Beijing and Shanghai who were drawn to John Dewey’s call for a more scientific curriculum, as well as among members of the international community in China with whom Yan had established a friendly relationship.<sup>160</sup>

Yet while the NAPCE’s curriculum focused on the *Commoners’ Thousand Character Text* represented both a scientifically innovative and a nationally unified approach to *pingmin* education, the implementation of this particular curriculum was largely left up to newly created provincial and county-level commoners’ education promotion associations. The NAPCE itself was a highly stratified national organization, with each of the national members assigned to particular provinces and charged with founding these kinds of local organizations, which were intended to operate independently of the national body.<sup>161</sup> Even Yan Yangchu and Tao Xingzhi

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<sup>159</sup> Yan, “Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong,” 1012. Yan was fluent in English, and several aspects of his writing for Chinese audiences would seem to indicate that he developed his educational rhetoric simultaneously in English and Chinese. For example, in the above article, one of Yan’s most popular slogans for commoner’s education, “yu zuishao de shijian, shi de zuiduo de wenzi 于最少的时间，识得最多的文字,” is followed by the parenthetical phrase “Maximum vocabulary, minimum time,” despite the fact that such a straightforward idea wouldn’t really necessitate an additional explanation or English reference point (p. 1011). Yan’s decision to describe his methods as both “empirical” (*jingyan* 经验) and “scientific” (*kexue* 科学), on the other hand, seems to demonstrate an awareness that such terms may have carried political weight in the wake of Dewey’s English-language lecture tour, during which Dewey emphasized the importance of these qualities in developing curricula.

<sup>160</sup> As detailed by Charles Hayford, these international associates included Roger Greene of the Rockefeller Foundation, John Earl Baker of the Board of Communications, the editor of the English-language magazine *The Peking Leader*, and other diplomats and educators. It is on the basis of these sorts of connections that Hayford comes to label Yan a “trans-pacific liberal.” See Hayford, *To the People*, 53.

<sup>161</sup> Some of these local organizations, such as the Nanjing Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education, were actually founded before the official formation of the NAPCE in August 1923. See “Nanjing pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui zhi jinkuang 南京平民教育促进会之近况 [Recent developments of the Nanjing Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education], JYZZ 15.11 (1923): 2-3. For a description of early local commoners’ education associations that preceded the formation of the national body, see Zhu Junyun 朱君允, “Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui zhunbei zhi jingguo 中华平民教育促进会准备之经过” [An account of the preparation of the NAPCE], *Xin Jiaoyu* 7.3 (1923): 481-482. NAPCE leaders like Yan Yangchu, Zhu Qihui, and Tao Xingzhi still played instrumental roles in sponsoring these original organizations (see note 163 below).



were assigned to work as provincial heads in Sichuan and Anhui province, respectively.<sup>162</sup> As in Changsha, most local commoners' education initiatives were organized in cooperation with pre-existing education societies, staffed with volunteers from local middle schools, and carried out in established public spaces such as temples and professional clubs.<sup>163</sup> Thus, despite the modern approach to their curricula, the many commoners' schools and reading rooms actually functioned more like Qing-era local academies, which had been largely funded by endowments from local gentry schools and treated like community public works projects.<sup>164</sup> The national-level organization remained involved in such projects primarily as fundraisers, with President Zhu Qihui proving particularly skilled at extracting large sums of money from local warlords to help fund individual commoners' education initiatives.<sup>165</sup> Nevertheless, these initiatives remained in many ways local affairs, with some larger local commoners' education groups sponsoring their own regional conferences and seminars.<sup>166</sup> Thus, the NAPCE was largely successful as a national

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<sup>162</sup> ZMDZ, 814-815.

<sup>163</sup> After the NAPCE was founded, the group immediately began soliciting the formation of local commoners' education groups in various provinces and outlined the major successes of the movement thus far in leading educational journals. See "Qing geshengqu tuixing pingmin jiaoyu an 请各省区推行平民教育案" [An invitation for each province to carry out commoners' education], *Yiwu jiaoyu* 义务教育 [Compulsory Education] 21 (1923): 6-7. Brief (but largely positive) overviews of the early implementation of such programs helped to build momentum for similar programs elsewhere. See, for example, "Geshengqu pingmin jiaoyu yundong zhi jinxing gaikuang 各省区平民教育运动之进行概况" [A general survey of the implementation of commoners' education movements in various provinces and districts], *JYZZ* 16.5 (1924): 4-5. The latter article makes specific mention of the different facilities and funding sources employed in Shandong, Shanxi, and Sichuan, as well as programs in the city of Guangzhou. While these programs achieved different results, all mention the contributions of local YMCA chapters, leading educational societies (*jiaoyu jie* 教育界), and other local organizations.

<sup>164</sup> Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China*, 10-11.

<sup>165</sup> Buck, *Tell the People*, 40-42. Yan Yangchu recalled one incident in which Zhu convinced the acting head of the Nanjing government, Marshall Ji Xieyuan, to contribute \$10,000 to the campaign, which was used to establish the very first municipal Commoners' Education Association in Nanjing. He also told Pearl Buck of an incident in which Zhu told a local Hankou warlord who was high on opium, "Marshal, our country is going to pieces and falling into ruin. You know why. The reason is that on one hand we have these millions of uneducated people, and on the other, these leaders, dishonest and even themselves uneducated. Why, some of them are actually opium smokers! What hope is there for China? ... We must do something and you must help us." Apparently this direct tactic worked, as the warlord in question promptly donated another \$10,000 to the cause.

<sup>166</sup> See the speeches to the Nanjing Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education's Teacher Discussion conference reprinted in *Pingmin xuexiao jiaoshi zhinan*, 17-23.

organization only in so far as they were able to cultivate these local organizations, which could better exploit the specific administrative conditions in various cities and counties.

The third key factor behind the success of Yan's model was the almost exclusive focus on literacy, which constituted a concrete educational good that appealed to funders, business leaders, administrators, and students, and which could be statistically measured in order to demonstrate progress. Yan once called literacy a "wonder drug" (*wanlingdan* 万灵丹) that could heal the "blindness, deafness, and dumbness" of the Chinese nation, and much of the publicity preceding local commoners' education framed literacy in terms of a cure for a variety of social problems.<sup>167</sup> Slogans like "Literacy is blindness! Are your workers blind?" and "Can you endure watching your countrymen go blind?" appealed to the sympathies of factory owners, administrators, and other well-educated urban leaders outside of reform circles, who were easily able to grasp the benefits of literacy training.<sup>168</sup> Although literacy was tied in vague terms to national salvation—"The fundamental method for saving the nation is commoners' education!"—went one slogan—these early efforts did not explicitly link literacy with new forms of political citizenship per se. Indeed, the most popular version of the *Commoners' Thousand Character Text* barely touched on political or nationalistic issues at all, offering instead a vague overture to "cultivate man's nature and promote the spirit of cooperation necessary in a republican country." The more specific aim of the text was "to train students to write letters, keep accounts, and

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<sup>167</sup> YYCWJ, 3.

<sup>168</sup> For a description of the various slogans used in the original Changsha campaign, see Yan, "Pingmin Jiaoyu xin yundong," 1016. This is not to say that all administrators and business leaders immediately signed on board to all aspects of the commoners' education program. A certain portion of the well-educated classes still did not understand why laborers, apprentices, and the like should need to be able to read and write, and even among those that were supportive of universal literacy training, there were still some who felt that the language taught should be classical Chinese rather than the vernacular *baihua* 百花. (Yen, "New Citizens for a New China," 268). Despite ongoing debates on the type of literacy being taught, I would still contend that literacy itself represented a more readily accessible educational program than those taught in modern public schools in Beijing and Shanghai, which focused heavily on new subjects like Western science and physical education.

compose useful literary articles” and “to teach them to read books and newspapers and thereby give them the very fundamentals of a superior education.”<sup>169</sup> This notion of literacy as providing the “fundamentals of a superior education” appealed not only to the well-educated classes, but also to workers themselves, who despite lacking formal schooling still understood the value of literacy as a cultural good. When describing to Pearl S. Buck the particular challenges and opportunities associated with popular education, Yan Yangchu explained the benefit of literacy training in the following way:

Any people who are illiterate and isolated are antagonistic towards anything new. You talk about a railroad, they object to it. Public health? They don’t understand it. But if you talk about *tu-shu* [*dushu* 读书, “reading books”], they understand that. I suppose this is due to our centuries of traditions, which have cultivated even in the illiterate a kind of reverence for learning. They appreciate *tu-shu* but never dreamed they could do it too...But if you can go to the people and actually show them that they can *tu-shu*, then half the battle is won.<sup>170</sup>

Thus, in contrast to the silence and indifference that typically greeted the Beida students’ lectures on international affairs, local communities easily recognized the value of literacy-focused *pingmin* education initiatives sponsored by the NAPCE. Not only were the teaching schedules and materials tailored to fit the needs and lifestyles of workers, but the central enterprise of the

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<sup>169</sup> Even later texts, such as the *Townpeople’s Thousand Character Text*, which emphasize citizenship more explicitly, establish their first goal as “to enable the people to read material relating to everyday life in the towns of China” and their second goal as “to give the common people a general education in citizenship which the leaders of the Movement believe to be the basis of all education.” The introduction to this volume adds a note that “Mr. Ch’en Chu-shan, who is in charge of the department of education for citizenship in the Movement informed the author that it is the social rather than the legal concept of citizenship which he wishes to emphasize—teaching the people to cooperate in solving their own local problems. He views the political sphere as only one of many.” Thus, even when such texts did emphasize literacy as a prerequisite to citizenship, they did so in the context of literacy as a social good that promoted cooperation and harmony rather than in the context of political rights or responsibilities. The above goals of early *pingmin* education textbooks are taken from Peake, *Nationalism and Education in Modern China*, 159-163. Peake himself remarks that the 1923 text “is confused and vague. It fails to present the conception of citizenship which the later one emphasizes.” Similarly, Peake says of the original *Commoners’ Thousand Character Text* developed by Yan, “This is the first set put out by James Yen and is much less mature than those that follow. It has only seven lessons of a nationalistic character.”

<sup>170</sup> Buck, *Tell the People*, 30-31.

program itself—namely, reading and writing—resided within individual students’ preconceived notions of what constituted an education.<sup>171</sup>

Finally, the focus on very short-term literacy programs, most of which lasted no longer than five months, allowed the NAPCE to begin developing a track record of success rooted in firm statistical measures of the organization’s activities.<sup>172</sup> Much like the scientific research methods that informed the construction of Yan’s textbook, empirical data was key to the implementation of *pingmin* education initiatives throughout the country. The original Changsha experiment tracked the age and profession of each student, and public declarations detailing the numbers of participants in each program constituted an important part of the NAPCE’s national publicity efforts.<sup>173</sup> Ongoing analyses of the commoners’ education movement as it was

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<sup>171</sup> Some reformers credited workers’ embrace of literacy training to more than just the accessibility of the material. In a 1927 article for the *International Labor Review*, Chinese sociologist and labor advocate Chen Da 陈达 (1892-1975) wrote, “Prior to 1918 or 1919, most manual workers unquestioningly submitted to the traditional social hierarchy, which was graded according to the rank and wealth of the old society, and rarely did they raise a voice of protest against the existing social order. But after Chinese students began to lecture to the masses on principles of citizenship and equality of men, the workers gradually came to realize that they had obvious rights and privileges in society, which slowly became the basis of united demands” (Quoted in Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, 223-224). While certain groups of students, such as the original members of the Chinese Labor Corps in France, later demonstrated this kind of class consciousness by organizing unions and engaging in collective bargaining on the mainland, there is not substantial evidence to suggest that a belief in educational rights was an important motivating factor among the young students (most aged 10-14) who enrolled in the NAPCE’s four month commoners’ education programs. As Hayford notes, the “thousand-character texts” produced by more radical students (particularly those affiliated with the Communist Party and with labor rights campaigns) were much more likely to emphasize exploitative conditions and the need for workers to assert their rights, educational and otherwise (Hayford, *To the People*, 45). The materials produced by the NAPCE, in contrast, did not focus on such language.

<sup>172</sup> For a broader analysis of the use of statistics and social surveys in the commoners’ education (and later mass education) movements, see Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), esp. 149-170. One of Lam’s most important arguments is that enumerative measures (such as those generated by the census and by social surveys conducted by organizations like the NAPCE) played a fundamental role in rendering society legible, both to the state and to individual members of the national community. In many respects, this argument is a corollary to my own argument that the discursive shift from “*pingmin*” as an abstract ideal to a concrete, bounded community defined by lack of education was predicated on precisely this legibility, and that this shift enabled state actors to address the social problem of “educating *pingmin*” in more concrete ways.

<sup>173</sup> The earliest appearance of the detailed statistics from Changsha is in Yen’s article “Pingmin jiaoyu xin yundong,” 1018-1022. The charts from this original article, which appeared in *Xin Jiaoyu*, divided all students by age and profession, listing the numbers for each. Abridged versions of these same statistics came up almost any time Yan mentioned the Changsha program, and provided the key piece of evidence explaining his early success as an organizer of commoners’ education, as in Yen, “New Citizens for a New China,” 268-269.

formulated and implemented by the NAPCE throughout the 1920s are awash with pie charts, tables, and other statistical measures.<sup>174</sup> Just as each account is likely to mention the 320 million people who remain illiterate, many are likely to follow with data on the reading spaces constructed, the numbers of textbooks printed, and the hundreds and thousands of students who successfully completed the *Commoners' Thousand Character Text*.<sup>175</sup> Such facts and figures were possible because the NAPCE's notion of *pingmin jiaoyu* was centered not on a political ideal, but rather on a specific, bounded community whose members could be counted and assessed in accordance with a particular skill. Thus, while calls for democratic learning and social equality were frequently followed by arguments about what kind of democracy or equality was being proposed, textbook adoption and graduation rates presented a clear currency that NAPCE leaders traded to secure greater funding, prestige, and influence. By 1925, the Beida Lecture Corps had disbanded, and circulation of the Beigao journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu* had slowed considerably, but the NAPCE could boast of having taught more than 150,000 students in Hunan province alone and over five million students across the country.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> See Fu Baochen, "Xiangcun pingmin jiaoyu dayi 乡村平民教育大意" [An overview of rural commoners' education], *JYZZ* 19.9: 11-17;

<sup>175</sup> For example, CNAAE, "Sheli pingmin dushu chu 设立平民读书处" [Commoners' reading rooms established], *Xin Jiaoyu* 8.1 (1924): 168-172, which provides numbers for all of the reading rooms established in various districts of Beijing; or Zhang Hanchu 张菡初, "Suzhou pingmin jiaoyu yundong fubiao" [A chart of the commoners' education movement in Suzhou], *Jing Haixing* 景海星 5 (1924): 3-5, which charts the numbers of male and female students who have enrolled and graduated in each of the thirteen commoners' schools set up around the city. These statistical measures became particularly important for coverage and promotion of the NAPCE's signature educational experiment at Dingxian. See "Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui shiyan xia de Dingxian 中华平民教育促进会试验下的定县," *Qinghua Zhoukan* 清华周刊 [Qinghua Weekly] 37.12 (1932); such statistical measures were also occasionally compared to similar statistical surveys of popular education programs overseas, as in Qu Shiyong 瞿世英, "Huaqiao yu pingmin jiaoyu 华侨与平民教育" [Overseas Chinese and Commoners' Education], *JYZZ* 19.9: 1-6. Chang Daozhi 常导之, "Cangan Deguo Bolin zhi jiben xuexiao guomin xuexiao pingmin zhongxuexiao lueji 参观德国柏林之基本学校国民学校平民中学校略记" [A brief survey record of fundamental schools, citizen schools, and commoners' middle schools in Berlin, Germany], *JYZZ* 20.7 (1928): 1-6.

<sup>176</sup> Yen, "New Citizens for a New China," 269-270.

Like the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps and the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society, NAPCE activities relied heavily on the political valances of one of the most prominent buzzwords of the May Fourth movement—*pingmin*. Yet unlike these student groups, NAPCE leaders—Yan Yangchu especially—linked this vocabulary to a specific group of people (illiterate workers) and a specific curriculum (literacy), which together served as the foundation for a concrete set of administrative actions. In many respects, Yan Yangchu was just as idealistic as the students at Beijing’s top colleges—in 1923 he suggested that the CNAAE commit itself to making everyone in China literate within five years—but the individual initiatives on the way to this idealistic goal produced concrete results vis-à-vis a specific and obvious social problem.<sup>177</sup> The national scope of the organization, along with their close connections to many leaders in local education reform communities, allowed the NAPCE to monopolize the language of *pingmin jiaoyu* such that explicitly democratic or egalitarian ideals were ultimately relegated to framing rhetoric or ignored entirely. Furthermore, the group’s attempts to develop a specific curriculum intended only for commoners prioritized the transformation of the nation over the establishment of a truly egalitarian or uniform education curriculum. The understanding of *pingmin* articulated and perpetuated by the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education still allowed (and indeed hoped) for a possible democratic future, but such connotations were most often suppressed in favor of treating a social crisis in the present.

### **Conclusion: Imagining a True Republic in the Context of Colonial Modernity**

Nearly all proponents of *pingmin jiaoyu* were keenly aware of the gap between the political vision of republican ideology and the actual conditions of the Chinese political subject.

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<sup>177</sup> YYCWJ, 3.

The first issue of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* opened with the observation that the Republic of China had never actually had a popular government, while the opening plenary of the NAPCE asked, “If a *guomin* completely lacks an education, but we still give them the label ‘*guomin*,’ isn’t this useless?”<sup>178</sup> Despite whatever progress had been made since 1911 in terms of greater intellectual freedom or wider social equality, the radical students, returned scholars, and international observers that contributed to May Fourth-era discussions of popular education all believed that the Chinese Republic had yet to fully materialize. In this context, reformers viewed *pingmin jiaoyu* not simply as a means of strengthening and broadening China’s education system, but indeed as the first and best step toward radically transforming the Chinese people into a new social and political body deserving of the name “*minguo* 民国/Republic” and “*guomin* 国民/citizen.” Nevertheless, while supporters of popular education all agreed that this transformation would depend upon those “common people” who had thus far been excluded from the formal education system, the extent of their involvement and the responsibilities of the educated classes remained unclear, as did the ultimate question of what a true Chinese Republic really looked like.

For the eager students in the Beijing University *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps, this Republic was one in which a greater number of citizens looked, spoke, and acted like Beida students. While their stated aim was to promote “people’s knowledge” (*pingmin zhishi* 平民知识) and arouse the “common people’s consciousness” (*pingmin zhi zijuexin* 平民之自觉心), the form and contents of their lecturing activities reflect a belief that China would only be able to call itself a true republic when all of its people equally embodied the same standard of citizenship that Beida students themselves did—a standard based on political engagement with global affairs, an awareness of recent advances in science and language, as well as basic literacy

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<sup>178</sup> WWST 3: 6, and ZMDZ, 812.

and hygiene skills. The editors of the journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu*, in contrast, envisioned a new, democratic society in which both scholars and uneducated farmers, workers, and merchants would have to transform themselves into self-regulating, economically productive *guomin* with the knowledge necessary to construct and maintain a truly democratic government (*pingmin zhengzhi* 平民政治). This clear commitment to democracy was expressed not in the form of particular rights (including the right to an education), but rather in the mutual responsibility of ensuring that China avoid socioeconomic class antagonism. Finally, the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education organized on behalf of a future Chinese state whose biggest national weakness, the 320 million Chinese "commoners" who could not read, could be solved by a focused, well-organized, and empirical effort to make all Chinese meet a minimum standard of education. Like the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society, the NAPCE's vision was not contingent upon any particular commoner's right to an education so much as it was a reflection of the necessity of universal literacy as a prerequisite to becoming a modern nation-state.

No matter how each of these early organizations defined and explained *pingmin* education—as a means of achieving equality, as an expression of democratic ideals, or as a targeted solution to a national problem—these understandings were heavily informed by the political and epistemological conditions that attended colonial modernity in May Fourth-era China. The Beigao students who contributed to the journal *Pingmin Jiaoyu* best exemplify this condition, as their pedagogical theories were made both possible and seemingly unachievable by China's position as an object of critique by American educators and political philosophers. Having worked closely with John Dewey, Paul Monroe, and other educators from Columbia University, the editors of *Pingmin Jiaoyu* had internalized both the modern directive that education must be progressive, productive, scientific, and democratic, and the ongoing critique



that China was backwards, poor, uneducated, and feudal. As a result, they constantly found themselves trying to address China's gaping inequalities using education methods designed to sustain (rather than produce) a self-consciously unachievable democratic ideal. Although this tension was perhaps less acute among members of the Beida Lecture Corps, it nevertheless manifested itself in an educational vision that remained centered on elite networks within China's highest centers of learning, even as it tried to create a new national body of politically aware Chinese citizens overnight. To a certain extent, the Beida students saw themselves as the only ones capable of truly addressing China's ongoing colonial and political crises, like the annexation of Shandong, and as such their particular level of educational background and political engagement presented itself as the only acceptable standard for popular education, no matter how impossible such a standard may have been for Beijing's urban workers. Thus the idealism that motivated the students' efforts to "Beida-ify" the surrounding city was not simply the product of delusions of grandeur, but rather a response to the political urgency of the May Fourth Movement itself.

While the NAPCE's vision of *pingmin jiaoyu* was comparatively more focused on the specific conditions of laborers, seamstresses, rickshaw pullers, and other illiterate residents of China's major urban centers, the international experiences of Yan Yangchu reveal that these programs, too, were informed by colonial anxieties and by a continuing awareness of how China was represented in the emerging global system of competing nation-states. Even though reformers associated the term *pingmin* with a bounded group of uneducated "commoners" rather than some abstract sociopolitical ideal, the motivation behind efforts to spread basic literacy skills grew directly from the perceived gap between illiterate *pingmin* and what reformers imagined to be well-educated, fully-modern *guomin*. Furthermore, the means by which national

organizations like the NAPCE understood and addressed the problem of illiteracy were conditioned by newly recognized empirical and enumerative approaches to social science, which delegitimized those aspects of the curriculum, such as moral cultivation, that could not be so easily measured. At the same time, by focusing on reading, letter writing, and other skills that value of which predated the arrival of colonial modernity in China, the NAPCE's educational vision remained far more legible than the more catachrestic ideations of *pingmin jiaoyu* evident among Beijing's university students. Ultimately, the NAPCE's focus on literacy, which was obviously valuable to students and could be measured for the benefit of donors, administrators, and international observers, allowed the organization's particular vision of *pingmin jiaoyu* to gain traction where others had failed.

Yet even as the NAPCE's notion of *pingmin* as a specific set of uneducated workers who must be transformed into *guomin* via literacy training had emerged predominant by 1925, this understanding was not static. Indeed, the same newly legible statistical picture that informed so much of the NAPCE's early endeavors soon forced them to turn their attention away from urban centers and toward the countryside, where the vast majority of China's so-called "*pingmin*" actually were. Thus, in 1926, Yan Yangchu, Tao Xingzhi, Liang Shumin 梁漱溟 (1893-1988), and several other national education leaders formally launched the Rural Reconstruction Movement (*xiangcun jianshe yundong* 乡村建设运动) as the second step in China's overall *pingmin* education movement. As the next chapter will demonstrate, this turn toward farmers precipitated a further re-evaluation of the contents and purpose of popular education, ultimately away from literacy and towards a more all-encompassing "productivity," which resonated with a number of different models of citizenship championed by liberal philosophers like John Dewey as well as China's emerging Leninist political parties.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### REEVALUATING LITERACY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF COMMONERS' EDUCATION THROUGH LOCAL EXPERIMENTS IN RURAL RECONSTRUCTION, 1925-1934

If the first half of the 1920s witnessed the rise of a new national consciousness among China's burgeoning intellectual elite, the second half witnessed the redirection of the nationalist project from the city to the countryside. Although Mao Zedong's 1927 Autumn Harvest Uprisings in Hunan may represent the most famous expression of this shift in political energies, a broad spectrum of social and political reformers, from Yan Yangchu to Sun Yatsen, found themselves increasingly concerned with the so-called "rural question" (*xiangcun wenti* 乡村问题).<sup>1</sup> Popular education reformers took a particular interest in developing rural pedagogical initiatives, although they explained their interest in rural reform in different ways. Many returned students, such as Tang Maoru 汤茂如 and Li Jinghan 李景汉 (1895-1986), saw the Chinese countryside as a fantastic laboratory in which to apply the educational theories they had learned abroad, and moreover, they were eager to conduct modern social surveys among China's rural population.<sup>2</sup> Confucian thinkers like Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893-1988) viewed the countryside

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<sup>1</sup> For an excellent analysis of the "rural question" in the minds of education reformers (specifically Yan Yangchu and Tao Xingzhi), see Kate Merkel-Hess, "A New People: Rural Modernity in Republican China" (PhD diss., University of California, Irvine, 2009), esp. 54-106. For a broader analysis of how interest in rural issues among education reformers coincided with broader political developments in the late 1920s, see Charles Hayford, *To The People: James Yen and Village China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 60-84.

<sup>2</sup> Tang Maoru, also known as Monroe Tang, attended Teacher's College at Columbia University and studied under John Dewey. He also served as one of the few China representatives at the first session of the World Federation of Educational Associations held in Oakland, California in 1923. Although initially involved in the Mass Education

as a refuge from the sweeping cultural changes wrought by the May Fourth Movement and as an opportunity to mobilize the nation by revitalizing moral instruction.<sup>3</sup> Some educators sought to harness the emerging political power of Chinese peasants. Cheng Benhai 程本海 (1898-1980), a rural reformer and protégé of Tao Xingzhi 陶行知 (1891-1946), stood up at the National Student Union in August 1927 and proclaimed, “To complete the Republican Revolution, we must rigorously develop rural education!”<sup>4</sup> Others had more practical motives. Literacy promoter Yan Yangchu once remarked that conditions in the village were simply more conducive to popular education than those in the city, particularly in North China, where the climate produced a natural span of “idle months” in fall and winter, during which peasants could take a break from labor to focus on training.<sup>5</sup>

Whatever their individual reasons, reformers’ shift from the city to the countryside was swift and definitive. In 1926, the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education, by then calling itself the “Mass Education Movement” in English, established a Rural Education Department to set up commoners’ schools in the countryside. In November of that

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Movement’s (MEM) Urban Education Department, his status as a central administrator within MEM meant that he became increasingly involved in the organization’s rural activities. For more on Tang Maoru’s role within the MEM, see Letter, E. C. Carter to Thomas B. Appleget, Nov. 2, 1928, Appendix E, 6, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction Records, B5, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University in the City of New York. [Hereafter, the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction Records will be abbreviated IIRR and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia University will be abbreviated CUL]. Li Jinghan, also known as Franklin C. H. Lee, was one of China’s most prominent early social surveyors, having studied at Columbia and later collaborated with Sidney Gamble in launching a social survey of Dingxian. For a deeper explanation of Li’s reasons for turning from his initial social science work on urban rickshaw pullers to the countryside, see Tong Lam, *A Passion for Facts: Social Surveys and the Construction of the Chinese Nation-State, 1900-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 153-163.

<sup>3</sup> Guy S. Alitto, *The Last Confucian: Liang Shuming and the Chinese Dilemma of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), ix-xii.

<sup>4</sup> Cheng Benhai, *Zai Xiaozhuang* 在晓庄 [At Xiaozhuang] (Shanghai: Shanghai zhonghua shuju, 1930), i-iii.

<sup>5</sup> James Yen, “New Citizens for China,” *The Yale Review* 18.2 (1929): 272-273. This chapter deals frequently with articles and documents authored by Yan Yangchu 晏阳初, known in English as James Yen. In print, Yan was often referred to in English as Y. C. James Yen, and he signed letters to his English-speaking friends as “Jimmy.” In general, this chapter will refer to the leader of the MEM as Yan Yangchu, although footnotes will reflect the name used for individual documents.

year, Feng Rui 冯锐 (1897-1936), an agriculturalist, and Fu Baochen 傅葆琛 (1893-1984), a rural education specialist, traveled two hundred miles south of Beijing to the town of Zhaicheng 翟城 in rural Ding county (Dingxian 定县), where they started a new experiment in rural education and agricultural extension. By the end of the decade, the Chinese Mass Education Movement (MEM) had relocated its headquarters from Beijing to Dingxian, and put aside all of its previous urban projects in favor of devoting all of its attention to rural reconstruction. Tao Xingzhi, who had helped to found the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education alongside Yan Yangchu, left the organization to start his own rural normal school in the village of Xiaozhuang (晓庄) outside of Nanjing. All of these projects came to be understood under the umbrella of “rural reconstruction” (*xiangcun jianshe* 乡村建设), a social, economic, and political project that encompassed agricultural extension, civic organization, and infrastructure development as well as education. Thus, by the early 1930s “commoner’s education” (*pingmin jiaoyu* 平民教育), which had previously been subject to many diverse interpretations among the May Fourth student groups in Beijing and Shanghai, was now virtually synonymous with educating rural peasants or *nongmin* 农民.

Although the turn to the countryside was predicated in part on the simple fact that rural people constituted a sizable majority of the Chinese population (85% by most casual estimates), the equation of *pingmin* with *nongmin* signaled far more than a simple shift in the intended participants in popular education projects. As this chapter will show, rural reconstruction also offered an opportunity for reformers to self-consciously reevaluate the purpose of education and its relationship to modern citizenship. Writing in *The Yale Review* in 1928, Yan Yangchu emphasized that rural education was not simply a matter of expanding the scope of popular education, but rather signaled a real turning point in the broader popular education movement:

Up to the present, the Movement has carried out the *quantitative* aspect of its work; but it must from now on emphasize the *qualitative* aspect. It has thus far gained breadth and must now achieve depth. Making the people literate is an important step but only the first one. The real task of educating the Chinese people is just beginning. The ultimate objective of the Movement is not merely to teach the illiterate millions of China to read, but also to train them for modern citizenship. What shall constitute this education for citizenship, and what shall be its spirit and content?<sup>6</sup>

Political reformers and education leaders had been addressing the question of what it meant to be a modern citizen since the start of the century, but the shift to the countryside established citizenship as an open question in ways that it had never been before. Whereas earlier education reformers had appropriated assumedly shared notions of *guomin* and *pingmin* to promote their initiatives, the community of reformers heading the MEM saw rural education itself as an endeavor to discover the meaning of citizenship in China. In the early years of the Dingxian experiment, the MEM established a Department of Citizenship Education (*gongmin jiaoyubu* 公民教育部) the explicit aim of which was not to inculcate students with a specific set of ideas, ideals, and institutions, but rather to investigate the basic question: “What is Chinese citizenship?”<sup>7</sup>

In an effort to explore how reformers ultimately answered this question, this chapter focuses on both the rhetorical strategies and the practical conditions framing two of the largest rural education projects: Tao Xingzhi’s Xiaozhuang Normal School and Yan Yangchu’s “Dingxian Experiment,” which included a cluster of people’s schools and civic initiatives run by the Mass Education Movement. While certainly not the only efforts at popular education in the countryside, these two projects were undoubtedly among the most influential, drawing the attention of Chinese and American social scientists, international donors, and the Chinese

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of how MEM leaders explained the purpose of the Department of Citizenship Education as an investigation into the meaning of Chinese citizenship itself, see Letter, E. C. Carter to Thomas B. Appleget, Nov. 2, 1928, box 5, IIRR, Appendix E, 40.

Nationalist Party. By exploring how reform leaders like Tao Xingzhi and Yan Yangchu conceived of their experiments, as well as what Tao and Yan ultimately learned from their experiences, the chapter illustrates how the shift to the countryside transformed reformers' understandings of Chinese citizenship, as well as their understandings of the goals of popular education. Furthermore, I argue that even as reformers began to question the meaning of citizenship more openly, their tentative answers to these questions frequently coalesced around an increasingly familiar set of pedagogical assumptions and colonial anxieties about the degree of foreign influence over China.

Indeed, part of the effort to reposition citizenship as an open question in the Chinese countryside stemmed from reformers' self-conscious desire to critically examine and even reject foreign norms and values. When the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners' Education was founded in 1923, Tao Xingzhi had been a loyal advocate for spreading the philosophy of American scholars like John Dewey and other faculty at Columbia University, but by the middle of the decade, he had grown weary. In a short article entitled "Citizens and Blind Masses (*guomin yu xiamin* 国民与瞎民)," Tao fretted about the preponderance of foreign "isms" percolating in China's reform discourse. Tao compared these foreign ideologies to "strangers who come inside our houses and stay the night," and whose appearance, disposition, and background should be properly examined before being allowed to stay.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, Tao frequently explained his own rural education projects as an "examination, experimentation, and selection" of new theories and practices, as opposed to the "imitative adoption" that had characterized

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<sup>8</sup> Tao Xingzhi, "Guomin yu xiamin 国民与瞎民" [Citizens and blind masses], *Shenbao* 申报, 7 January 1925. Reprint; *Tao Xingzhi Quanjì* 陶行知全集 [Complete works of Tao Xingzhi] (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 227-228.

previous projects.<sup>9</sup> Whereas Tao Xingzhi allowed that some Western philosophies and prescriptions could be adopted after having proven themselves suitable, many rural education leaders defined their projects explicitly in opposition to foreign methods and Western political categories. Even when writing for an American audience, Yan Yangchu suggested that “the object of the experiment in Ting Hsien [Dingxian] is to evoke a system of education for citizenship that is adapted to the genius of the Chinese people, as well as the needs of a modern republic, and to develop a modern (not Western) Chinese district to serve as a model for China.”<sup>10</sup> As Kate Mekel-Hess has observed, such a quest to develop a modern Chinese village was not a retread of the *tiyong* 体用 ideology of the late Qing Self-Strengthening movement, which sought to pair Chinese “essence” (*ti*) with Western practical methods (*yong*), but rather an attempt to modernize on the basis of the practical knowledge of Chinese farmers themselves.<sup>11</sup> One finds in Yan’s conviction not only a desire to develop an educational and political program more well-suited to the actual lived conditions in the Chinese countryside, but also a broader effort to decouple modernity (and practicality) from the West. If the editors of May Fourth-era journals like *Democracy and Education* ultimately proved unsuccessful in applying an American standard of political modernity to a national context deemed irrevocably un-modern, then rural education presented an opportunity to seek out new educational strategies and new understandings of citizenship beyond Western colonial discourses.

Yet for all of their efforts to articulate an “education for citizenship” that was rooted in the traditional needs and expectations of rural communities, reformers were still quite willing to articulate radical new ideas about the method and social function of education. Nowhere is this

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<sup>9</sup> Tao Xingzhi, “China,” *Educational Yearbook* (1924): 103.

<sup>10</sup> Yen, “New Citizens for China,” 272.

<sup>11</sup> Mekel-Hess, “A New People,” 107.



radicalism more apparent than in the issue of literacy. Prior to 1925, literacy had constituted the *raison d'être* of the NAPCE, which had adopted as its slogan, “Eliminate Illiteracy and Make New Citizens (*chu wenman, zuo xinmin* 除文盲, 作新民).” But by the late 1920s, many rural education reformers began to question the value of literacy as a normative educational good, and even suggested that a narrow focus on reading within rural education projects risked creating a country of “bookworms” (*shudaizi* 书呆子) who were well-read but had no ability to apply knowledge to practical situations. Even Yen himself, who had based his career on literacy training, was forced to concede that “the village, unlike the city, does not give the literate man much chance to use the characters he has learned,” and thus “merely teaching the farmers to read and write would not be rendering them a practical service.”<sup>12</sup> Though literacy’s political and moral usefulness had previously been self-evident to nearly all participants in China’s popular education projects, students and teachers alike, the new cadre of rural reformers consistently highlighted its insufficiency as a means of creating Chinese citizens even as they acknowledged its continued necessity. To the extent that rural educators did continue to enshrine literacy as the foundational content of popular education, they increasingly did so in the context of literacy’s usefulness as a practical and economic skill and as a means of disseminating new developments in agronomy and rural engineering.

Although experiments in rural education such as the commoners’ schools in Dingxian or Tao Xingzhi’s Xiaozhuang Experimental Normal School never achieved the kind of national social transformations their founders intended, historians have justifiably celebrated these projects as expressions of a new kind of social and political consciousness, whether it be Tao Xingzhi’s “life education” (*shenghuo jiaoyu* 生活教育), Yan Yangchu’s “transpacific

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<sup>12</sup> James Yen, *China’s New Scholar-Farmer* (Beijing: Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1929), 2-3.

liberalism,” or a notion of “rural modernity” shared by multiple reformers.<sup>13</sup> Typically, these configurations are positioned as (failed) alternatives to the predominating—and substantially less democratic—discourses produced by China’s emerging political parties and are just as frequently depicted as competing with one another. Yet, as this chapter and the following chapter will show, these experiments in rural reconstruction, despite their diverse origins, also represent a further narrowing of the conditions of possibility for reading the social category *citizen* in China. A detailed consideration of the pedagogical strategies and policy justifications within individual rural reconstruction projects like Dingxian and Xiaozhuang reveals that the pedagogical arguments behind *pingmin jiaoyu* in the countryside represented growing consensus that education, and literacy in particular, was not a normative or moral end but rather a means to do work and be useful. These arguments about the value of education themselves helped to stabilize a broader understanding of the relationship between the people and the state—namely, that the common people can (and must) be transformed from blind masses into *guomin* who can think and act on behalf of the nation.

### **Vernacular Language, Experiential Learning, and the Debate over Literacy**

At first glance, language and literacy pedagogy seemed like settled issues among political leaders, student protesters, and education reformers in the mid 1920s. Following the New Culture Movement of the 1910s and early 1920s, vernacular language, or *baihua* 白话, had emerged as the most popular form of political expression as well as the most prominent language of instruction in both formal public schools and in the specialized *pingmin* schools established by

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<sup>13</sup> For articulations of these three specific conceptions, see Yusheng Yao, “Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi as an Educational and Social Revolutionary,” *Twentieth-Century China* 27.2 (April 2002): 79-120; Hayford, *To the People*; and Merkel-Hess, “A New People,” respectively.

universities and popular education groups. Although certain members of the so-called “national essence group” (*guocui pai* 国粹派), including Deng Shi 邓实 (1887-1957) and Zhang Binglin 章炳麟 (1868-1936), continued to claim that classical language was central to Chinese national identity, widespread arguments linking nationalism with mass literacy, combined with the broader delegitimization of Confucianism as a social and political ideology, enabled vernacular language to completely overtake literary Chinese.<sup>14</sup> Writing in May of 1927, primary school specialist Yu Ziyi 俞子夷 (1885-1970) dismissed the classical language almost entirely, arguing that “the contention between classical texts and vernacular...is actually quite funny. If we take universal education as our objective, then the dead language of classical texts completely lacks a basis for existence.”<sup>15</sup> The vernacular language did not displace classical texts entirely, as members of the “*baihua* movement” would continue to advocate for the further simplification of texts and against the persistence of classical linguistic forms in administrative writings for the next few decades. But the vernacular language had nevertheless achieved a clear victory on the basis of reformers’ belief in vernacular literacy as essential to universal education and universal education as essential to national strength.<sup>16</sup> Even after the enormous cultural shift towards vernacular language, literacy training and national language (*guowen* 国文) instruction remained

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<sup>14</sup>Elizabeth Kaske, *The Politics of Language in Chinese Education, 1895-1919* (Boston: Brill, 2008), 386-389. By the mid 1920s, even staunch advocates of the classical language, such as Qian Jibo 钱基博 (1887-1957), were forced to incorporate many *baihua* texts into their literacy textbooks, relegating Ming-era philosophical texts and other essays written in classical Chinese to the heading “Chinese literary history.” Meanwhile, Qian’s selection of vernacular texts included essays from Liang Qichao and even very recent speeches from Beijing University Chancellor Cai Yuanpei. See Qian Jibo, *Guowen: Xin shifan jiangxike yongshu* 国文:新师范讲习科用书 [National language: a handbook for new methods in lecture and study] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1926), 1-3.

<sup>15</sup> Yu Ziyi, “Xiao xuesheng shizi jiaofa 小学生识字教法” [Primary school literacy pedagogy], *JZZZ* 19.5 (May 1927); Reprint, Dong Yuanqian 董远骞 and Shi Yuying 施毓英, eds., *Yu Ziyi: jiaoyu lunzhu xuan* 俞子夷:教育论著选 [Yu Ziyi: a selection of education treatises] (Beijing: Renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 193.

<sup>16</sup> For a summation of the accomplishments of the vernacular language movement, see Kaske, *The Politics of Language*, esp. 472-473. For a further discussion of *baihua* reforms in the countryside, see Robert Culp, “Teaching Baihua: Textbook Publishing and the Production of Vernacular Language and a New Literary Canon in Early Twentieth-Century China,” *Twentieth-Century China* 34.1 (2009): 4-41.

the cornerstone of formal public schooling and of popular education initiatives such as Yan Yangchu's literacy campaigns with the NAPCE.<sup>17</sup>

Yet this seeming consensus masks the vitality of ongoing debates over literacy in 1920s China. Despite the decisive victory of *baihua* in replacing the classical language in schools, the practical implementation of literacy pedagogy and the function of literacy within a well-rounded education remained subject to critique. Reformers agreed that universal literacy was the aim, but they differed on how this goal should be achieved and on what its intended consequences for the nation should be. In terms of the practical issue of how best to teach literacy, reformers found room for debate within the new scientific norms that increasingly dominated education reform proposals. Some reformers sought refuge in statistical approaches to literacy education, as organizations like the Chinese National Language Research Association compiled scientific data with which to craft new lexicons, grammar texts, and pronunciation guides that aimed to standardize the Chinese language for school instruction.<sup>18</sup> For reformers like Cai Yuanpei, who

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<sup>17</sup> When the Republican Ministry of Education established formal rolls for *guomin* schools in 1916, national language classes constituted almost half of all prescribed curriculum hours for grades one through four, outpacing moral instruction, arithmetic, and the study of Confucian classics combined. See “Jiaoyu bu gongbu guomin xuexiao ling shixing xize ling 教育部公布国民学校令施行细则令” [The Ministry of Education's detailed regulations governing the implementation of *guomin* schools], Jan 1916; Reprint, *Zhongguo di'er lishi dang'anguan*, ed., *Zhonghua Minguo shi dang'an ziliao huibian: jiaoyu* 中华民国史档案资料汇编: 教育 [A collection of historical materials from Republican China: education] (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1996), 478-492.

<sup>18</sup> As stated in their revised charter from 1919, the goals of the Chinese National Language Research Association were the following: 1) to investigate dialects in each province; 2) to designate a standard language; 3) to compile grammar texts and lexicons; 4) to use the standard language to compile school textbooks and reference books; and 5) to compile national language books and periodicals. For an assessment of the National Language Research Association's methods and principals, see Li Jinxi 黎锦熙, *Guoyu xue jiangyi* 国语学讲义 [Printed teaching materials for national language study] (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1919). Li Jinxi (1890-1978) was himself a linguist and educator who served as a committee member on the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In 1915 he joined the department within the Ministry of Education responsible for screening and editing textbooks and was one of the foremost advocates for promoting vernacular language over classical texts. At the time that he wrote *Guoyu xue jiangyi*, he served as national language instructor at Beijing Normal University. For more on Li's personal biography, see He Zilin 何梓琳 and Xia Yuansheng 夏远生, eds., *Ershi shiji Hunan renwu* 二十世纪湖南人物 [Twentieth-century personalities from Hunan] (Changsha: Hunan chubanshe, 2001). Also, the national language unification movement was not confined to large-scale organizations, as even many local *guomin* school boards established similar national language research associations to publish teaching materials based on new scientific standards. For an example of the activities of such a group, see “Fanchang di si xuequ quli di yi guomin xuexiao

initially requested the establishment of a national language research group in 1916, the modern, scientific approach to the study of Chinese language went hand-in-hand with the vernacular language movement's goal of modernizing and unifying the country through shared literacy.<sup>19</sup> But not all reformers were convinced that national unification was a step forward. Several returned students, such as Chen Heqin 陈鹤琴 (1892-1982) and Yu Ziyi, drew on the even newer field of educational psychology (*jiaoyu xinli xue* 教育心里学) to criticize these unification schemes, and argued instead for the development of a lexicography more tailored to the practical needs of specific student groups like workers, farmers, and young children.<sup>20</sup> Drawing on the work of progressive educators at the Teachers College at Columbia University as well as older antecedents like the work of German philosopher Johann Freidrich Herbart (1776-1841), these authors helped to develop more specialized teaching strategies and textbooks, including Yan Yangchu's popular *Commoners' Thousand Character Text*, which billed itself as a literacy textbook specifically suited to the special needs of its audience.<sup>21</sup> The field of educational psychology saw its biggest impact in primary school pedagogy and "family education," where

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fushe guoyu yanjiu hui yuanqi xiaozhi Digang 繁昌第四学区区立第一国民学校附设国语研究会缘起校址荻港” [A report on the origins and location of the ancillary national language research association established in Digang by the No. 4 *guomin* school in district four of Fanchang county], *Guoyu yuekan* 国语月刊 [National language monthly] 1.6 (1922): 1-2. The town of Digang is located in Fanchang county, Anhui province. For a broader history of the national language movement and the role of unification schemes within the movement, see Fang Shiduo 方师铎, *Wushi nian lai Zhongguo guoyu yundong shi* 五十年来中国国语运动史 [A fifty year history of the Chinese national language movement] (Taibei: Guoyu ribao she, 1965).

<sup>19</sup> One should note that reformers favoring unification did not see their efforts as entirely new, and on at least one occasion a textbook editor cited Chinese linguists like Gu Tinglin 顾亭林 (1613-1682) and Shen Yue 沈约 (441-513) as inspirations, yet they nevertheless emphasized that the Chinese language must be subjected to rigorous scientific research and be made more writable and more modern (*jinwen* 近文). See Li, *Guoyu xue jiangyi*, Vol. 2, 33.

<sup>20</sup> For a broader history of the influence of educational psychology on literacy pedagogy in the Republican period see Jiang Jianbang 姜建邦, *Shizi xinli* 识字心里 [Literacy psychology] (Beijing: zheng zhong shuju, 1948).

<sup>21</sup> For a more specific discussion of Herbart's influence on Chinese pedagogy, see Yu Ziyi, "Hai'erbatuo wu duan fa 海尔巴脱五段法" [Herbart's five part plan] in *Xiandai wo guo xiaoxue jiaoxue fa yanbian yi ban—yi ge huiyi jianlu* 现代我国小学教学法演变一斑——一个回忆简录 [A commentary on changes in modern China's primary school pedagogy—a simple reflection] (1963); Reprint, PTJY, 225-227.

Yu Ziyi argued that unified lexicographical statistics only represented language use in “adult society” and that when it came to teaching introductory classes to children, textbook authors should focus not on the most common characters, or even the simplest characters to write, but rather on the language of “children’s experience.”<sup>22</sup>

These pedagogical shifts in the argument for how best to teach literacy hint at a broader change in the perception of literacy itself, from an obvious and self-evident moral end to a practical means of gaining experience and securing a livelihood. Throughout the late imperial period, classical literacy functioned not only as the official language of bureaucratic communication, but also as means of uniting the learned elite into a singular social and moral community versed in “Way learning.”<sup>23</sup> Even after the abolition of the civil service examinations and the subsequent overhaul of the public school system, literacy had remained closely associated with reading literature and accessing the moral guidance contained within instructional texts. The

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<sup>22</sup> Yu Ziyi, “Xiao xuesheng shizi jiaofa,” 194. This preference for “children’s experience” led directly to Yu’s criticism of standard lexicons. For example, Yu noted that almost all children knew what it meant to *chi tang* 吃糖, or “eat sweets,” and yet these characters appeared fairly infrequently in many vernacular texts and thus fairly low in most lexicons. If teachers were to select lessons based only on uniform lexicographical statistics, Yu asserted, then students would not arrive at a discussion of the character *tang* 糖 (“sweets”) until the second year, but by that time “students’ tastes would likely have expanded to other issues and aspects as a result of their scholarly lifestyle, and will not resemble the things that lower primary school students are always interested in eating, which often involves sweets.” Following Yu’s argument, a pedagogical approach that emphasized the language and experiences of children was both a more natural and a more efficient means of acquiring mastery over written characters. Chen Heqing’s work in the field of “family education” was also widely praised by Columbia graduates such as Zheng Zonghai 郑宗海 (1892-1979) and Tao Xingzhi. See Tao Xingzhi, “Ping Chen zhu *Jiating jiaoyu*—yuan yu tianxia fumu gong du zhi 评陈著《家庭教育》—愿与天下父母共读之” [A review of Chen’s *Family Education*—and a wish that all mothers and fathers read it], *Xin jiaoyu pinglun* 新教育评论 [New education commentary] 1.2 (1925); Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi jiaoyu wenji* 陶行知教育文集 [Collected writings of Tao Xingzhi], ed. Hu Xiaofeng 胡晓凤 (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2005), 178-181. In his review, Tao praises Chen’s incorporation of educational psychology in developing methods of childhood instruction. Tao also notes that much of the book is based on Chen’s experience educating his own son Yiwu, and that the book is modeled heavily on *The Education of Karl Witte*, first published in Germany in 1818, which explains how a young boy was able to achieve a doctorate in Philosophy at the age of 14. As a fascinating aside, *The Education of Karl Witte* has achieved a recent resurgence in popularity in China, prompting Jinghua Press to publish a revised and expanded Chinese translation in 2002.

<sup>23</sup> For more on the role of classical literacy in Ming and Qing education systems, as well as the way in which access to classical texts helped to condition the literati elite into servants of the people (and the ruler), see Benjamin Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 47-50, 126-146.

most popular term for illiteracy in the early Republican period, “*wenmang* 文盲,” literally means “blind to literature/culture,” and many arguments for popular education, beginning with Qing Education Minister Zhang Zhidong’s *The Essential Reader for Guomin*, insisted that mass literacy was important for improving “citizens’ cultural level” (*guomin wenhua de chengdu* 国民文化的程度).<sup>24</sup> Defenders of the classical curriculum, such as early Republican Minister of Education Tang Hualong 汤化龙(1874-1918), clearly felt that an understanding of written texts was an important prerequisite to a moral lifestyle.<sup>25</sup> Even May Fourth students and early leaders of the *pingmin* education movement felt that reading and writing characters was an important “first step” toward making “everyone’s thoughts draw nearer to each other” and creating a political community capable of self-government.<sup>26</sup>

In contrast, the education theory of Columbia graduates like Yu Ziyi and Chen Heqin represented a profound inversion of literacy’s place within the Chinese school curriculum. In an

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<sup>24</sup> Literacy was also seen as a source of fundamental humanity. As one 1913 textbook lesson arguing for women’s education put it, “Ability to read is one great distinction between human beings and the brutes. When education is withheld the effect is to make man like the lower animals.” See Su Bendiao 苏本铤, ed., *Gonghe guomin yingwen dushu* 共和国英文读书 [The English reader for republican citizens] Vol 4 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1913), 31. This equation between literacy and one’s cultural level remained predominant throughout the Republican period, as even the supporters of “mass education” (*minzhong jiaoyu* 民众教育) in the 1930s spoke of literacy’s connection to one’s “cultural level.” See, for example, Gan Yuyuan 甘豫源, ed., *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu* 新中华民众教育 [New China mass education] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1932), 34-35.

<sup>25</sup> For the classical view, see Tang Hualong, “Chi jing neiwai ge xuexiao zhongxiaoxue xiushen ji guowen jiaokeshu caiqu jing xun wu yi Kongzi zhi yan wei zhiguiwen 飭京内外各中小学修身及国文教科书采取经训务以孔子之言为旨归文” [An order that moral cultivation and national language textbooks in schools around the capital adopt classical teachings and treat the language of Confucius as most important], *Jiaoyu gongbao* 教育公报 1 (1914); Reprint, JYSX, 896-898. Tang clearly believes words and writing to be the origin of a moral community of *guomin*, as when he argues that “simple words with deep meanings are scattered prominently throughout all the classics, so by adopting human relationships and activities that correspond to the *words* of the classics, schools can develop the nature of *guomin*.”

<sup>26</sup> For the New Culture view, see the speech from Wang Boqiu 王伯秋 in *Pingmin xuexiao jiaoshi zhinan* 平民学校教师指南 [Guidebook for commoners’ education instructors] (Wuxi: Nanjing pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui chubanshe, 1924), 1-2. As Wang argues, “illiterate people are truly ‘unprecedented and unrepeatable.’ If they are illiterate they cannot read books, and so not only can they not acquaint themselves with people of the past, but also when it comes to their own time, they cannot mutually circulate or understand each others’ thoughts, never mind passing on these thoughts to future generations.” For this reason, Wang felt, literacy had to precede the foundation of a true modern political community.

article on primary school literacy pedagogy, Yu asserted that “we teach children in order to help expand their experiences, not to recognize a few characters or read a few books.”<sup>27</sup> In Yu’s preferred method, literacy should be taught as a subset of “common knowledge” curricula (*changshi ke* 常识科) under a system whereby students could naturally encounter new experiences both within and outside of school, gradually explain and discuss those experiences, and, only after having mastered the ability to speak about them, learn the written characters. While defenders of the Confucian curriculum and leaders of the May Fourth-era literacy campaigns all saw written Chinese as the essential moral foundation of Chinese education, Yu suggested that “characters are symbols for crystalizing experiences...but certainly not the key to begin learning.”<sup>28</sup> Such an appeal to experience-based literacy was growing increasingly common among returned students from Columbia, among whom “experiential learning” had become a cause célèbre following John Dewey’s lecture tour.<sup>29</sup> Even Yan Yangchu’s literacy campaigns, going back to his initial efforts with the Chinese Labor Corps, emphasized the practical applications for workers’ literacy rather than the moral instruction or intellectual enlightenment that such skills may have imparted. This widespread celebration of learning from experience rather than from texts, inspired in part by the fields of educational psychology and by Dewey’s “democratic education,” provided Chinese reformers with a space in which to question the value of literacy like never before.

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<sup>27</sup> Yu, “Xiao xuesheng shizi jiaofa,” 196.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Recall from the previous chapter that as early as 1919, the student editors of *Democracy and Education* were championing experiential learning as the most productive model of popular education, with some going so far as to directly criticize the educational and social benefits of “reading books.” See “Jiaoyu de cuowu 教育的错误” [The errors of education], *Pingmin Jiaoyu* 9 (Dec 1919), Reprinted in WSST 3: 20-21.



## Turning Bookworms into Scholar-Farmers at Xiaozhuang

Among the new cohort of educational theorists critical of literacy as a moral and intellectual good, none was more prominent than Tao Xingzhi. Tao Xingzhi is a complex figure, and his position at the heart of the *pingmin* education movement—as founder of the NAPCE, as editor of the reform journal *Xin Jiaoyu* 新教育 [New Education], and as director of the Xiaozhuang Experimental School outside of Nanjing—provides historians with comparatively greater access to his political ambiguities and complicated intellectual history. Although Tao frequently shifted his political energies, his career as an education reformer is defined by a continuous consideration of the relationship between action and learning, as exemplified in the two characters that made up his name, *xing* 行 (“action”) and *zhi* 知 (“knowledge”). While a student at Jinling University in the years surrounding the 1911 Revolution, Tao constructed a graduate thesis proposing that education was the single most important method of national reconstruction. Tao was particularly inspired by Ming philosopher Wang Yangming 王阳明 (1472-1529), whose conception of “unity of knowledge and action” (*zhixing heyi* 知行合一) inspired Tao to briefly change his name to Tao Zhixing 陶知行 to better reflect Wang’s theory.<sup>30</sup> After graduating from Jinling, Tao pursued graduate studies in the United States and ended up at the center of the international progressive education movement, the Teacher’s College at Columbia University. Following his exposure to the progressive educational philosophy of Dewey and Tao’s personal mentor Paul Monroe, Tao would change his name back to Tao Xingzhi to emphasize his belief that action (*xing*) was a prerequisite to knowledge (*zhi*), and to better identify with the kind of scientific, evidentiary learning championed by Teacher’s College

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<sup>30</sup> Yao, “Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi,” 88-91; for a broader discussion of Wang Yangming’s political philosophy, see Thomas Metzger, *Escape from Predicament: Neo-Confucianism and China’s Evolving Political Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), esp. 101-104.

faculty and by Deweyan reformers in China like Hu Shi and Jiang Menglin.<sup>31</sup> Shortly after returning to China, however, Tao's preference for action and experience over abstract theory led him to question even the received wisdom of his Columbia professors. In 1924, Tao suggested that China had "followed her teachers rather blindly" and should work harder to develop original solutions.<sup>32</sup> In the second half of the decade, as Tao turned his attention to rural reconstruction, he developed a much more radical education program that embraced educational egalitarianism, experiential learning outside the classroom, and the need to "commonerize" (*pigminhua* 平民化) Chinese society.<sup>33</sup> By the end of the decade he argued that "book-based science is really just a Western version of the eight-legged essay" and that neither were "real knowledge born from experience."<sup>34</sup>

The mercurial shifts and internal contradictions within Tao Xingzhi's educational philosophy have inspired debate among English- and Chinese-language historians over the exact intellectual origins of Tao's programs. Many of these debates center around the degree to which

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<sup>31</sup> Yao, "Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi," 92-93.

<sup>32</sup> See Tao, "China," (1924), 103.

<sup>33</sup> It might be tempting to suggest that Tao's preference for experience over theory meant that Tao also saw himself as learning from the peasants he was trying to help through his rural reconstruction projects. As Keenan notes, Tao's turn against the rote application of foreign pedagogical methods was accompanied by a strong desire to reconnect with Chinese peasants, as Tao began to outfit himself in simple cotton clothing reminiscent of Chinese farmers (Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 90). Yet Hubert O. Brown argues that Tao thought the Chinese peasants to be hopeless and destitute and that the object of rural education "was not to learn from the peasants, except how to save them." As Brown suggests, Tao's belief in bringing an utterly new form of existence to peasant life distinguished him from the more rosy perspective frequently advanced by James Yen, who often argued that reformers must simply help peasants reach their natural potential. Even when Tao later embraced a philosophy of trying to "peasantize" (*nongminhua* 农民化) Chinese society, he still saw the task as a kind of new spiritual awakening for peasants and "false intellectuals" alike. See Hubert O. Brown, "American Progressivism in Chinese Education: The Case of Tao Xingzhi," in *China's Education and the Industrialized World*, eds. Ruth Hayhoe and Marianne Bastid (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1987), 135.

<sup>34</sup> Tao Xingzhi, "Weizhishi jieji 伪知识阶级" [The false intellectual class], in *Zhongguo jiaoyu gaizao* 中国教育改造 [Remolding Chinese education], ed. Tao Xingzhi (Shanghai: Yadong tushuguan, 1928; Reprint, Washington D.C.: Center for Chinese Research Materials, Association of Research Libraries, 1984), 201-203. The "eight-legged essay" refers to the most intricately stylized component of the late Qing civil service examinations. It was among the first components to be eliminated from the examination system during the Hundred Days Reform of 1898 and was later used by reformers like Tao to reference those aspects of the Chinese education system that were considered most abstruse and impractical.

Tao was directly influenced by John Dewey, although more recent scholarship from Yusheng Yao has moved beyond the discussion of Dewey and identified other important influences on Tao, including anarchism and Marxism.<sup>35</sup> Taken in the aggregate, these studies reveal a thinker who was clearly in dialogue with a broad array of intellectual traditions from Confucianism to Progressivism to Marxism, but whose resulting philosophical and policy contributions were not reducible to any one of these influences. Much like the eager students who wrote for the journal *Democracy and Education* at Beijing Normal University, Tao Xingzhi clearly adopted the language of American progressive educators, while also revising it to suit his own ends. Rather than focus on the specific complexities of Tao's individual intellectual history, it is more productive to consider Tao's thinking in the broader context of 1920s education reform, to investigate what aspects of Tao's programs resonated with contemporaries like Yu Ziyi and Yan Yangchu, and to consider what specific contexts in China made those resonances possible.

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<sup>35</sup> For the debate on Tao's status as a Deweyan reformer, see Philip A. Kuhn, "T'ao Hsing-chih, 1891-1946, An Educational Reformer," *Harvard Papers on China* 13 (1959): 163-195; Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment in China*; and Brown, "American Progressivism in Chinese Education: The Case of Tao Xingzhi," 120-138. The accounts of Tao's intellectual life from Philip Kuhn and Barry Keenan suggest that Tao was first and foremost a student of Dewey, even if Keenan acknowledges that Tao later rejected many of Dewey's ideas and questioned their applicability to China. Keenan explains Tao's later revision of American Progressivism as a natural result of his attempts to radicalize Dewey's ideas to fit the needs of rural education in China. He further asserts that Dewey himself came around to Tao's more radical notion of "society as school," as evidenced in Dewey's *Impressions of Soviet Russia and the Revolutionary World* (See Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 105). Hubert Brown, on the other hand, has sought to refute the importance of Dewey's personal impact, arguing instead that Tao's educational policies and programs derived mostly from practical conditions and political developments within China, as well as from the influence of his close personal friend, Yan Yangchu. For Yao's reframing of this debate, see Yao, "Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi," 79-120. Here, Tao sidesteps the debate on Dewey's influence by taking a more chronologically sensitive approach to Tao's intellectual development, which acknowledges Dewey's impact in the years surrounding his initial lecture tour, but also considers other influences from earlier and later in Tao's career, including Confucianism, Marxism, and anarchism. Over this same period, Chinese language scholarship on Tao has shifted considerably in accordance with Tao's political reputation within the Communist Party, but here too the central issue is Tao's status as a student of Dewey's (bourgeois) progressivism or as an independent (Marxist) intellectual. For an excellent summation of the Chinese literature on Tao, see Yao, "Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi," 84-85 and Yusheng Yao, "The Making of a National Hero: Tao Xingzhi's Legacies in the People's Republic of China," *The Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies* 24 (2002): 251-281. For examples of Chinese language scholarship that transcend these simplistic dichotomies, see Dong Baoliang 董宝良, ed., *Tao Xingzhi jiaoyu xueshuo* 陶行知教育学说 [The educational theory of Tao Xingzhi] (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1993) and Zhang Kaiyuan 章开沅 and Tang Wenquan 唐文权, *Pingfan de shensheng—Tao Xingzhi* 平凡的神圣—陶行知 [Tao Xingzhi: a Confucius after Confucius] (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992).

Certainly one of Tao Xingzhi's most enduring intellectual legacies within the popular education movement in China was his advocacy of "life education" (*shenghuo jiaoyu* 生活教育), which posited that true learning came not from reading, but from living. In an essay dated December 1926, Tao proposed that an ideal rural education should "utilize the living environment and not rely on dead books" (*yong huo de huanjing, bu yong si de shuben* 用活的环境, 不用死的书本).<sup>36</sup> The "living environment" provided learning opportunities for teachers as well as students and farmers, and Tao often claimed that to save China from its current crisis, educators must "teach those who read books to do work" as well as "teach those who work to read books."<sup>37</sup> This twin approach reflected Tao's general belief that true education involved a "unity of teaching, learning, and doing." Tao's advocacy of learning by experience placed him in agreement with many other education professionals and returned students, from radical students at Beijing Normal University to education leaders like Hu Shi. Tao's advocacy of "life education" was even reflected in the formal goals adopted by the Republican Ministry of Education in its 1922 reform platform.<sup>38</sup> But Tao also went further than his contemporaries in articulating the inadequacies of literacy as a goal within "life education." While Yu Ziyi and popular educators like Yan Yangchu were engaged in efforts to make the goal of literacy more accessible,

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<sup>36</sup> Tao Xingzhi, "Zhongguo xiancun jiaoyu zhi genben gaizao 中国乡村教育之根本改造" [Fundamental reform in China's rural education], *Zhongguo jiaoyu gaizao*, 131.

<sup>37</sup> Tao Xingzhi, "Muqian zhongguo jiaoyu liang tiao luxian 目前中国教育两条路线" [Two paths facing Chinese education], *Jiaoyu zhoukan* 教育周刊 [Education weekly] 137 (Nov 1932); Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan* 陶行知, 黄炎培, 徐特立, 陈鹤琴教育文选 [Selected essays from Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, and Chen Heqin] (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 36-39.

<sup>38</sup> For a summary of the Ministry of Education's 1922 reform platform, see "Jiaoyu bu zhaoji zhi xuezhi huiyi ji qiyi jue'an 教育部召集之学制会议及其议决案" [Resolutions presented at the education system meeting convened by the Ministry of Education], JYZZ 14.10 (1922); Reprint, XZYB, 994-1001. The full set of goals adopted in the resolution are to first, develop a spirit of *pingmin* education; second, focus on individual development; third, expend effort to popularize education; fourth, focus on life education; fifth, give more leeway in standards to as to be more responsive to local needs; sixth, take into account the economic ability of *guomin*; and seventh, simultaneously deal with the old system while instituting new reforms (1995).

affordable, and achievable, Tao openly questioned literacy and reading as a sufficient end goal of schooling, especially in the context of rural education.

In discussing the flaws in Chinese approaches to rural education, Tao summarized the problem this way:

Chinese rural education has taken the wrong path! It teaches people to leave the countryside and run to the city, it teaches people to eat food but not to plant rice, to wear clothes but not to plant cotton, and to build a house but not to grow trees. It teaches people to admire extravagance and to scorn agriculture. It teaches them to distribute profit but not to make profit. It teaches the sons and younger brothers of farmers to become bookworms (*shudaizi* 书呆子). It teaches the rich to become poor and the poor to become even poorer; it teaches the strong to become weak and the weak to become even weaker.<sup>39</sup>

Tao was often extraordinarily harsh in his discussion of so-called “bookworms,” who were well read but had no means of turning this knowledge into productive work. Tao compared such people to a “false intelligentsia” (*weizhishi jieji* 伪知识阶级) who act like “parasites on society” and who “taint the country with their corruption.”<sup>40</sup> Tao depicted China’s current education system as one in which “the big bookworms teach the little bookworms.” His protégé Cheng Benhai went a step farther, calling China’s primary schools nothing more than “bookworm manufacturing plants that take good sons and younger brothers of farmers and turn them into unproductive good-for-nothings.”<sup>41</sup> To be fair, Tao was not completely opposed to literacy as an important part of a well-rounded education. He conceded that illiteracy was one of the primary factors behind the exploitation of lower classes, and argued that illiterate farmers were little more than “hayseeds” (*tiandaizi* 田呆子) incapable of developing more efficient farming methods or

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<sup>39</sup> Tao, “Zhongguo xiancun jiaoyu zhi genben gaizao,” 8.

<sup>40</sup> See Tao, “Weizhishi jieji,” *passim* and “Muqian zhongguo jiaoyu liang tiao luxian,” 37.

<sup>41</sup> Tao, “Weizhishi jieji,” 201 and Cheng Benhai, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 8-9.

otherwise improving their political station.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, Tao maintained that “reading books” was entirely insufficient as an educational goal. While Tao’s contemporary Yan Yangchu sponsored literacy campaigns that positioned “*dushu*” (“reading books”) as a primary means of establishing common ground between progressive popular educators and ordinary *pingmin*, Tao called “*dushu*” a myth that protected the false intellectual class and needed to be exposed. In Tao’s words, “books are simply tools, in the same manner as a saw or a hoe, which people can use. Thus, rather than say ‘*dushu*’ [read books], we should really say ‘*yongshu*’ [use books].”<sup>43</sup>

Tao’s questioning of the value of “*dushu*” fundamentally reconfigured the goal of popular education and its relationship to citizenship in China. Earlier proponents of popular education such as Qing statesman Zhang Zhidong and textbook editor Zhuang Yu saw literacy as a normative good because of its ability to create a community of citizens defined by shared values and beliefs. To the extent that Tao valued literacy at all, it was as a utilitarian means to create a community of “living citizens” (*huo de guomin* 活的国民) who would have the economic skills necessary to earn a living. In an article written in 1926 for the magazine *Shenghuo zhoukan* 生活周刊 entitled “Learning to be a Person,” Tao suggested that a “whole person” must possess three essential traits: “a healthy body” with which to take on work, “an independent way of thinking” with which to make good judgments, and “an independent skill” with which to make a profit.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Tao, “muqian zhongguo jiaoyu liang tiao luxian,” 37. Clearly, Tao saw “hayseeds” (*tiandaizi*) and “bookworms” (*shudaizi*) as natural analogs of one another, the former working only with their hands and never with their minds, while the latter worked only with their minds and not with their hands.

<sup>43</sup> Tao, “Weizhishi jieji,” 204-205. Tao later expands the analogy to eating: “Viewed from another angle, if one only knows eating, do they not become a fathead? If one only knows reading books, do they not simply become a walking bookshelf? In order to avoid falling into the trap of the false intelligentsia, we should make sure to advocate ‘using books’ and not ‘reading books.’”

<sup>44</sup> Tao Xingzhi, “Xue zuo yi ge ren 学做一个人” [Learning to be a person], *Shenghuo zhoukan* 生活周刊 [Life magazine] 1.19 (1926); Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan*, 6-7. Although Tao did not use the phrase “living citizens” in this particular essay, it’s clear from these traits that Tao’s “whole person” encompasses the same qualities as the “living citizens” referenced in his article on “Fundamental Reforms to Rural Education,” published three years earlier.

When this notion of citizenship was applied to rural education, it meant teaching students above all to be *economically* productive. As Tao argued, “A living rural education should teach people to make a profit. It should make a barren hill into a grove of trees and a desolate field grow five grains.”<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in his view, it was the lack of an ability to produce profit that made “book readers” such a terrible scourge on the nation.

Arguments in favor of placing personal hygiene and practical skills at the center of the Chinese education curriculum had been made before, most notably by Huang Yanpei 黄炎培 (1878-1965), who founded the vocational education movement and published *Life Magazine* (*Shenghuo zhoukan* 生活周刊), which featured many of Tao’s essays.<sup>46</sup> Yet Tao’s criticisms of book learning and exploitation by “false intellectuals” signaled a radical departure from other advocates of vocational education. While many in the vocational education movement saw practical training as an important form of social work to improve the lives of jobless workers, Tao saw the development of practical skills as foundational to the construction of new political communities based on the principles of “self-sufficiency, self-governance, and self-defense”

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<sup>45</sup> Tao, “Zhongguo xiancun jiaoyu zhi genben gaizao,” 8.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Huang Yanpei 黄炎培, “Zhonghua zhiye jiaoyu she xuanyanshu 中华职业教育社宣言书” [Manifesto of the Chinese vocational education society], *Jiaoyu yu zhiye* 教育与职业 [Education and vocation] 1 (1917). In the vocational education manifesto that opened the inaugural issue of the journal *Jiaoyu yu zhiye*, Huang declared, “Today our country’s most important and difficult problem is none other than that of livelihoods (*shengji* 生计); when seeking a fundamental solution to the problem of livelihoods, the answer is none other than education...but not only is our country’s current education system not capable of solving the livelihood problem, it also creates the greatest obstacle for solving the livelihood problem.” In Huang’s estimation, China’s education system was incapable of producing students with marketable skills, even within practically oriented fields like agricultural science and business. As a solution, Huang called for a new curriculum that emphasized practice over theory. Rather than simply read national language books on farming and commerce, students should find opportunity to do the work itself. While these pedagogical strategies mirror many of those later developed by Tao Xingzhi at Xiao Zhuang, Huang Yanpei seemed to view these vocational education programs in the context of social work rather than in the context of citizens’ education. He compared his efforts to recently established vocational training centers in America and England, which were often meant to educate African-Americans and immigrants in the skills required to service automobiles, drive carriages, prepare food products, and accomplish other service-oriented tasks. These American and English programs were clearly not meant to serve as the foundation of public education, which is more what Tao Xingzhi had in mind.

(*zili, zizhi, ziwei* 自立, 自治, 自卫).<sup>47</sup> In Tao's scheme, each of these principles was dependent upon the others, and true autonomy for rural people would require that they acquire the economic knowledge and skills necessary to seek a livelihood. Furthermore, unlike previous vocational education advocates, Tao saw economic training not as a supplement to more traditional book learning, but rather as the foundation of a new form of "life education." Thus, while Tao agreed with nearly all popular education reformers that knowledge was a prerequisite to citizenship, he continually stressed that this knowledge must constitute "real" learning derived from experience and "capable of producing results" rather than the "shifting sand of false knowledge" derived from metaphysics, foreign science, and classical moral cultivation.<sup>48</sup>

In March of 1927, Tao moved to put his theory of "life education" and rural economic self-sufficiency into practice by establishing the Xiaozhuang Experimental Normal School in a small village outside of Nanjing. To this point, Tao's primary pedagogical interests lay with primary school and early childhood education, but when it came to applying these interests to the task of rural reconstruction, he felt that he could make the greatest impact training rural primary school teachers rather than primary school students themselves.<sup>49</sup> The school was intended to be

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<sup>47</sup> Tao, "Xuesheng zizhi wenti zhi yanjiu," 73-81.

<sup>48</sup> For the most involved discussion of Tao's distinction between "real" knowledge and "false" knowledge, see "Weizhishi jieji," *passim*. Here, Tao's interest in profit extends even to his more abstract analogies. He compares the eight-legged essay to a "bank note issued according to one's own paper currency," while a Western science textbook is like "a bank note issued according to another country's paper currency," but both are ultimately "counterfeit and lacking in a true bank reserve" and the difference lies only in the latter's relative novelty (p. 202).

<sup>49</sup> This move toward teacher training in rural areas was part of a broader trend among education reformers, particularly in wealthier provinces like Jiangsu (in which the Xiaozhuang Experimental School was located). As Xiaoping Cong has noted, the Jiangsu Provincial Association for Advancing Compulsory Education placed its support behind expanding rural teachers' schools, and between 1923 and 1924, multiple provincial teachers' schools began establishing branches in rural areas. Such activity in Jiangsu, Shandong, Henan, and elsewhere was sufficient to constitute the "beginning of a movement to establish village teachers' schools." See Xiaoping Cong, *Teachers' Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 108-109. For an example of Tao's interest in early childhood education, see his article "Chuangshe xiangcun youzhiyuan xuanyanshu 创设乡村幼稚园宣言书" [Manifesto on setting up rural kindergartens], *Xin jiaoyu pinglun* 新教育评论 [New education commentary] 2.22 (1926); Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan*, 11-14. This particular article reflects the degree to which Tao



the culmination of the reformist vision that Tao had been developing over the past decade: it shifted the normal school from an urban setting to one that was thoroughly integrated in the rural community, drew inspiration from the practicalities of Chinese village life, and sought to develop teachers with “the physical skills of farmers, the mind of scientists, and the spirit of social reformers.”<sup>50</sup>

Although originally only encompassing a primary school teacher training academy and a preschool teacher training academy, the Xiaozhuang project eventually grew to include a wide variety of pedagogical initiatives including a formal primary school, a people’s night school (*minzhong yexiao* 民众夜校), a children’s science summer school, and a hospital, with further plans for a village printing press and a university.<sup>51</sup> The school attracted attention from all over the country, earning write-ups in education journals from Hunan, Shaanxi, and Beijing, as well as visits from the educational experts including Chen Heqin (then serving as Curriculum Bureau chief for the Nanjing Municipal Education Department), Liang Shuming, and Columbia faculty member William Kilpatrick.<sup>52</sup> The more radical efforts of the Xiaozhuang school, including the

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was very skeptical of foreign influences on Chinese education by the mid 1920s, as he accuses China’s kindergartens of suffering from a “foreign sickness” in which Chinese children “play pianos, sing foreign songs, tell foreign stories, play with foreign toys, and even eat foreign snacks.” He even goes so far as to call such schools nothing more than “stalls for selling foreign goods.”

<sup>50</sup> Tao’s description of the ideal Xiaozhuang graduate comes from his explanation of the “Aims of rural education,” published as part of the school’s central tenets. See Cheng, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 9. Tao’s efforts to more thoroughly integrate the Xiaozhuang school into rural life was also a reaction to the failures of previous village schools, which had really just relocated urban schools to the countryside without adapting their curricula or materials to fit the rural environment. See Cong, *Teachers’ Schools*, 109.

<sup>51</sup> Merkel-Hess, “A New People,” 120. For a full account of the ambitious plans for the Xiaozhuang Experimental School, see “Minguo shiqi nian si yuefen Xiaozhuang xuexiao jianshe gongzuo yaoxiang 民国十七年四月份晓庄学校建设工作要项” [Key points from the construction work on the Xiaozhuang experimental school in April 1928], *Hunan Jiaoyu* 湖南教育 [Hunan education] 2 (1928): 4.

<sup>52</sup> For examples of the journals offering (typically glowing) reportage of the Xiaozhuang project, see “Wenke tan Xiaozhuang shifan xuexiao shisheng bing gengshi ganfu 闻客谈晓庄师范学校师生并耕事感赋” [Wenke’s thoughts on teachers and students doing farm work together at Xiaozhuang normal school], *Jiaoyu yu zhiye* 教育与职业 [Education and vocation] 96 (1928): 437; “Nanjing Xiaozhuang xuexiao xuesheng zhi baogao 南京晓庄学校学生之报告” [A report on the students at Xiaozhuang normal school], *Liaoning jiaoyu yuekan* 辽宁教育月刊

organization of a self-defense league, the increasing involvement in village governance, and the school leaders' increasingly communist rhetoric, also attracted the ire of the Guomindang government, whose troops forcibly closed the school on April 12, 1930, forcing Tao to flee the country.<sup>53</sup>

Despite its rather short lifespan, the Xiaozhuang experiment nevertheless serves as a practical expression of Tao's belief in an economically self-sufficient model of citizenship and in "the unity of teaching, learning, and doing." As Tao described the school in a speech in August 1927, "The practical conditions of our lives constitute the entirety of the curriculum, and the curriculum constitutes the practicalities of our lives."<sup>54</sup> Tao summed up the spirit of the school in a "Self-Sufficiency Song," which was included in the school's central tenets and purportedly sung by all its students:

I sweat my own sweat,  
I eat my own rice,  
I manage my own affairs.  
Those who rely on others, on heaven, or on their ancestors  
Are not worthy of being called good Chinese!<sup>55</sup>

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[Liaoning education monthly] 1.5 (1929): 154; Chen Jianxiao 陈剑脩 "Xiaozhuang xiangcun shifan xuexiao xintiao 晓庄乡村师范学校信条" [Tenets of the Xiaozhuang rural normal school], *Shanxi jiaoyu zhoukan* 陕西教育周刊 [Shaanxi education weekly] 3.32 (1930): 34; at this time of his visit to Xiaozhuang, Chen Jianxiao was acting as director of the Nanjing Municipal Education Department, and was accompanied by Chen Heqin (See Cheng, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 15). For details on William Kilpatrick's visit in 1929, including his extended impressions of the school, see Merkel-Hess, "A New People," 121-129, and Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 108. As Merkel-Hess and Keenan both point out, Kilpatrick commented on the strong similarity between Tao's program and those he had observed in the Soviet Union a few months prior.

<sup>53</sup> Merkel-Hess, "A New People," 108-110. Whatever the reasons behind the closure, the authorities in Nanjing did eventually reopen the school albeit with a different mission. See "Zhongyang zhengfu fahuan xiaozhuang shifan, choubei ertong kexue shuqi xuexiao 中央政府发还晓庄师范, 筹备儿童科学暑期学校" [Central authorities return Xiaozhuang Normal, prepare a children's science summer school], *Yunnan jiaoyu xingzheng zhoukan* 云南教育行政周刊 [Yunnan education administration weekly] 2.9 (1932): 52.

<sup>54</sup> Cheng, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 16-18. The text of this particular speech was also published in the August 1927 issue of the journal *Xiang jiao cong xun* 乡教丛讯 [Rural dispatches] 1.17 (1927).

<sup>55</sup> The original draft of this song appeared in Tao's 1926 article "Xue zuo yi ge ren" in *Shenghuo zhoukan*, but was also included as part of the central tenets of the school throughout 1928 and 1929 (see Cheng, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, xii). The song was also Reprinted in the journal *Hongdao* 弘道 [Magnificent cause] in 1928 (see Wu Jinlou 吴近楼, "Xiaozhuang xuexiao liang shou ge 晓庄学校两首歌" [Two songs from Xiaozhuang school], *Hongdao* 44 (1929): 2.

Work constituted the center of the school day. Every morning students would hold a ten-to-fifteen-minute “yin meeting” (*yinhui* 寅会), devoted to planning and delegating administrative and work tasks for the day, while the rest of the morning was spent practicing martial arts and studying in the classroom. Even the school’s more formal curriculum was organized around “using books” rather than merely “reading books.” The topics studied were almost always directly related to the school’s rural reconstruction efforts and included texts on environmental science and sociology rather than language instruction or math.<sup>56</sup> The entire afternoon was typically devoted to work, as the teachers-in-training at Xiaozhuang committed themselves to agricultural labor, simple craft manufacturing, and working among the people. The evening was often spent teaching at the people’s night school and journaling about the day’s activities.<sup>57</sup> The focus on work even extended to the surrounding landscape, as Tao renamed the nearby Laoshan 老山 (“Old Hill”) as Laoshan 劳山 (“Labor Hill”).<sup>58</sup> When graduates from Xiaozhuang left the program to establish their own schools, such as the nearby Yaohuamen 尧化门 Experimental Primary School, they engaged in similar kinds of volunteer work, running people’s schools in the evenings and managing all of the school’s affairs themselves without the aid of a groundskeeper.<sup>59</sup> Shared work, whether in the fields or the schoolhouse, was consistently seen by the school’s administration as its chief selling point, and nearly all publicity materials and

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<sup>56</sup> See “Xiaozhuang xuexiao zhuzhang yongshu bu zhuzhang dushu 晓庄学校主张用书不主张读书” [The Xiaozhuang school emphasizes using books, not reading books], *Hunan Jiaoyu* 3 (1929), 7.

<sup>57</sup> Chen, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 17. The “yin” meetings that started each day were not only important to the organization of various work tasks, but were also key expressions of the idea of “student self-government” in which students at Xiaozhuang took an active role in managing the schools affairs. See “Xiaozhuang xuexiao de ‘yinhui’ 晓庄学校的‘寅会’” [The “Yin meetings” at Xiaozhuang school], *Hunan Jiaoyu* 3 (1929): 4.

<sup>58</sup> Yao, “Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi,” 97.

<sup>59</sup> Cheng, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 62-66.

memoirs of the school, such as Cheng Benhai's *Zai Xiaozhuang*, prominently featured photographs of this shared labor.

Yet as much as Xiaozhuang represented a culmination of Tao's ideas about "life education" and rural reconstruction, the school also presented itself as a learning opportunity for Tao, and it marked a transition after which his philosophy of "life education" became much more politically radical, especially with regard to the issue of "self-government" or *zizhi* 自治. Tao's earliest writings on student self-government, articulated at the time of Dewey's China tour, defined it in the following way:

Student self-government (*xuesheng zizhi* 学生自治) is students coming together as a group and having everyone study the process of managing oneself...student self-government does not mean to act on one's own, but rather to mutually govern one another; it does not mean to dispel rules, but rather to establish laws and abide by laws rather than interfere. It does not mean to declare one's independence from school, but rather to practice the rationality of self-government.<sup>60</sup>

Such a definition of *zizhi* positioned self-government (or, perhaps more accurately, self-governance) as almost an extension of moral cultivation or self-discipline, and at the very least preserved the sanctity of the schoolhouse as the primary vessel of disseminating knowledge. When Tao first established the Xiaozhuang school, he saw it occupying a similarly central role, embodying a kind of top-down approach to better provide rural teachers with the scientific knowledge and agricultural skills necessary to economically revitalize the countryside. Tao claimed that "this kind of living education is not something that local educational circles or any organization can do on their own; we must have a large-scale alliance before we can hope for success."<sup>61</sup> As Hubert O. Brown has noted, Tao did not see Xiaozhuang as an effort to learn from the peasants, whose brains he compared to "vacuum tubes," but rather as an attempt to transform

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<sup>60</sup> Tao, "Xuesheng zizhi wenti zhi yanjiu," 74.

<sup>61</sup> Tao, "Zhongguo xiangcun jiaoyu zhi genben gaizao," 8.

its students from simple villagers into living citizens through scientific methods.<sup>62</sup> Within this context, “self-government” still clearly referred to peasants’ ability to adapt to these scientific standards and maintain them within their communities. It did not signal a new form of political autonomy. Indeed, such a program still required the kind of central state organizing that popular education reformers had been seeking since the founding of the Republic.

Yet after having established a true unity of “teaching, learning, and doing” at Xiaozhuang, Tao began to take the political notion of self-government more seriously and throughout the 1930s repositioned “life education” as the foundation of a radically egalitarian society with no clear need for a central state. In 1934, Tao launched a new journal simply titled “Life Education,” which redefined its titular subject as a form of education that completely obliterated the boundaries between school and society, turning all of one’s life experiences into learning experiences. Whereas Dewey had famously decreed that schools should be more like society, Tao now claimed that society itself was the school, and likened formal schoolhouses to birdcages that keep their subjects from experiencing the real world. In Tao’s formation, “Life education is something one is born with and something one dies with...In the great school of society, anyone can be our teacher, anyone can be our classmate, and anyone can be our student.”<sup>63</sup> This kind of life education also served a social good, built on a foundation of radical equality. A later issue of the journal noted that true life education must not teach students to exploit one another, but rather must “teach the masses to use the work of the people to feed the life of the people, to use the science of the people to enlighten the life of the people, and to use the organized force of the

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<sup>62</sup> Brown, “Tao Xingzhi and American Progressivism,” 135.

<sup>63</sup> Tao Xingzhi, “Shenghuo jiaoyu 生活教育” [Life education], *Shenghuo Jiaoyu* 生活教育 1.1 (1934); Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan*, 50-51.

people to safeguard people's livelihood."<sup>64</sup> Gone were the notions of moral, political, or scientific tutelage that had characterized many earlier attempts at popular education. They had been supplanted by an understanding of education that placed rural reconstruction firmly in the hands of "living citizens" themselves. While more contextual factors, such as Tao Xingzhi's personal friendship with the warlord Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥 (1882-1948), may have provided the immediate impetus behind the Guomindang's efforts to shutter the Xiaozhuang project in 1930, this direction in Tao's thinking was also incompatible with the political ideology and social programs of a growing party-state with national ambitions.<sup>65</sup>

Although the Xiaozhuang Experimental Normal School was short-lived, the educational philosophy that guided its development still had a large impact within the education reform community, particularly Tao's assertion that citizens must be practically skilled and economically self-sustaining. Although Tao's early scholarship demonstrates a belief in *guomin* as a particular kind of moral community and literacy as a means of accessing these values, his work at Xiaozhuang presented a different idea of what it meant to be a good teacher, a good student, and a good citizen. Many of Tao's notions about economic productivity and literacy as a practical skill are reflected in John Dewey's lectures on democratic education, which held that a good citizen "must be one who produces rather than one who merely shares in the production of

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<sup>64</sup> Tao Xingzhi, "Chuantong jiaoyu yu shenghuo jiaoyu you shenme qubie 传统教育与生活教育有什么区别?" [What are the differences between traditional education and life education?], *Shenghuo jiaoyu* 1.29 (Dec. 1934); Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> See Merkel-Hess, "A New People," 108-110 for a more detailed analysis of the reasons behind the school's closure. Merkel-Hess offers a variety of compelling reasons for why the Guomindang would have been so eager to close the school beyond the perceived threat generated by its communist/egalitarian leanings. One reason was Tao's friendship with Christian warlord and former Vice Premier of the Republic of China, General Feng Yuxiang 冯玉祥 (1882-1948). Feng was attracted to the principles of self-government and self-sufficiency established in Xiaozhuang, but was also engaged in a series of battles against the GMD in Shandong province at the time. Another reason for the closure may have been the increasingly political nature of Xiaozhuang students, who had by 1930 become involved in efforts to block foreign access to the Yangzi River, a policy that the GMD opposed.

others,” and that a good school “must not merely acquaint students with the needs of society, but must also prepare them to meet those needs.”<sup>66</sup>

Yet this embrace of citizens as economic actors goes beyond just Tao and Dewey. Even after Tao’s encounters with Marxist and anarchist philosophy led him to substantially revise some of Dewey’s central ideas about school socialization, his transformation of literacy from a moral good into a practical and economic means of “using books” to do work nevertheless represents a concession to the globalizing impulses of capitalism, which ascribed social value to economic utility. Thus, Tao’s career marks one instance in which the conditions of colonial modernity, personified by Tao’s encounter with Dewey but not reducible to his personal influence, worked its way into the rural education movement.

Tao Xingzhi is often presented in the literature as an outlier at odds with the rest of the reform community and with China’s Nationalist and Communist party-states.<sup>67</sup> Yet just as Tao’s intervention into the developing debate on literacy is not reducible to the influence of one man, neither was Tao alone in his re-conception of the relationship between school, society, and learning. As this section has shown, many of Tao’s early ideas about experiential learning and about practical approaches to citizenship echo larger trends within the reform community, as reformers like Huang Yanpei advocated for vocational training and scholars like Chen Heqin and Yu Ziyi used the tools of educational psychology to rethink the role of literacy in early childhood

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<sup>66</sup> John Dewey, “On Cultural Heritage and Social Reconstruction,” in *John Dewey: Lectures in China, 1919-1920*, eds. Robert W Clopton and Tsuin-Chen Ou (Honolulu: The University of Hawaii Press, 1973), 210-212.

<sup>67</sup> Yusheng Yao notes that Tao was a “unique independent radical” because of his attack on so-called “false-intellectuals” and his lack of willingness to easily side with either liberal or Marxist reformers (Yao, “Rediscovering Tao Xingzhi,” 105. Hubert Brown tries to similarly stress the individuality of Tao’s beliefs, particularly with regards to American Progressivism. As he argues, “The source, thrust, and telos of his ideas and behavior were most clearly rooted in Tao’s personality, the ambiguities of his enculturation to China and acculturation to the West, and the evolving situation of Republican China. Tao was influenced by Progressivism, there is no doubt, but somewhat in the way the gravity of the sun deflects starlight that grazes it, starlight whose source and destination is elsewhere” (See Brown, “Tao Xingzhi and American Progressivism,” 138). While this poetic argument about Tao’s distinction from Progressivism is well taken, and the effort to restore Tao’s intellectual agency well-intentioned, it should not blind us to the ways in which Tao’s ideas found resonance with a broader community beyond himself.

education. Furthermore, Tao's increased emphasis on economic productivity as the ultimate measure of citizenship had broad appeal. By the late 1920s, even Yan Yangchu, China's leading advocate of popular literacy, had begun to channel his energies into agricultural reforms, and his own experiment in rural education at Dingxian promised to create true "scholar-farmers" who were not only literate but also had an awareness of agricultural science, personal hygiene, and civic organization.<sup>68</sup> These skills made Yan's "scholar-farmers" precisely the kind of physically able, scientifically skilled, and reform-minded students Tao hoped to produce at Xiaozhuang. Yan's endorsement of these goals reflected the broader belief among the reform community that "mere literacy" was no longer an adequate goal of popular education. This transformation of literacy from a self-evident moral end to an economic means of doing work represents a relevant and hitherto unexplored contribution to the broader debate on education and the meaning of citizenship in China, one which had life beyond Tao's specific endorsement of "life education."

Tao's more radical efforts to promote self-government and to abolish the formal schoolhouse as a tool of rural reconstruction had less appeal, and Tao never received the kind of political sponsorship given to similarly-minded education reformers in the USSR.<sup>69</sup> Tao was not entirely at odds with the broader Chinese national project—he encouraged his own students to read selections from Sun Zhongshan's *Three People's Principles*, and the nearby Yaohuamen

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<sup>68</sup> Yen, "China's New Scholar-Farmers," 7-8. Such arguments also reflect the broader resonance of the argument equating citizenship with work. In this same article, Yan Yangchu provides an illustration equating citizenship with agricultural burden. In the illustration, two peasants (a man and a woman) hold up an enormous globe with "Zhonghua Minguo 中华民国" (The Republic of China) written on the side and the caption, "Some Chinese gladly assuming the burden of their citizenship."

<sup>69</sup> As mentioned earlier, when Columbia professor William Kilpatrick visited Tao's Xiaozhuang Experimental School, he favorably compared it to similar progressive educational projects led by Stanislav Teofilovich Shatskii (1878-1934). Shatskii's rural schools were widely praised by American progressives (including Dewey), and although Shatskii originally identified himself as a liberal reformer, the Communist Party ultimately adopted his methods as an ideal way of socializing rural work, abolishing class distinctions, and eroding institutions of private property. For a further discussion of Shatskii's school, its success in the USSR, and its esteem by American educators, see Keenan, *The Dewey Experiment*, 106-109. As Keenan notes, Tao himself also saw the connection between these efforts and his Xiaozhuang project, and he claimed that Shatskii was trying to accomplish many of his same goals.



Experimental Primary School (run by Xiaozhuang students) held weekly Monday morning meetings commemorating Sun Yatsen in a style that mirrored the nationalist rituals and ceremonies encouraged by the Guomindang.<sup>70</sup> But Tao's vision of an entirely self-sufficient, self-governing, self-defending rural society was fundamentally at odds with the kind of state that Chinese Nationalist Party wanted to build. Even if Xiaozhuang students had not made themselves the political enemies of the Nationalist government by launching anti-Japanese protests and other politically subversive activities, it is unlikely that Nationalist Party leaders would have found anything useful among the specific pedagogical methods, technologies, and priorities at Xiaozhuang. Forced closure, however, was not a fate shared by all rural reconstruction projects. To fully understand the broader political impact of popular education and rural reconstruction (and indeed, to understand Tao's influence in shifting the debate on literacy as a pedagogical aim), we must turn to another experiment in rural education: Yan Yangchu and the Mass Education Movement's efforts at Dingxian.

### **Eliminating Illiteracy and Making New Citizens at Dingxian**

Tao Xingzhi's Xiaozhuang Normal School and Yan Yangchu's Dingxian Experiment were founded with a similar intent to socially and economically transform the Chinese countryside,

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<sup>70</sup> Cheng, *Zai Xiaozhuang*, 59. For a more detailed discussion of how rituals and the memory of Sun Yatsen were heavily incorporated into the political projects of the Nationalist Party, see Chen Yunqian 陈蕴茜, *Chongbai yu jiyi: Sun Zhongshan fuhao de jiangou yu chuanbo* 崇拜与记忆: 孙中山符号的建构与传播 [Worship and memory: the design and spread of Sun Yatsen symbology] (Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009). In Chen's analysis, the GMD capitalized on the political symbol of Sun Yatsen for the purpose of spreading a specific government agenda derived from Sun's theory of "rule by party government" (*yidangzhiguo* 一党治国). Chen also notes that the systems of time and space implicit within practices of Sun worship were contradictory to the lifestyle and customs of farmers. The form of Sun worship utilized in rural schools was thus both politicized and modern—it marked a sharp break with traditional forms of faith among the people (p. 580-583). Clearly Tao Xingzhi did not support the notion of rule by party government but was nonetheless attracted to the notion of people's rights within Sun's thought. For a broader analysis of the role of political ceremony within modern schools, see Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

but the scope and legacy of the two projects differed considerably. Whereas Xiaozhuang attempted to provide rural teachers with the scientific skills and agricultural experience necessary to train a new generation of self-sufficient “living citizens,” the Dingxian project encompassed a broader set of local reforms, including the founding of over two hundred “people’s schools,” a “people’s literature and drama” department, agricultural banks and cooperatives, and district health centers. It also sought to intervene into local village governance via the Hebei Institute of Social and Political Reconstruction.<sup>71</sup> In contrast to the mostly locally-oriented and particular vision of the Xiaozhuang school, the reformers at Dingxian saw their experiment as the foundation of a new “national awakening” in rural education, and collaborated with institutions all over China, including Peking Union Medical College, Tsinghua University, the National Health Administration, and the Bank of China, to create the foundations for a nationwide rural education campaign.<sup>72</sup> This spirit of collaboration extended overseas as well, and many of Dingxian’s most notable projects and achievements emerged from the constant dialogue between Mass Education Movement members, local village leaders, and a growing coterie of American donors and fundraisers, including John D. Rockefeller Jr., Henry Ford, and V. Everit Macy, all of whom knew Yan by his English name, James Yen.<sup>73</sup> Finally, while Tao Xingzhi only engaged the issue of citizenship indirectly through his advocacy of self-government, self-sufficiency, and self-defense, Yan Yangchu and his collaborators Tang Maoru, Fu Baochen, Feng Rui, and Chen

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<sup>71</sup> For an overview of the Dingxian project’s many components at the height of its operation, see *The Dingxian Experiment in 1934* (Peiping: Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1934), 12-35. Although the English-language pamphlet does not list a specific author, a forward notes that this particular statement was “prepared and made possible only through the operation of Miss Ellen Auchincloss” who served as the English secretary of the movement and was intimately familiar with the work at Dingxian since 1929.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 45. The organizers’ relationship with Peking Union Medical College was especially close, as the Medical College’s acting director, David S. Greene, served on the finance committee of the China National Association of the Mass Education Movement (MEM) and paved the way for many of the organization’s fundraising efforts in the United States.

<sup>73</sup> For a full list of contributors to the American Cooperating Committee of the MEM as of 1929, see “Contributions to the Chinese Mass Education Movement,” Dec. 20, 1929. IIRR, B4, CUL.

Zhushan 陈筑山 placed questions of Chinese citizenship at the heart of their project. Throughout their endeavors to establish new systems of cultural, economic, hygienic, and civic education in Dingxian, they consistently asserted that their central goal was to define the spirit and substance of Chinese citizenship education and ultimately “to make the ‘ideal Chinese citizen’ of the twentieth century.”<sup>74</sup> Although the Dingxian experiment was also eventually subject to forced closure, this time by the invading Japanese army in 1937, its notoriety made James Yen into an international education celebrity whose methods inspired and drew the cooperation of the Chinese Nationalist Party. As such, the models of rural citizenship articulated and performed in Dingxian serve as important contributions to the ongoing conversation about citizenship, education, and the state in rural China.

When the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education, now calling itself the Mass Education Movement, first turned its attention to rural education, Dingxian was but one of several new rural education ventures. The organization’s first attempts at rural literacy campaigns were overseen by Fu Baochen and carried out in the suburbs and villages surrounding Baoding, a mid-sized city in Central Hebei province. By May of 1926, the MEM was attempting to establish rural education projects of varying scales all over China. These projects included a program to develop a mass education center in Baotou, Inner Mongolia overseen by Marshal Feng Yuxiang, a partnership with the School of Education and School of Agriculture at National Southeastern University to develop rural education in Jiangsu province, and a network of experimental village schools in Guangzhou. Taken together, these projects constituted what Yan

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<sup>74</sup> The letterhead produced by the MEM established its organizational slogan as “*Chu wenmang, zuo xinmin* 除文盲, 作新民,” rendered in English as “Eliminate Illiteracy and Create New Citizens.” Somewhat humorously, the early drafts of the letterhead used by the MEM, such as those produced prior to 1928, rendered the English translation of *chu wenmang* as “Eliminate Illiterates,” but reformers presumably realized this translation had rather dark implications and changed it to “Eliminate Illiteracy.” See, for example, Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Mr. F.S. Brockman, March 30, 1928, IIRR, B16[add], f529, CUL.

later called the “extensive” phase of rural education, whose aim was to “universalize language education so as to reduce illiteracy in as many villages as possible and as rapidly as possible.”<sup>75</sup>

The organization’s initial interest in extending literacy campaigns to rural areas seemed as much practical as ideological, and at first it did not mark a fundamental shift in the organization’s approach to popular education. To a certain extent, the diffusion of the movement’s efforts among a large number of rural towns was merely a strategy for dealing with the increasing threat posed by ongoing warlord violence in northern China.<sup>76</sup> When writing about the movement’s progress to the family to Mrs. David D. Gamble (mother of Sidney Gamble), Yan compared the MEM’s efforts to a battle of sorts—one that must be fought on multiple fronts to be successful. “While the warlords are fighting their battle, we too are getting our ‘munitions’ ready,” Yan wrote, “and as soon as they stop, we can start to ‘shoot’ again... If they fight in one part of the country, we push our work to another part.”<sup>77</sup> Finally, Yan also found that the village

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<sup>75</sup> For this specific language, see Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Nov. 14, 1927, p. 2-3, IIRR, B1, CUL. Yan also spoke about this “extensive phase” of the project when talking about the history of the Dingxian experiment to Chinese audiences, such as in a report given at the first annual Rural Work Conference in Zouping, Shandong in 1933. See Yan Yangchu, “Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujin hui dingxian gongzuo dagai 中华平民教育促进会定县工作大概” [Outline of the work done in Dingxian by the Chinese National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education] in *Xiangcun jianshe shiyan 乡村建设实验* [Experiments in rural reconstruction] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1934); Reprint, *Yan Yangchu wenji 晏阳初文集* [The complete works of Yan Yangchu], ed. Song Enrong 宋恩荣 (Beijing: Jiaoyu kexue chubanshe, 1989), 53.

<sup>76</sup> There are countless accounts of early public education programs thwarted by military violence during the first decades of Republican China. For a broad overview of the ways in which political violence threatened schools (as well as the ways in which new public schools themselves often incited political violence), see Helen R Chauncey, *Schoolhouse Politicians: Locality and State During the Chinese Republic* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 118-128. For a specific example of a school whose progress was at least temporarily halted by ongoing political violence, see Lǚ Huiru 吕惠如, *Jiangsu shengli diyi nüzi shifan xuexiao wu zhounian gaikuang 江苏省立第一女子师范学校五周年概况* [A general overview of Jiangsu First Women’s Normal School after five years] (Nanjing: Jiangsu shengli diyi nüzi shifan xuexiao, 1917). In this school yearbook, headmaster Lǚ Huiru notes that even within five years of opening, political violence forced the Jiangsu First Women’s Normal School to change schoolhouses three times, and that the school had additionally withstood two “mutinies” against the curriculum, along with other interruptions. This particular volume was accessed at the Republican Documents Collection, Nanjing Municipal Library.

<sup>77</sup> Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Mrs. David D. Gamble, May 27, 1926, p. 10, IIRR, B5, CUL. To further explain the organization’s practical need to branch out, Yen paraphrased Abraham Lincoln’s observation about fooling others “the war-lords may fight in some part of the country some of the time, but they cannot fight in all parts of the country all the time!” Even though Yan clearly saw ongoing violence among warlords as detrimental to the aims of

was simply a more conducive environment to the type of swift, intensive literacy training he had perfected in the trenches of France during WWI. He argued that village students were frequently more appreciative of the organization's efforts on account of their previous neglect by social reformers, that their small family-focused communities made promotional work easier, and that the lack of distractions in the village made students more faithful and regular in their attendance of impromptu "people's schools." Furthermore, North China winters in particular provided a fruitful window during which farmers were unable to conduct agricultural labor and thus more available for intensive training in basic literacy.<sup>78</sup> Perhaps because the MEM did not originally view the countryside as a fundamentally new pedagogical problem, initial rural education efforts were modeled directly on the MEM's earlier successes in promoting urban literacy campaigns, using many of the same techniques and materials.<sup>79</sup> Although Yan acknowledged that China's rural areas were ultimately key to the "greater battle" of popular education, he nevertheless viewed these early attempts as extensions of his urban campaigns into rural towns and suggested that "if the village is to be conquered, the town must first be won. The village can do little without the town."<sup>80</sup>

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the movement, he nevertheless worked with various warlords from time to time to develop popular education programs for soldiers. One of the first such programs involved working with the army of Marshal Zhang Xueliang in Shenyang [Mukden]. The organization worked with an "editorial committee" within the Mukden army to produce *Soldier's Weekly* [*Shibing zhouban* 士兵周刊], an illustrated magazine that exclusively used vocabulary drawn from the first book of the Commoners' Thousand Character Text. See Y. C. James Yen, *The Mass Education Movement in China* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1925), 14-15 (the original printing of this pamphlet was accessed in the archives of the International Institute for Rural Reconstruction, B130, CUL). In 1928, the organization released a "Soldier's Thousand Character Text" with vocabulary more directly suited for use by military members, although as Cyrus Peake noted, these volumes emphasized that soldiers should not cause undue suffering and that peace was more generally conducive to Chinese commercial development and national strength. See Cyrus Peake, *Nationalism and Education in Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1932), 163-164.

<sup>78</sup> Yen, *The Mass Education Movement in China*, 21-22.

<sup>79</sup> For example, these early campaigns used the same volume of the Commoners' Thousand Character Text (*Pingmin qianzike* 平民千字课) that Yan had developed for use in Changsha and Hangzhou. Letter, Y.C. James Yen to Mrs. David D. Gamble, May 27, 1926, p. 3-4.

<sup>80</sup> Yen, *The Mass Education Movement in China*, 16.

In contrast to the “extensive” approach that characterized the MEM’s initial rural education work, Yan conceived of the Dingxian experiment as the first step in a new “intensive” phase for the movement, one that would thoroughly investigate the practical conditions within a typical Chinese village and transform it into a model rural district. The intensive approach to rural education exemplified in the Dingxian experiment went beyond the basic literacy movements carried out elsewhere and promised to raise the “intellectual,” “economic,” and “moral” level of the community.<sup>81</sup> The Dingxian experiment was also different in that it was just that—an experimental district in which to survey the specific needs of rural Chinese farmers and to test hypothetical methods for promoting popular education. The rural people’s schools of Dingxian were established to train the next generation of modern Chinese farmers, but many of their earliest graduates were employed by the MEM as social surveyors in charge of collecting data on the agricultural conditions, social customs, farming methods, and family incomes of their fellow villagers.<sup>82</sup> This investigative experiment even extended to the issue of citizenship

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<sup>81</sup> When describing the Dingxian project to an early potential investor—Ray Lyman Wilbur, President of Stanford University—Yan used exactly this division into intellectual, economic, and moral levels to explain the work in Dingxian. See Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Nov. 14, 1927, p. 3. For a broader overview of the original plan at Dingxian, as divided into the four fields of “cultural education, livelihood education, hygiene education, and citizen education,” see Zheng Dahua 郑大华, *Minguo xiangcun jianshe yundong* 民国乡村建设运动 [The rural reconstruction movement in Republican China] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2000), 214–242. Note that “civic education” is rendered as *gongmin* 公民 rather than *guomin* 国民.

<sup>82</sup> The MEM’s social survey work in Dingxian was overseen by returned student Li Jinghan [Franklin Lee], who lived in Dingxian until the fall of 1929. This social survey work encountered numerous difficulties. First, the social surveyors who initially arrived at Dingxian had trouble convincing local villagers that their inquiries into the living conditions and production yields of each farm would not ultimately lead to higher taxes, hence the MEM’s reliance on recent graduates trusted within the village. Second, many farmers were simply unable to provide concrete statistics about their income or about the numbers of people in their village. For more on the difficulties in the MEM’s original social survey work, see Y. C. James Yen, “Literacy—and then? The Ting Hsien Experiment,” Unpublished article, dated 1930, IIRR, B1, CUL. Many of these survey records were also collected with the help of Christian social worker Sidney Gamble, and the data provided the basis for his book on Dingxian, first published in 1954 by the Institute of Pacific Relations. For the data in Chinese, see Tang Maoru, *Dingxian nongmin jiaoyu* 定县农民教育 [Rural education in Dingxian] (Beiping: Zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui, 1932).

education, as Dingxian organizers often claimed that the purpose of the Dingxian program was “to *find out* the meaning of citizenship in modern China” (emphasis added).<sup>83</sup>

Setting up the initial system of people’s schools in Dingxian required not only the focused attention of MEM leaders, but also the close collaboration of local village elites. In 1926, the county of Dingxian contained approximately four hundred thousand people living in four separate villages, the largest of which was Zhaicheng.<sup>84</sup> While Dingxian’s size and location (about a six-hour train ride from Beijing) made it an attractive model for experimentation, MEM members first traveled there predominantly at the invitation of Mi Digang 米迪刚, a local elite who had previously led rural self-government reforms in Zhaicheng, and who carried great influence in the county.<sup>85</sup> Yet even after Mi’s invitation, reformers feared that the support of a single progressive magistrate would not be enough to sustain the project over a long period of time, and so they insisted that Mi organize a formal invitation from a broad group of village elders from around the county.<sup>86</sup> The first MEM members, Feng Rui and Fu Baochen, arrived in the village in May 1926. According to Yan’s later retelling of events, many local village elites were originally quite skeptical of the popular education reformers, as their investigative queries and desire to conduct social surveys appeared suspiciously like a ploy to extract more tax

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<sup>83</sup> This particular phrase was used by Ellen Auchincloss, the English-language secretary of the movement in charge of preparing many of the program’s publicity materials. See Ellen Auchincloss, “Ting Hsien, Hopei,” *The Brearley Bulletin* (May 1933), 26-27, IIRR, B23[add], f821, CUL. Elsewhere, Yan Yangchu claimed that the Dingxian experiment would attempt to create a “new idea of Chinese citizenship” based on the experiences and lifestyles of the farmers themselves (See Yen, “China’s New Scholar-Farmers,” 24).

<sup>84</sup> For a broader history of Zhaicheng, see Sidney D. Gamble, *Ting Hsien: A North China Rural Community* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1954), 146-165.

<sup>85</sup> For more on Mi Digang’s initial village self-government initiatives, see Li Defang 李德芳, *Minguo xiangcun zizhi wenti yanjiu* 民国乡村自治问题研究 [Research on the problem of Republican-era village self-government] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001), 20-33. Also, Mi Digang’s particular sway in the village resulted from the fact that Zhaicheng had long been dominated by the Mi clan—41% of the 366 families in the village were named Mi (Hayford, *To the People*, 68).

<sup>86</sup> Yen, “China’s New Scholar-Farmer,” 5-6.

revenue from the village, but eventually Feng and Fu were able to convince the local elite to cooperate in establishing a small network of people's schools for teaching literacy. Reformers insisted that all future organizational work must be led and funded by the villagers themselves and called upon local elites to assemble a mass meeting in which, according to MEM accounts, various village leaders agreed to make material contributions to the founding of a people's school, ranging from coal and oil for fuel to an entire barn for use as a classroom.<sup>87</sup> In the spring of 1927, after the MEM had spent over a year and a half establishing people's reading schools to win the confidence of the local community, a group of one hundred Zhaicheng elders established a general committee for Mass Education and granted the MEM the land and access necessary to expand the agricultural research component of their rural reconstruction experiments.<sup>88</sup>

This type of local cooperation and material support was essential to Yan's conception of rural reconstruction. As Yan argued, "the very essence of such education is its being indigenous—self-operated, self-supported, and self-propagated," and thus the impetus for any reconstruction project must come from the village itself.<sup>89</sup> Even the organization's more obvious attempts at "top-down" reform, such as the introduction of new agricultural methods, were presented as a form of collaboration with local villagers. Yan claimed that the chief point of the work was not "to discover the most modern methods of performing the tasks of the Chinese farmer," but rather "to discover those applications of modern science and experience which could make as useful and as productive as possible the tools...and the experience of the Chinese farmer which he now possesses."<sup>90</sup> Part of this focus on self-sustaining programs no doubt

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 7-12.

<sup>88</sup> Even this initial grant was tentative, as the village originally only gave the MEM two and a half acres, although this allotment was later expanded to seventeen and then two hundred acres (Ibid., 18).

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 20-21.



derived from the general consensus among education reformers that previous attempts to introduce “foreign-born” reforms in the Chinese countryside had failed, a sentiment echoed by Yan’s colleague Tao Xingzhi.<sup>91</sup> But the requirement that local village elites provide the social and financial capital for their own rural reconstruction projects also fed into a broader theme of “self-reliance” among the members of the MEM, whose literature frequently compared rural reconstruction, and even citizenship itself, to a “burden” that must be borne by the farmers themselves. Furthermore, this approach established the villagers as true “equals” in the broader task of popular education, and Yan took the occasion of the Dingxian reforms as an opportunity to once again redefine *pingmin jiaoyu* to mean “Equal People’s Education” rather than simply “commoners’ education” or “mass education.”<sup>92</sup> Yet even as Yan saw village cooperation as central to the practical and ideological success of the MEM’s rural education work, it would be a mistake to construe the Dingxian project as an entirely local affair.

At the same time that Feng Rui and Fu Baochen were establishing their “intensive” rural reconstruction work in Dingxian, Yan Yangchu was building support for the MEM’s efforts among a growing group of American donors and supporters. In 1924, when the National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education (the precursor to the MEM) was still in its infancy, Yan and Chairwoman Zhu Qihui (Mme. Xiong Xiling) were already well-practiced in hosting fundraisers among the expat community in Beijing, and at the start of the

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<sup>91</sup> See, for example, Tao, “Citizens and Blind Masses.” Yan himself asserted in an overview of the Dingxian project in 1934 that previous educational drives in China “had no particular purpose,” and thus “followed the line of least resistance, taking short cuts in mapping out an educational system for China by copying Japanese, American, French, and later, Soviet patterns.” The result, argued Yan, was that schools and colleges were graduating many young Chinese men and women, “but were not educating them *for life*.” (emphasis original). Yan admitted that these adoptive strategies had their uses but argued that “in making men and women, we cannot import the process from abroad.” Clearly, Yan was insistent that his particular brand of Commoners’ Primary Education was not modeled after any specific foreign model, and indeed had no precedent in Chinese or Western history. See Y.C. James Yen, “Social Reconstruction Through Education: A Narrative Study of the Dingxian Experiment before 1934,” unpublished pamphlet, January 1934, IIRR, Box 2, CUL.

<sup>92</sup> Yen, “China’s New Scholar-Farmer,” 9.

organization's national expansion, Yan had attempted to secure financial support from the American Indemnity Joint Commission Fund, headed up by Jiang Menglin 蒋梦麟 (1886-1964, then serving as President of Beijing University), Zhang Boling 张伯苓 (1876-1951), their mentors John Dewey and Paul Monroe, as well as leaders from Peking Union Medical College. When Yan was ultimately unsuccessful in meeting with leaders of the committee as he had planned, he began writing to American friends that he had met through the YMCA, such as F. S. Brockman, to consider looking for other sources of funding in the United States.<sup>93</sup> Following several years of ongoing political violence between 1925 and 1927, during which many of the businesses that had previously supported the MEM went bankrupt, Yan found himself increasingly reliant on foreign donations. In a letter to Stanford University President Ray Lyman Wilbur, dated November 14, 1927, Yan claimed that the Movement's dire financial situation threatened its very existence and requested an "emergency fund" capable of keeping the MEM afloat for the next several years.<sup>94</sup> Perhaps playing on the political fears of American observers, Yan warned that American funding was essential to prevent the movement from being "used as a 'tool' by some wild and unscrupulous politicians," or worse, as a puppet by the Russians or the Japanese ("God forbid!" remarked Yan).<sup>95</sup> American fears of competing political influence aside, such claims were also an honest recognition that organizations outside of China had an important role to play in sustaining the work of Yan's organization.

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<sup>93</sup> Letter, Y.C. James Yen to F.S. Brockman, Sept. 23, 1924, p. 3-4, IIRR, B16[add], f529, CUL. Recall that Yan himself, unlike most leaders in the popular education movement in China, was not a student of the Teachers College at Columbia University, and thus he did not enjoy the same connections to Columbia faculty like Dewey and Monroe that other reformers, such as Tao Xingzhi, did.

<sup>94</sup> In the same letter (and in similar ones sent to the Rockefeller Foundation), Yan assured potential investors that this was not the basis for some kind of permanent support, which would demoralize an otherwise "indigenous" movement whose success depended on the moral and material investment of the Chinese people. See Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Nov. 14, 1927, 12-13.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 14.

Thus, in the summer of 1928, Yan traveled to the U.S. to found an American Cooperating Committee in charge of generating funding for MEM research in education, agriculture, public health, and citizenship training in Dingxian. Prior to 1928, 95% of the organization's funding came from domestic sources (the largest of which was a three-year grant from the China Foundation for the Promotion of Education and Culture), but soon after the founding of the American Cooperating Committee, their fundraising efforts constituted the single largest contribution to the MEM's overall budget, even as the organization downsized their other activities to concentrate all of their efforts on Dingxian.<sup>96</sup> Thus, while MEM leaders continued to assert that the sums raised abroad were merely intended to fund the "research" portion of their work rather than the actual programs within Dingxian, the overall scope and trajectory of the Dingxian experiment remained reliant upon these American donations. As such, Yan often found himself explaining and conducting the project for multiple audiences: Dingxian students, fellow MEM members, Chinese political leaders, and foreign investors. Such diverse audiences required Yan to explain the process of "creating new citizens" in different, sometimes contradictory ways.

When first trying to convince the residents at Zhaicheng village to invest in the MEM's rural reconstruction projects, Yan and his colleagues continued to present literacy as the single most important goal of education, equating it not only with citizenship and patriotism, but also with vision itself. At the first mass village meeting to discuss the founding of a "commoners' school" (*pingmin xuexiao* 平民学校), MEM leaders began by polling the crowd to see how many of them could actually read and write. Upon seeing the paltry showing (one or two out of a thousand, according to one report), the reformers launched into the following tirade:

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<sup>96</sup> For financial records of the MEM and its American Cooperating Committee, see Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement Financial Report, Jan. 1 to Dec. 31, 1929, IIRR, B1, CUL and Letter, Y.C. James Yen to the League of Nations Education Commission, Jan. 5, 1933, 4, IIRR, B5, CUL.

Isn't this a terrible showing? You can't read the books of your own country! You are blind. A blind man cannot be a patriotic man and he cannot help his village. Think of your China, of your village! Almost all of you are blind. If you get hold of a book, you do not know which way to turn it. China cannot become a strong nation with blind citizens. Why are you blind? We are going to cure your blindness. We are a group of doctors come to help cure you.<sup>97</sup>

The earlier failure of popular education groups like the Pingmin Education Lecture Corps at Beida suggests that the nationalist message behind the MEM's initial pitch may not have resonated with many of the villagers at Zhaicheng, who likely did not feel that China was "theirs" in any meaningful way. Indeed, in the years following the May Fourth Movement of 1919, the national consciousness ignited by demonstrations all across China's urban college campuses had been mostly confined to the elite students who had participated directly in such political activities.<sup>98</sup> Nevertheless, the physical disability implied by a lack of literacy clearly struck a chord with many of the villagers, as after this particular speech, MEM members reported that nearly all the assembled villagers signed up to receive basic literacy training. This equation of literacy with physical blindness had been a staple of Yan's work since the original literacy campaign in Changsha, and even appeared as a central theme in the early lessons of Yan's Thousand Character Text used in Dingxian.<sup>99</sup> One early lesson featured an illustration depicting a (physically) blind man asking a fellow villager to read a letter for him, only to discover that the second villager was illiterate, and thus also unable to read the letter. The caption to the illustration read "One who cannot see with his eyes is blind (*xiazi* 瞎子); one who cannot read

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<sup>97</sup> Yen, "China's New Scholar-Farmers," 11.

<sup>98</sup> For a broader analysis of the difficulty faced by urban college students in translating their political ideals to settings beyond the urban university and the political ambivalence that emerged from such difficulties, see Wen-Hsin Yeh, *The Alienated Academy: Culture and Politics in Republican China, 1919-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

<sup>99</sup> During the initial Changsha campaign (discussed at greater length in the preceding chapter), Yan organized a parade in which students carried banners that read "An illiterate man, a blind man" and "Is your son blind?" See Y.C. James Yen, *How to Educate China's Illiterate Millions for Democracy in a Decade* (Peking: Chinese National Association for the Advancement of Education, 1923), 7.

books is also blind.”<sup>100</sup> Thus, curing the disease of illiteracy was seen as central to the MEM’s broader rural reconstruction project, not least by the targets of reform themselves.

Yet when speaking to audiences beyond the villagers at Dingxian, Yan made clear that literacy was a necessary but entirely insufficient means for creating new citizens in China. As Yan put it in one of his earliest appeals to the Rockefeller Foundation, “The ultimate aim of the Chinese Mass Education Movement is not merely to make an illiterate laborer a ‘reader of books’...but above all, make him a good citizen of the Chinese Republic.”<sup>101</sup> By 1934, Yan suggested in a review of the reconstruction work at Dingxian that whatever cultural appeal literacy had as an attainable educational goal, “literacy alone...had little practical value to the farmers,” and that “literacy is a fundamental educational tool, but it is not education.”<sup>102</sup> In arguing that literacy was merely an educational tool, Yan positioned the task of the MEM as teaching farmers “how to make use of it in shaping their everyday lives.” Elsewhere in the same 1934 pamphlet, Yan compared literacy training to “plowing the field...for later cultivation,” suggesting that literacy was an important step for rural reconstruction, but not the ultimate product upon which the success of that reconstruction should be judged.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Yen, “China’s New Scholar-Farmer,” 13-14. This particular lesson was not confined to the texts used at Dingxian; it also appears as the second lesson in Yan’s urban literacy textbook *Shimin qianzike* 市民千字课 [Townsperson’s thousand character text] (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1927). This particular edition of the textbook was accessed in IIRR, B108[add], f2648, CUL. Note that even though this particular lesson highlights the importance of basic literacy, the presentation has internalized the lessons of the experiential learning camp in that it presents a basic illustration first. Teachers were instructed to discuss the illustration with students and ask them what was occurring before moving on to the characters, once again demonstrating the common belief among educators that sensory experience comes before literary knowledge.

<sup>101</sup> Letter, E. C. Carter to Thomas be Appleget, Nov. 2, 1928, 40, IIRR, B5, CUL.

<sup>102</sup> Y. C. James Yen, *Social Reconstruction Through Education—A Narrative Study of the Ting Hsien Experiment before 1934* (Dingxian: Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1934, Ch. 2., 12). Unpublished. Located in IIRR, B2, CUL. In a similar document published around the same time, the MEM’s English-language secretary Ellen Auchincloss also noted that “it takes more than literacy to equip the people to cope with the problems of modern life.” See Auchincloss, *The Ting Hsien Experiment in 1934*, 2. Accessed at Missionary Research Library, Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University.

<sup>103</sup> Yen, *Social Reconstruction Through Education*, Ch. 3, p. 1-2.

In 1929, having satisfyingly prepared the village for further reforms, the MEM purposefully shifted its emphasis away from promoting literacy and toward the broad project of creating citizens. For Yan, the task of cultivating farmers into citizens required that the movement invest in cultural education (*wenhua jiaoyu* 文化教育), livelihood education (*shengji jiaoyu* 生计教育), hygiene education (*weisheng jiaoyu* 卫生教育), and civic education (*gongmin jiaoyu* 公民教育), all of which were necessary to produce “good citizens of the Chinese republic.” (Note that *gongmin jiaoyu*, literally “public people education,” differs in meaning from the earlier *guomin jiaoyu*, which, as previous chapters have shown, touched upon issues of citizenship but did not directly specify a particular relationship to the public sphere.) Yan even noted that Dingxian’s “people’s schools,” which were originally presented to villagers primarily as a way of combatting illiteracy, were now primarily useful for establishing contacts between villagers and MEM members and for producing student alumni associations that could help the MEM tackle the broader problems of ignorance, poverty, physical weakness, and civic disintegration in the countryside.<sup>104</sup> Thus, what began as a mere extension of Yan’s literacy work into the countryside had by the end of the decade become a much broader, more self-conscious project to define and produce modern Chinese citizens for whom literacy was no longer a sufficient intellectual criterion.

Many of the core elements of Yan’s fourfold rural reconstruction plan echoed Tao Xingzhi’s argument that effective rural education required teaching farmers to be economically productive. Some of the efforts to improve the livelihood of farmers in Dingxian involved direct investment by MEM members themselves, such as when MEM director of industrial science Liu Tuo 刘拓 developed a new single-person-operated water wheel to aid in irrigation, or when

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., Ch. 3, p. 6-7.

MEM members bred local chickens and hogs with foreign stock to produce larger, healthier livestock that were well suited to the local environment.<sup>105</sup> Most economic programs, however, were designed to help farmers use the tool of literacy to improve their own economic standing. One of the organization's central achievements was the publication of a semi-weekly newsletter, *Nongmin* 农民 [The farmer], which published articles on topics like seed selection, fertilizer, and night soil storage using the vocabulary presented in the newly compiled *Nongmin Qianzike* 农民千字课 [Farmers' thousand character text].<sup>106</sup> MEM leaders also penned books to stock a series of "people's libraries" (*pingmin tushuguan* 平民图书馆) in Dingxian, which housed scientific and agricultural texts ranging from specific topics, such as *The Lives of Mole Crickets and How to Kill Them*, to more general works, such as *The Social Status of Farmers* and *Preparing for Famine Years*.<sup>107</sup> Finally, reformers also hoped that the social bonds forged in the literacy training centers of Dingxian would serve as the basis for a new wave of "self-help societies," which could relieve temporary financial stringency in the village and help establish "a new rural economic system based upon the principals of mutual cooperation and mutual assistance." These

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<sup>105</sup> Yen, "China's New Scholar-Farmer," 22-23. Note that this effort to use local breeds in their animal husbandry projects played into the theme of self-sufficiency and village finance within the Dingxian model, even though such cross-breeding would not have been possible without foreign livestock or the animal husbandry knowledge of the MEM members themselves.

<sup>106</sup> *Nongmin* was published once every ten days, or about 36 times a year. For a typical selection of material in the journal following the MEM's expansion in Dingxian, see "Zhuangjia xiazhong ying zhuyi de jidian 庄稼下种应主义的几点" [What times to pay special attention to when planting seeds], "Nongxue changshi 农学常识" [Common agronomy knowledge], and "Gailiang zhucang dafen he shiyong de fangfa 改良贮藏大粪和实用的方法" [Methods for using and improving the storage of night soil], *Nongmin* 农民 6 (1930), 1-10. *Nongmin* itself was not entirely constrained to agronomic issues; it also featured articles on biological science, fictional stories, songs, and even some of the statistical results of the organization's rural surveys.

<sup>107</sup> See Li Liyuan 李黎元, *Lougu de shenghoushi he fangchufa* 蝼蛄的生活史和防除法 [The lives of mole crickets and how to kill them] (Dingxian: CNAMEM, 1931); Lin Dachun 林大椿, *Nongmin de diwei* 农民的地位 [The social status of farmers] (Beijing: CNAMEM, 1930); and Lin Dachun 林大椿, *Yubei huangnian* 预备荒年 [Preparing for famine years] (Beijing: CNAMEM, 1930). For a broader catalog of titles in the "Scientific Common Knowledge" (*kexue changshi* 科学常识) series and the "Farmer's Talk" (*nongmin tanhua* 农民谈话) series, see the folder on "People's Reading Material" in IIRR, B132, CUL.

values, reformers maintained, would serve as the foundation for community solidarity, which reformers believed was both essential to the economic revitalization of the countryside and a marker of modern citizenship.<sup>108</sup>

These economic programs were crucial to the MEM's appeal for funding from American investors and reflect the degree to which reformers used colonial and capitalist discourses to frame the rural reconstruction work at Dingxian. First, these agronomic and economic projects helped position investment in the Mass Education Movement as an economically productive means of improving China's domestic economy and better integrating it into the global capitalist system. The leader of the movement's American Cooperating Committee, E. C. Carter, advertised the Dingxian project to the Rockefeller Foundation by citing China's importance as a growing world market and suggested that rural reconstruction work represented a "good business proposition" as much as a humanitarian or political investment.<sup>109</sup> Secondly, these projects helped to establish that this economically productive work was made possible by the careful application of modern (Western) science by American-trained reformers. Yan Yangchu was decidedly less skeptical than Tao Xingzhi in his approach to foreign scientific practices and theories, and his embrace of Western science proved instrumental in his fundraising campaigns. Yan often noted that the MEM's Agricultural Director, Rui Feng, received his own doctoral training in agricultural economics from Cornell, and that the movement's programs for improving crop selection adopted the "Cornell method."<sup>110</sup> Such credentials reflected a broader pattern whereby the MEM felt compelled to insist that their so-called "indigenous" programs

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<sup>108</sup> Yen, *Social Reconstruction Through Education*, Ch. 3, 21 and Ch. 7, 17-18.

<sup>109</sup> Letter, E C. Carter to Thomas B Appleget, Nov. 2, 1928, Appendix C, p. 2, IIRR, B5, CUL.

<sup>110</sup> Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Nov. 14, 1927, p. 8, IIRR, B1, CUL and "A Report on the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement," prepared by the American Cooperating Committee of the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1930, 11, IIRR, B2, CUL.



were built upon the credible foundations of American academic science, which they were now introducing to the rural people of China at large. One contemporary Chinese observer, Jiang Tingfu 蒋廷黻 (1895-1965), went so far as to suggest that the Mass Education Movement's primary contribution was "to bring scientific knowledge to the rural people."<sup>111</sup> This focus on applying modern (American) science in the Chinese countryside made the Dingxian experiment a good fit for the Rockefeller Foundation, whose leaders saw spreading "science" and "civilization" to China as one of their chief missions.<sup>112</sup> While the literacy initiatives utilized in the village were more or less effective in inspiring village leaders to materially and culturally invest in the MEM's efforts, it was the organization's economic and public health work that ultimately allowed reformers to declare that the Dingxian experiment was both "Chinese" and "modern." The trend whereby MEM members assumed leadership over rural reconstruction projects via their accreditation from American universities later extended to the entire Mass Education Movement, as the sponsorship of the Rockefeller Foundation lent much needed legitimacy to Yan Yangchu and his organization on the world stage.<sup>113</sup> Overall, Yan's embrace of economic and public health reform as central to Dingxian illustrates the degree to which literacy on its own had been delegitimized as an educational goal, as well as the ways in which

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<sup>111</sup> Jiang Tingfu 蒋廷黻, "The Real Mission of the Mass Education Movement," *Da gong bao* 大公报, May 13, 1934, 3; English translation located in IIRR, B23[add], f822, CUL.

<sup>112</sup> Merkel-Hess, "A New People: Rural Modernity in Republican China," 324-325. The Rockefeller Foundation's investment in China began with the establishment of the Peking Union Medical College (PUMC) in 1914, and prior to Dingxian, most of the foundation's investment in China had been focused exclusively on issues of public health. In a certain sense, Dingxian represented an expansion of the organization's goals into a broader set of public policy concerns, but the agronomic and economic projects at Dingxian were nevertheless fully within the bounds of the broader mission to spread science. For more on the Rockefeller Foundation in China, see Mary Brown Bullock, *The Oil Prince's Legacy: Rockefeller Philanthropy in China* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2011).

<sup>113</sup> Some of the MEM's earliest fundraising efforts in the U.S. were based on conditional pledges from donors like the Milbank Fund, who only agreed to support the project after it became clear that MEM had the support of the Rockefeller Foundation. See commentary on these matters in the financial statements prepared by the movement's American Cooperating Committee in the folder "Financial Statement, Jan. 1, 1929- June 30, 1938," in IIRR, B1, CUL.

Tao Xingzhi, Yan Yangchu, and other rural education leaders increasingly defined the goals of rural education in economic terms.

Where Yan differentiated Dingxian from Tao's Xiaozhuang project and distinguished his views from some of the expectations of contemporary national and international observers was in the realm of civic education, or *gongmin jiaoyu* 公民教育. The civic training component of the Dingxian project was self-consciously considered the most difficult goal of the entire movement. MEM leaders carefully refrained from mentioning it during the first mass village meeting out of fear that no villagers would understand what they meant by "citizenship training."<sup>114</sup> Even by 1930, when many of the project's economic and public health reforms were well underway, the organization projected that the "civic training" portion of the experiment could not begin in earnest until 1936.<sup>115</sup> To MEM reformers, the task of preparing for citizens' education required the cooperation of every other department in the village, from the Department of School Mass Education to the Department of Public Health. Yan once suggested that only after Dingxian had "a leaven of 80,000 young men and women with a knowledge of their own language and culture...[and] a population with its economic level raised to make possible the taking of thought for something besides filling the rice bowl" would the countryside be "ready to learn the meaning of citizenship."<sup>116</sup>

But as Yan asked in his essay for the *Yale Review*, "what shall constitute this education for citizenship, and what shall be its spirit and content?"<sup>117</sup> On a basic level, Yan and his

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<sup>114</sup> Yen, "China's New Scholar-Farmers," 7.

<sup>115</sup> "Literacy—and then?" 12. This mode of civic training was part of a broader ten-year plan for Dingxian, which was to begin in 1930. The plan labeled 1930-1933 as the period of "Literacy and School Mass Education," 1933-1936 was the period of "Agriculture and Economic Education," and 1936-1940 was "Village Self-Government and Citizenship Education."

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>117</sup> Yen, "New Citizens for China," 271.

collaborators viewed civic education as a fundamentally moral enterprise—one designed not to train villagers for specific civic action, but rather to cultivate their hearts and minds (*xin* 心). In a letter to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Yan suggested that “the central objective of our educational efforts in the field of citizenship training is the extension of the noble moral practices prevailing in the clan and family unit” and asserted that civic training was a vital component of raising the “moral level” of rural people.<sup>118</sup> Yet Yan was also quick to point out that this brand of moral education, delivered under the guise of citizenship training, was different from the moral instruction of earlier periods. Yan noted that social values, and even morality itself, were currently undergoing a period of rapid change in China, whereby younger generations were extremely skeptical of “traditional Chinese social values.” Therefore, Yan argued, the purpose of citizenship training was “the creation of... new social values, or of a new morality.”<sup>119</sup>

In his speeches and letters to supporters in the United States, Yan suggested that these new social values were intimately related to democracy. One of the National Association for the Promotion of Pingmin Education’s first English-language publications was Yan’s pamphlet “How to Educate China’s Illiterate Millions for Democracy in a Decade,” first published in 1923 in Beijing. When seeking the support of the Rockefeller Foundation, Yan cast the Dingxian experiment as the central battleground in a contest between democracy and despotism. “China and America,” Yan suggested, “are struggling for a common ideal of world democracy...the future of China’s four hundred million, for good or evil, democracy or Bolshevism, is not only a matter of vital concern to China alone, but to the whole of mankind.”<sup>120</sup> Yan’s commitment to

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<sup>118</sup> Letter, Y.C. James Yen to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Nov 1928, p. 12-13, IIRR, B1, CUL.

<sup>119</sup> James Yen, *A Report on the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement* (New York: American Cooperating Committee of the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement, 1930), 19; copy accessed at IIRR, B2, CUL. Also available at the Burke Library, Union Theological Seminary, CUL.

<sup>120</sup> Letter, E. C. Carter to Mr. Thomas B Appleget, Nov. 2, 1928, Appendix C, 3, IIRR, B5, CUL.

American-style democracy was no doubt sincere, and his vocal support for democratic values steadily increased over the next two decades, such that by the end of World War II, Yan argued that literacy was crucial to electoral politics and that the Mass Education Movement represented the best hope for establishing political freedom in China.<sup>121</sup> At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that the citizenship training at Dingxian promoted the kind of rights-bearing individualism so central to “democracy” in the U.S. or even the same notion of autonomy or “self-government” promoted by the likes of Tao Xingzhi.

Rather, Yan and his colleagues stressed a vision of civic values that explicitly critiqued individualism and instead promoted cooperation and devotion to local community goals. The best avenue for understanding the approach to civic education at Dingxian is Chen Zhushan’s *Pingmin gongmin jiaoyu zhi jihua* 平民公民教育之计划 [A plan for commoners’ civic education], originally published in 1928. Chen Zhushan served as the head of the Mass Education Movement’s “Department of Citizenship Training,” which was itself charged with investigating and articulating new approaches to civic education in the countryside.<sup>122</sup> According

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<sup>121</sup> For examples of Yan’s advocacy in this direction, see “Memorandum on the People’s Press,” 1946, IIRR, B23, CUL and Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Marshall Field, April 28, 1945, IIRR, B108, CUL. Marshall Field III (1893-1956) was the founder of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and it was in this capacity that he originally wrote to Yan for information regarding the MEM’s activities in China. Yan’s endorsement of mass education as a tool for creating “peace and democracy” was further reflected in the language of individual students within the schools run by the MEM. For example, one MEM member, Frederick Douglas, helped students at an English-language mass education school in Shanghai to produce a weekly periodical entitled *Sun Weekly*. The April 14, 1947 edition of the journal included an editorial entitled “The Urgent Need of China Today,” which argued that mass education was needed so that “public opinion and judgment will produce a decisive influence on the government.” See attachment from Letter, Frederick Douglas to Ching-yi, April 24, 1947, IIRR, B16, CUL. A cynical reading of Yan’s promotion of mass education and democracy might suggest that he saw it as a strategy for drawing American support during the Chinese Civil War (1945-1949), when a Communist-led China was becoming increasingly likely. In a confidential 1947 memo to the American Cooperating Committee entitled “How to Implement American Policy for a ‘Strong and Democratic China,’” Yan suggested that the Chinese Civil War would ultimately be won “not on the battlefield but the rice field,” and that given the inability of the Guomindang to attract the genuine support of the people, American investment in rural popular education represented the only path to preventing a total Communist victory. See, James Yen, “How to Implement the American Policy for a ‘Strong and Democratic China,’” September 1947, 1-2, IIRR, B23, CUL.

<sup>122</sup> Chen Zhushan had previously studied political science and philosophy in Japan and the U.S. He had also served as a senator for his native province of Guizhou during the first Parliament of the Republic of China. He had earned

to Chen, civic education, or *gongmin jiaoyu* 公民教育, meant “training people to be effective members in a group” and in a slightly more narrow sense referred specifically to training people to be effective members of a political organization, such as the village administration.<sup>123</sup> For Chen, this meant not only inculcating a sense of “team spirit” (*tuanti jingshen* 团体精神) among the broader community of villagers, but also specifically seeking out those already in positions of power and providing them with the political values, skills, and technologies necessary to be effective stewards of the Republic of China.<sup>124</sup> In this sense, *gongmin* (公民), unlike *guomin* and *pingmin* before it, could not refer to a particular group of people, but necessarily referred to a specific kind of disposition or action—in this case, a commitment to working as a group. In a Chinese-language article on the purpose of *pingmin jiaoyu*, Yan Yangchu suggested that this disposition was rooted in a sense of communal consciousness (*tongren de zijuexin* 同人的自觉心), a sense of responsibility (*zerenxin* 责任心), and a sense of struggle (*fendouxin* 奋斗心).<sup>125</sup> Unlike Confucian morality, however, these values could not be accessed merely through the words in a civic reader, but rather had to constitute activities in which the farmers of Dingxian could themselves participate. Thus, civic education at Dingxian found its real expression in the commoners’ schools’ student alumni associations, which used the tools of literacy and community spirit to conduct social surveys, put on popular plays, establish demonstration farms,

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his bona fides as a friend of popular governance in China by strongly fighting against the monarchical ambitions of Yuan Shikai and, prior to his involvement with the Mass Education Movement, had conducted his own experiments in rural self-government in the village of Gaotou, Fujian Province. For more on Chen’s background and the way Yan advertised it to investors, see Letter, Y.C. James Yen to Ray Lyman Wilbur, Nov. 14, 1927, 11, IIRR, B1, CUL.

<sup>123</sup> Chen Zhushan, *Pingmin gongmin jiaoyu zhi jihua* 平民公民教育之计划 [A plan for commoners’ civic education] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1928), 1-2.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 13-20.

<sup>125</sup> Yan Yangchu, “Pingmin jiaoyu de zongzhi mudi he zuihou de shiming 平民教育的宗旨目的和最后的使命” [The aims, goals, and final mission of commoners’ education], 1927; Reprint, Song Enrong, ed., *Yan Yangchu wenji*, 21.

and staff “people’s libraries.”<sup>126</sup> Once again, these activities constituted expressions of civic education not because they represented an expression of individual rights, but precisely because they sublimated the needs of individual students in favor of the village as a whole.

This articulation of citizens’ education as inculcating new social values centered on a commitment to community endeavors was important for two reasons. First, it addressed longstanding colonial criticisms that China’s chief weakness was an overabundance of individualism and a lack of cooperative action. At the very outset of the MEM’s move to the countryside in 1925, Yan referenced Liang Qichao’s famous critique that China was like a “dish of scattered sand” and declared that citizenship training would help to correct this weakness by alerting well-to-do members of society to the needs of the masses and by giving the masses themselves a “sense of responsibility in the life of the community and the nation.”<sup>127</sup> In this sense, Yan’s program for civic education was proposed on much the same rhetorical ground as his literacy campaigns—they were solutions to specific weaknesses within the Chinese national body. Much as the literacy campaigns would help China to overcome its greatest statistical deficit on the global stage, so too would civic training enable Chinese students to meet new standards of civic behavior that would benefit the nation.

Secondly, this articulation of citizenship training allowed the Mass Education Movement to reclaim the notion of citizens as a community defined by shared values, while also assuring contemporary observers that these values were fully modern and based on principles of experiential learning articulated by John Dewey and other progressive education leaders. To a

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<sup>126</sup> Yan claimed that one of the central goals of the alumni associations was to “bind [students] together for the service of the community” and that these associations formed “the nuclei in the villages for reconstructive activities.” See Yen, *Social Reconstruction Through Education*, Ch. 3, 2-3. A later report, prepared for the United China Relief Fund and adapted from an account by Mildred Price of the China Aid Council in 1942, likened the alumni associations to “civil service leagues.” See Mildred Price, “Abstract of Materials forwarded to United China Relief,” 1942, 34, IIRR, B2, CUL.

<sup>127</sup> Yen, *The Mass Education Movement in China* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1925), 24.

certain degree, Chen Zhushan admitted to the continuity between “commoners civic education” and older citizens’ education schemes, at one point even declaring that *pingmin gongmin jiaoyu* was really just a matter of making *guomin* education available to the masses who had been left out of the state-run education system launched in the wake of the Qing collapse.<sup>128</sup> Yet after the New Culture Movement of the late 1910s and the critiques of “mere literacy” launched by Tao Xingzhi and others, the old model of *guomin* education articulated in the late Qing *Essential Reader for Citizens* and based on literary knowledge of the Confucian classics was clearly no longer viable. Yan’s suggestion that civic education was designed to create new values and communities capable of accomplishing shared tasks in the village allowed him and his collaborators to present this new form of moral education as one rooted in global values and the practical problems of the present, rather than in the ossified morality of the past.<sup>129</sup>

This promotion of citizenship training as embodied in civic cooperation swiftly attracted the attention of the Guomindang, who saw an opportunity to replicate the Dingxian program in other rural counties throughout the nation. General Jiang Jieshi (frequently referred to in English as Chiang Kai-shek), who by this point had firmly established his role as leader of the GMD, took a particular interest in Dingxian, and in the spring of 1931, he personally invited Yan to visit his national headquarters in Nanjing.<sup>130</sup> The subject of this initial meeting was Jiang’s desire

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<sup>128</sup> Chen, *Pinmin gongmin jiaoyu zhi jihua*, 12-13.

<sup>129</sup> Reformers were keen to criticize the superstition and backwardness of rural Chinese values and to present the moral training provided under the umbrella of citizenship education as congruent with emerging “global values.” Among the articles presented under the heading of “civic education” (*gongmin jiaoyu* 公民教育) in the vernacular periodical *Nongmin* [The farmer] were articles on research into “global morality” (*shijie daode* 世界道德), “global knowledge” (*shijie de zhishi* 世界的知识), and the skills one needed to interface with the world community. See *Nongmin* 6 (1930), 4.

<sup>130</sup> Jiang Jieshi learned of the Dingxian program through Liu Jingheng, who was then serving as the director of the Guomindang’s National Health Administration (*weishengshu* 卫生署). A letter from James Yen to Ellie Auchincloss called Liu an “old friend of the Movement,” and it was through Liu that Jiang first requested a meeting. See Letter, James Yen to Ellie Auchincloss, June 15, 1931, 1, IIRR, B4, CUL. For the original invitation, see Letter, J. Heng Liu to Dr. James Yen, April 1931, IIRR, B5, CUL. Jiang Jieshi also had several other personal connections to Yan

to seek Yan's advice on a rural reconstruction project he had begun in Jiang's native village of Xikou, in the Fenghua district of Zhejiang. In addition to visiting the reconstruction projects in Xikou, Yan was also invited to speak to the instructors and senior cadets at the Central Military Academy, whom Jiang hoped would be inspired by the Dingxian experiment to lead rural reconstruction projects in villages throughout the country.<sup>131</sup> After Yan's visit to Nanjing, General Jiang provided a personal donation of \$20,000 to the Dingxian work, and regularly began sending top GMD members to Dingxian as part of a series of conferences on rural popular education.<sup>132</sup> By 1934, Yan boasted that Dingxian served as an actual (though still unofficial) "National Research and Training Center for Rural Reconstruction."<sup>133</sup> So sufficient was the Guomindang's interest in Dingxian that decades later Yan deflected accusations that the GMD controlled the movement by suggesting that "on the contrary, the [Mass Education] Movement

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Yangchu. Jiang's wife, Song Meiling had been a school friend of Yan's wife, Alice. Similarly, Yan's classmate Song Ziwen 宋子文 (1891-1971) was Jiang Jieshi's brother-in-law and had recently been given control of the Cabinet, from which he recruited Yan to join the National Economic Council. For more on Yan's personal connections to Jiang, see Hayford, *To the People*, 147-150.

<sup>131</sup> Letter, James Yen to Ellie Auchincloss, June 15, 1931, p. 2-3, IIRR, B4, CUL.

<sup>132</sup> In 1933 alone, the MEM boasted of having 2,987 visitors to Dingxian, many of whom were provincial and national leaders within the Guomindang apparatus. See Yen, *Social Reconstruction Through Education*, Ch. VIII, 4. By this time the movement had a history of hosting so-called "Spring Training" conferences, in which MEM leaders would invite visitors from all over the country to explain their methods and principles for rural reconstruction. The first of these, organized by the national Christian Council and held in 1930, was attended by almost a hundred "Christian leaders" from around the country. The second, held at the request of General Jiang Jieshi and co-sponsored by northern warlord Zhang Xueliang, was attended by official delegates from each government institution. The following year, MEM leaders held a similar conference for various county and provincial administrators, consisting of multiple meetings over several months that attracted over eight hundred visitors. For more on these meetings, see Letter, James Yen to Dr. Carl Becker, et al, of the League of Nations Educational Commission, Jan. 5, 1933, 6-7, IIRR, B5, CUL. A final note about the \$20,000 sum given by Jiang Jieshi to the Movement: monetary amounts listed in MEM sources are sometimes given in terms of U.S. dollars, sometimes in Mexican dollars, and sometimes in "local currency." The particular source in this instance does not specify which type, so I have left it ambiguous in the text.

<sup>133</sup> "Chinese Mass Education Movement—A Summary," prepared for the Rockefeller Foundation in 1934, p. 8, IIRR, B2, CUL.



has influenced and led the government, both national and local, in carrying out social and political reforms.”<sup>134</sup>

To a certain extent, Jiang’s embrace of Dingxian was a philanthropic gesture that helped to bolster the GMD leadership’s ongoing efforts to enhance their personal prestige. By the early 1930s, Jiang’s wife, Song Meiling 宋美齡 (1898-2003), had already built an international reputation for supporting various social causes, and Yan’s explicit framing of the Dingxian experiment as addressing the economic and civic weaknesses in Chinese rural society fit well with Song’s philanthropic efforts elsewhere.<sup>135</sup> Even prior to his consultation with Yan, General Jiang had already invested substantial resources in revitalizing his hometown of Xikou, and clearly saw the project as a reflection of his personal talent for promoting rural reconstruction.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> Letter, James Yen to Marshall Field, Nov 5, 1945, p. 2, IIRR, B108, CUL. This particular letter was written in response to Marshall Field, founding editor of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, who expressed concerns that a “People’s Press” run by the movement would become an agency for Guomintang propaganda, particularly in the midst of China’s ongoing civil war.

<sup>135</sup> A full consideration of Song Meiling’s political and social position as a leader of the Guomintang and an ambassador for Chinese philanthropy on the international stage lies beyond the scope of this essay, yet in many ways Song Meiling’s life echoes many of the same themes of colonial modernity advanced in this chapter. For an explanation of the ways in which Song Meiling’s philanthropic activity intersected with new notions of modernity and humanitarianism articulated by foreign Christian activists as well as an older tradition of social activism among women in the late Qing elite, see Thomas L. Kennedy, “Activism Among Women of China’s Traditional Elite,” and Suzanne Wilson Barnett, “American Protestant Missions and the New China,” in *Madame Chiang Kaishek and her China*, ed. Samuel C. Chu (Norwalk, CT: EastBridge, 2005), 7-15, 33-48. As Barnett notes, “Americans of the 1930s and 1940s could see in Madame Chiang Kaishek ‘the Chinese’ many of them wanted to see after a century of American Protestant missions in China,” and Song Meiling herself helped to represent a kind of new social consciousness that was heavily informed by American discourses on nationalism and modernity (Barnett, “American Protestant Mission and the New China,” 33). For a deeper analysis of Song Meiling’s life, particularly her role as the “public face” of China for much of the early twentieth century, see Laura Tyson Li, *Madame Chiang Kai-shek: China’s Eternal First Lady* (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2006). For the record, Yan Yangchu objected to the notion that the Mass Education Movement was primarily engaged in philanthropy (which, to him, implied a kind of top-down imposition), and he preferred to think of his own role as that of a researcher. Nevertheless, Yan was often portrayed as a philanthropist in the international press, and a League of Nations review even criticized the overly “philanthropic nature of the work” in Dingxian (Ibid., p 7).

<sup>136</sup> Yan himself was quite unimpressed with the efforts undertaken in Xikou prior to his meeting with Jiang. Although it is unclear how much of his criticisms Yan revealed to the generalissimo, a letter written to E. C. Carter (then the head of the American Cooperating Committee of the MEM) frankly notes that the “aristocratic looking school buildings” in Xikou were very ill suited to training people in the village, and that a lack of sustained cooperation between urban teachers and rural parents had made the project amount to a lot of wasted money and few results (Letter, James Yen to E.C. Carter, April 1, 1931, 2-3, IIRR, B5, CUL). Yan forwarded these remarks to Sidney Gamble in a second letter dated April 22, 1931, available in the same location.

But Jiang also clearly saw the Mass Education Movement's efforts as an important component of the growing party-state's broader political project. After Yan spoke about the Dingxian project to the cadets at the Nanjing Central Military Academy, Jiang spoke for an additional forty-five minutes, praising the "stick-to-it-iveness" of the MEM workers and asserting that the Dingxian project was "truly revolutionary work" that would help bring into realization the principles of Guomintang founder Sun Zhongshan.<sup>137</sup> In particular, Jiang praised the work of the Movement in using civic training to improve cooperation among rural village administrators, a task that the GMD leadership saw as foundational to their state-building efforts, but at which they had been mostly unsuccessful.<sup>138</sup> Working together with the Mass Education Movement, the GMD established several Provincial Institutes of Social and Political Reconstruction, which attempted to educate village elders from nearby provinces in Nationalist Party principles and the basics of county administration, while also inculcating them in the fourfold goal of the Mass Education Movement (cultural education, economic improvement, public health, and citizenship training).<sup>139</sup> Although still conforming to a rather autocratic notion of political tutelage (a subject which will be explored in more detail in the next chapter), Jiang clearly bought into the broader principle advocated by rural reformers that social and economic uplift in the countryside was critical to the establishment of a strong nation-state, and that if the Guomintang were to succeed

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<sup>137</sup> Letter, James Yen to Ellie Auchincloss, June 15, 1931, 2-3, IIRR, B4, CUL and Letter, Y. C. James Yen to E. C. Carter, April 1, 1931, 4, IIRR, B2, CUL.

<sup>138</sup> In many respects, the Guomintang's broader political failure in early twentieth-century China can be explained precisely by this inability to effectively control local village administration. As Prasenjit Duara points out, the Guomintang state apparatus proved fundamentally incapable of penetrating what he terms the "cultural nexus of power," that is, the kinship and religious organizations that structured access to resources through shared ritual in local society. As a result, the Guomintang relied increasingly on entrepreneurial brokers to generate tax revenue (and enforce party doctrine) by squeezing peasants. See Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). Jiang's embrace of Yan illustrates that to some degree the GMD was aware of this problem and looking for solutions that, at least in Yan's view, emerged organically from the political networks that already existed in villages like those of Dingxian.

<sup>139</sup> Letter, James Yen to Ellie Auchincloss, June 15, 1931, p. 5, IIRR, B4, CUL.

in becoming the stewards of that nation-state, the party would need to invest in a political infrastructure that was more deeply enmeshed in the village itself.<sup>140</sup>

Yet as much as the Nationalist government embraced Yan Yangchu's methods and practices, Yan did not embrace the Guomintang with the same level of enthusiasm, and the Mass Education Movement continued to position itself as politically independent. Part of Yan's reluctance to continue his popular education work from within the larger Guomintang apparatus was no doubt practical. Much as Yan's initial turn to the countryside was motivated in part by a desire to avoid having urban popular education work derailed by warlordism in North China, Yan continued to see China's political turmoil as a threat to the movement's success. In a letter to Mr. Selskar Gunn of the Rockefeller Foundation in the summer of 1934, Yan noted that another prominent rural education project, Liang Shuming's Zouping experimental district, had recently been "threatened with total collapse" by the temporary abdication of erstwhile GMD military general Han Fujū 韩复榘 (1890-1938).<sup>141</sup> Not wishing to meet the same fate, and doubting the ability of Jiang's government to successfully control all of China, Yan was understandably reluctant to tie the Mass Education Movement's fate to the political success of the Guomintang.

Beyond these strategic considerations, Yan had also begun to develop a more general political vision of China and of citizenship that simply did not require the existence of a strong

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<sup>140</sup> Hayford, *To the People*, 154. In December of 1932, the Guomintang sponsored a National Conference on Interior Administration with the intent of addressing these administrative issues. Nationalist government operatives at the conference recommended that provinces begin setting up experimental counties modeled after Dingxian (and Liang Shuming's similar experimental district in Zouping). As Hayford notes, there was some debate over what to call these districts, with the central government initially preferring "county government experimental counties" to emphasize their administrative intent. Rural reformers, who were concerned that the Nationalist Government's political ambitions would occlude the social and economic reconstruction work they were doing, settled on the name "county government reconstruction experimental area." For more on the Guomintang's efforts to invest in village-governance initiatives, see Li, *Minguo xiangcun zizhi wenti yanjiu*, 162-164.

<sup>141</sup> Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Selskar M. Gunn, July 36, 1934, 7-8, IIRR, B4, CUL.

national party-state. While Yan continued to maintain that national and coordinated planning were “urgently needed” if rural reconstruction projects were to succeed, he also argued that this reconstruction should take place on a *xian* 县 or “county” basis.<sup>142</sup> In 1928 when the Dingxian project was still in its infancy, Yen claimed that the main goal of training citizens was to broaden the horizons and extend the spheres of interest of village folk, so that the institutions of the “village republic” could be expanded to the larger units of “the district community and the nation.”<sup>143</sup> Over time, however, Yan became more committed to keeping political reformers rooted in the village and county. As Yan explained to his good friend Sidney Gamble in 1933, the *xian*, not the nation, was the primary “social, economic, and political unit of China,” and if the movement were to bring about true political reform, it should begin with the *xian* government, “since it concerns directly and vitally the welfare of eighty-five percent of China’s four hundred million people.”<sup>144</sup> Indeed, the types of collective cooperation heralded in the citizenship training at Dingxian and in the commoners’ civic education curriculum proposed by Chen Zhushan had comparatively little to do with the nationalist sentiment that dominated earlier popular education efforts, such as the lectures of the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps. Rather, civic training focused on promoting community activities in which the farmers could directly participate, such as fairs or contests, and on developing collective responses to problems within the village, such as managing households, combating opium use, spreading new agricultural methods, and improving village public health.<sup>145</sup> When the Movement did eventually step more forcefully into the realm of politics via cooperation with the Nationalist government in establishing the Hebei

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Yen, “New Citizens for China,” 275.

<sup>144</sup> Letter, Y. C. James Yen to Sidney Gamble, June 14, 1933, 14-15, IIRR, B5, CUL.

<sup>145</sup> James Yen, *A Report on the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education Movement*, 19-20.

Provincial Institute for Social and Political Reconstruction in the spring of 1933, they asserted that the Institute should remain focused on conducting experiments in village governance on a *xian*-unit basis and improving the training of county magistrates.<sup>146</sup>

Thus, for the leaders of the Mass Education Movement, citizenship remained fundamentally *local* in character. Although students of the *pingmin* schools were supposed to graduate with a national awareness in keeping with movement's broader aim of national socioeconomic salvation, they were intended to actually express this citizenship within their own villages. There is perhaps no greater expression of the Mass Education Movement's belief in localism than the fact that by the early 1930s, they had concentrated almost the entirety of their human and financial resources into the Dingxian project. This extreme level of focus drew criticism from organizations like the League of Nations, whose investigators claimed that "much work, money, and good will is being wasted in a work of limited scope, incapable of producing a general economic or social plan."<sup>147</sup> Despite such criticisms, this local focus remained crucial to the movement, first because it fit their vision of scientific experimentation, second because it afforded them autonomy from warlords and the Nationalist government, third because it enabled reformers to develop model solutions to concrete social, economic, and public health problems, and finally because it allowed for an expression of citizenship that could be fully embraced and enacted by rural people within the villages of Dingxian.

In her dissertation, "A New People: Rural Modernity in Republican China," Kate Merkel-Hess has suggested that one of the primary innovations of the national rural reconstruction

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<sup>146</sup> The Hebei Provincial Institute for Social and Political Reconstruction was opened with the blessing of the Ministry of the Interior of the Central Government, but Yan felt that the institute (like the movement itself) retained a distinctly "non-partisan and non-political character" (Letter, Y.C. James Yen to Sidney Gamble, June 14, 1933, 17, IIRR, B5, CUL).

<sup>147</sup> Carl Becker, et al, *Report of the League of Nations Educational Commission to China* (Paris: League of Nations Institute of Intellectual Cooperation, 1932), 192-195; original manuscript located in IIRR, B5, CUL.

movement (including, but not limited to, Yan's work Dingxian) was its ability to take the presumably universal strategies of modern governance and apply them to local conditions within the Chinese countryside. Merkel-Hess argues that the resulting contradiction between modern state-building on the one hand and a "localism that threatened the coherence of the nation-state" on the other emerged from reformers' fundamental desire to be responsive to local needs and to build upon previously existing practices of local semi-autonomous elite leadership within the countryside even as they strived to build a nationalist movement.<sup>148</sup> In highlighting the ways in which Chinese reformers were responsive to local conditions and pre-existing political traditions, Merkel-Hess addresses Paul Cohen's call for a "China-centered" history, and she asserts that "the direction of the Rural Reconstruction Movement was neither a reaction to nor result of interactions with the West."<sup>149</sup>

I disagree. The localism expressed in Dingxian and other rural education projects, though frequently *presented* as an attempt to respond to pre-existing Chinese political traditions, was as much the consequence of a fundamentally new understanding of citizenship that emerged from rural reformers' desire to meet the expectations of international donors, politicians, and pedagogical theorists. Previous notions of citizenship grounded in literacy, such as those expressed in the very first *guomin* education projects undertaken by the Qing Ministry of Education, leant themselves well to a national scale because they were predicated on the inculcation of a basic universal skill. The new understandings of citizenship embodied within the rural education experiment at Dingxian required students not merely to internalize a set of values or meet a certain intellectual standard, but also to enact those values and standards for the social

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<sup>148</sup> Merkel-Hess, "A New People," 1-7.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 421. For a deeper explanation of Cohen's "China-centered" history, see Paul Cohen, *Discovering History in China: American Historical Writing on the Recent Chinese Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), 149-199.

and economic betterment of their communities in ways that were only truly possible on a local scale. While these new forms of collective civic action were of course rooted in older forms of public engagement by local elites, the broader expectation that experience and action were prerequisites to citizenship was circumscribed by colonial discourses that equated citizenship with usefulness, and formed the basis by which Yan advertised the success of the Dingxian project to American investors. In this later sense, then, Yan was very much engaged in a broader international discourse on the relationship between citizenship and knowledge.

Gauging the overall legacy of the Dingxian experiment can be difficult. Like Tao Xingzhi's Xiaozhuang Normal School, it was eventually forced to cease its activities, this time due to the invasion of Hebei by Japanese forces in 1937.<sup>150</sup> Prior to its forced closure, however, Dingxian established a template for rural popular education initiatives nationwide, with Yan claiming that prior to 1936 over eight hundred rural education centers patterned after Dingxian had been established across China.<sup>151</sup> The basis of this template was a fundamentally new understanding of Chinese citizenship, one that emerged from the Movement's social surveys into the practical conditions of life in the Chinese countryside, as well as from the shifting dialogue between local village leaders, international donors, and the returned students that made up the

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<sup>150</sup> By 1936, the MEM had already begun to de-emphasize Dingxian as the center of the Movement. In 1936, MEM leaders relocated their headquarters to Changsha (the site of Yan's first literacy campaign), and ceded the day-to-day running of Dingxian to the North China Council of Rural Reconstruction. Even after the incursion of the Japanese army forced the people's schools of Dingxian to close their doors, the experimental work that began in 1926 still proved influential in shaping the county's experience of the war. According to a report on the Movement prepared by Ellen Auchincloss, the Dingxin Health Center was swiftly converted into a base hospital, while the Department of People's Education helped organize student alumni associations and various other civic groups into first aid teams and local self-defense groups that collaborated with the army in slowing the Japanese advance. See Ellen Auchincloss, "Report of the Mass Education Movement: July 1937-June 1938," n.d., p. 1-2, IIRR, B5, CUL. Yan's letters to Sidney Gamble at this time similarly discuss the tenacity of Dingxian residents in holding back the Japanese, even as the broader Mass Education Movement's finances were decimated by the ongoing war effort. In a later report filed in 1942, Yan boasted that even after Hebei decisively fell to the Japanese, Dingxian itself was lost and regained seven times by the armed forces of the people, who had been "hailed by imperial observers and journalists who have first-hand experience as the most effective guerrilla division in all North China." See James Yen, "Material forwarded to United China Relief," 1942, 34-35, IIRR, B2, CUL.

<sup>151</sup> Letter, James Yen to Marshall Field, Nov. 5, 1945, 1-2, IIRR, B108, CUL.

bulk of the professional education reform community. In short, the students and teachers at Dingxian articulated an understanding of citizenship that was predicated on basic skills like literacy but embodied through collective action on behalf of the economic and social betterment of the rural community. This notion of citizenship addressed growing critiques within the education reform community about the limited usefulness of literacy and the necessity of grounding learning in the lived experiences of rural students. Furthermore, this notion of citizenship remained legible both to the conservative village elites charged with funding local people's schools and to the members of the American Cooperating Committee who secured the substantial funds necessary for the Movement to continue its research work. Finally, this notion of citizenship served to correct perceived weaknesses in the Chinese national character, namely an overabundance of individualism, and was thus carried out not to inform rural people of their rights as members of the Chinese republic, but rather to enable them to fulfill their obligations to the local community, and, by extension, the nation. While these obligations were explained to students, teachers, and donors in terms of moral cultivation, Yan and his colleagues were still able to claim that these morals represented fundamentally new, modern values that would help China to succeed on the global stage.

### **Conclusion: Rural Reconstruction in the Broader Context of *Guomin* Education**

Yan Yangchu's programs for civic education and rural reconstruction won him many admirers, from Guomintang leaders to Christian activists to American industrialists. Given the almost universal praise afforded to Yan, it is worth stepping back and considering his programs in the broader context of debates over citizenship and popular education, which had been appearing on the pages of education journals, administrative guidelines, and popular education



textbooks since the start of the twentieth century. Since its formal inception in 1906, programs for popularizing *guomin jiaoyu* or “education for citizens” had been beset by internal tensions and contradictions produced by the semantic instability of neologisms like *guomin* and by the incredibly broad range of possibilities for imagining new relationships between the people, knowledge, and the state in the wake of the Qing collapse. Even after reformers refocused their popular education schemes on *pingmin* or “commoners” education, reformers were often unable to bridge the gap between their hopes for China’s future and the practical realities they confronted in the field. Yan Yangchu himself no doubt conceived of the *pingmin* education projects in Dingxian as an attempt to address the social and economic hardships of China’s vast rural population, but his specific conception of commoners’ education can also be productively viewed as an effort to overcome these ongoing discursive tensions.

One of the most fundamental questions facing proponents of popular education, as embodied in the debates within the late Qing journal *Jiaoyu zazhi*, was whether *guomin* education should strive to train the Chinese people to meet new standards of modern citizenship or work to be responsive to the practical needs of a community of citizens who already existed as a necessary consequence of the Qing and Republican constitutions. Early in the history of the Republic, the reformers in favor of new standards seemed to win out, as the Ministry of Education and commercial textbook publishers worked together to promote new curricular goals, and *guomin jiaoyu* became almost synonymous with the modern-style primary schooling provided to China’s urban elite. In the wake of the May Fourth Movement, which brought with it both a new national consciousness and a critique of hierarchical Confucian values, reformers suggested that popular education, under the guise of *pingmin jiaoyu*, should more specifically target those who had been left out of the old education structure. Their efforts to do so were

largely unsuccessful, often because zealous student groups like the Beida *Pingmin* Education Lecture Corps were never able to translate their radical new ideals into a format that was accessible to urban workers, farmers, and women. Yan Yangchu's program for eliminating illiteracy and making new citizens at Dingxian avoided such problems because it asserted that citizenship education could both hold students to high standards of modern citizenship *and* fit the economic needs and practical expectations of its intended audience. By emphasizing basic literacy, but positioning it as a tool for social and economic reconstruction, Yan Yangchu made popular education both accessible and rigorous. Such a program still positioned *guomin* as a community dependent upon intellectual and economic skills that had to be learned, but it placed those skills theoretically within reach of all Chinese.

A second major tension animating the debate on *guomin jiaoyu* was whether the contents of popular education should draw from so-called "Chinese" values, as embodied in classical literacy and Confucian morality, or be grounded in practical science and economic uplift. The existence of this dichotomy between Chinese moral values and, as it was often rendered, "Western" science was itself the product of decades of colonial discourses that had convinced members of groups like the *Pingmin Jiaoyu* Society that democracy was paradoxically both necessary and impossible in China. This debate also played out in the minds of individual returned students like Tao Xingzhi, who rejected foreign pedagogical theory but maintained that China's existing educational values, which focused almost exclusively on literacy, were hopelessly backward and economically unproductive. By insisting that literacy was a necessary but insufficient tool for cultivating new citizens, the Mass Education Movement offered an education that was both moral and practical. Through their curricula, and particularly through the civic activities of the student alumni associations, Yan Yangchu and his colleagues reclaimed the

notion of civic training as a fundamentally moral enterprise, while simultaneously asserting that the new social values instilled by the people's schools of Dingxian would help students to address ongoing social problems and allow them to improve their livelihoods. Furthermore, by presenting the Dingxian experiment as a means of researching and developing economic uplift in the countryside, the Mass Education Movement was able to raise unprecedented sums of financial support from growth-minded American investors, all while claiming that rural reconstruction remained a fundamentally indigenous movement. Yan's organization did not resolve these contradictions by "defeating" colonial discourses on modern citizenship and Chinese social problems, nor did the MEM truly produce an alternative, "indigenous" understanding of what it meant to be a *guomin* in rural China. Rather, the MEM adopted a hybrid understanding of citizenship, one that defined the goals of rural education according to the critiques and anxieties of international donors while defining its contents according to the expectations of rural students themselves.

Yan's Dingxian experiment even offered solutions to longstanding financial and administrative questions about the widespread implementation of popular education. The Mass Education Movement's role in drafting textbooks, conducting social surveys, and setting up demonstration farms suggested that central administrators still had a role to play in funding (and directing) the development of new popular education projects. However, MEM leaders' insistence that all people's schools be funded entirely by the villages themselves suggested that the actual task of supporting popular education was an obligation for the people, not the state, to fulfill. Such an assertion also allowed for the development of popular education funding models that could be more easily replicated throughout China during a time in which national and

provincial governments found themselves chronically strapped for cash.<sup>152</sup> In short, the shift to the countryside enabled rural reformers to solve many of the longstanding issues facing proponents of popular education even as they radically expanded the scope of those efforts to include more students than ever before.

This expanded scope also represents the one area in which rural reformers remained conflicted on the ultimate scale and purpose of national popular education. If the programs developed in Dingxian provided a clear blueprint for reproducing the success of the Mass Education Movement throughout China, the political consequences of this replication remained murky. The capstone civic training at Dingxian provided a value system and a practical outlet through which individual commoners in the village could transform themselves into civic-minded *gongmin* (literally, “public people”), but what about the Chinese *pingmin* as a whole? What should be the broader political implications of a Chinese national subject for whom basic schooling was now within reach? Tao Xingzhi’s commitment to “self-government, self-sufficiency, and self-defense” at the Xiaozhuang Normal School was clearly not palatable to the growing Nationalist government, but Yan’s efforts to keep the Guomindang at arm’s length also reflect an uncertainty among both groups about how popular education should mediate the relationship between the Chinese state and its people. At the same time that MEM members bragged to their American investors that their projects were precipitating a “national awakening” in the Chinese countryside, Guomindang leaders increasingly repeated Sun Zhongshan’s claim that in order to secure China’s freedom and equality, it was necessary to “awaken the masses”

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<sup>152</sup> The economic insecurity of Chinese states during the republican period is an important and hitherto unexplored dimension of national efforts to promote popular education in Republican China. The Nationalist government in particular found itself plagued by financial weakness stemming from both a lack of revenue and an abundance of debts to foreign governments in the wake of China’s disastrous foreign conflicts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a broader analysis of the financial constraints upon the Nationalist government and the ways in which these constraints affected its relationship with urban elites, see Parks M Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

(*huanqi minzhong* 唤起民众).<sup>153</sup> The discourse of “the masses” (*minzhong*) represented a fundamentally new way of talking about the Chinese political subject, one that seemed to reference even more directly those “common people” who had been left out of the former education system, but which also carried more explicit political implications befitting a national community of citizens. It was ultimately through the language of *minzhong* that Guomindang leaders hoped to deploy the practical strategies of the rural reconstruction movement to define a Chinese political subject more directly tied to the interests of the party-state. Such an effort represents a further narrowing of the conditions of possibility for imagining citizenship in early twentieth-century China and constitutes the subject of the dissertation’s final chapter.

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<sup>153</sup> For the MEM’s discussion of a “national awakening” in China, see Auchincloss, *The Ting Hsien Experiment in 1934*, 44-45. In private letters sent to Ellen Auchincloss containing draft language for MEM publicity materials, Yan even suggested that Dingxian could serve as the basis for the creation of a “National Democracy” in China. See Letter, Y.C. James Yen to Ellen Auchincloss, October 1, 1930, p. 4, IIRR, B1, CUL. Sun Zhongshan’s call to “awaken the masses” appeared prominently in his Last Testament, which was adopted as a core part of the Guomindang’s party platform in 1925, and appeared on frequently on promotional posters, political banners, and primary school textbooks. For an example of the latter, see Shanghaishi shizi weiyuanhui 上海市识字委员会 [Shanghai Municipal Literacy Committee], ed., *Duanqi xiaoxue keben* 短期小学课本 [Short period primary school textbook] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1935), which contains a portrait of Sun and a printing of his Last Testament on the inside cover.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CITIZEN READERS: MASS EDUCATION TEXTBOOKS IN THE NANJING DECADE, 1927-1937

In 1927, the Guomindang, under the leadership of Jiang Jieshi, defeated many of the remaining warlords in China and established a national capital at Nanjing, marking the start of the Nanjing Decade, and with it a new phase in the development of Chinese popular education. When a Chinese student opened up a literacy textbook from a major publisher during this ten-year period from 1927-1937, she or he would often be greeted by a portrait of deceased president and Guomindang founder Sun Zhongshan, alongside a printed transcript of Sun's Final Will and Testament.<sup>1</sup> The will, penned on February 20, 1925 and familiar to many students even today, reads in part, "For forty years I have devoted myself to the cause of National Revolution with one goal in mind: to bring China to a position of freedom and equality among other nations. My experiences during these forty years have deeply convinced me that if we are to achieve this goal we must awaken the masses (*huanqi minzhong* 唤起民众)..." Sun's call to "awaken the masses" was cited heavily among proponents of popular education during this time, and as Guomindang (GMD) policies of the period reveal, "awakening the masses" was a task that the GMD state sought to fulfill itself.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, as the GMD's central governing bodies asserted, Sun's use

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<sup>1</sup> For one example of a literacy textbook that included Sun's portrait and will, see the Shanghai for Literacy's *Duanqi xiaoxue keben* 短期小学课本 [Short period primary school textbook] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1935). Other "party-reader" textbooks, such as Lü Baiyou 吕伯攸 and Zheng Chang 郑昶, eds., *Xin Zhonghua dangyi keben* 新中华党议课本 [New China party reader] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1928), also featured the will and, as this chapter will show, frequently served as literacy textbooks themselves.

<sup>2</sup> Popular education advocate Yan Yangchu frequently cited Sun's call to "awaken the masses" as an inspiration, both in letters to his friends and in publicity material for the Chinese National Association of the Mass Education

of the word “awaken” (*hunqi*) referred primarily to “education” (*jiaoyu* 教育), so if the state were to be truly successful in “awakening the masses” they would first have to develop a policy of mass education, or *minzhong jiaoyu* 民众教育.<sup>3</sup> Yet many of the same questions that had plagued popular education initiatives for decades remained: who exactly were “the masses” (*minzhong* 民众)? What was their relationship to “common people” (*pingmin* 平民) and, indeed, to so-called “citizens” (*guomin* 国民)? What knowledge must the masses have in order to be truly “awakened?” The answers to these questions are not present in Sun Zhongshan’s typically murky, sometimes even self-contradictory political exegeses, but as revealed in the laws and training materials that constituted GMD education policy, they carried important implications for how the nascent party-state envisioned the relationship between individuals, education, citizenship, and the government.

As the preceding chapters have illustrated, early twentieth-century Chinese popular education proponents often found themselves debating the meaning of citizenship, the relationship between individuals and communities, and the mutual obligations of “the people” and “the state.” Yet, particularly after the founding of the Republic in 1911, the state itself—as a specific set of public institutions constituted by law and exercising executive authority over various matters including but not limited to education policy—had remained largely absent as a source of these discussions. This lacuna is partly a result of the fact that state formations in

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Movement. See, for example, Letter, James Yen to Sidney Gamble, May 24, 1932, IIRR, B5, CUL, 3; and “A Report on the Chinese Mass Education Movement 1946-1947,” IIRR, B23, CUL, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Guomindang Central Committee for Political Tutelage, *Sanminzhuyi minzhong jiaoyu jubei de mubiao* 三民主义民众教育具备的目标 [The objectives of Three People’s Principles’ Mass Education], 1931; Reprint, *Zhongguo Di’er Lishi Dang’anguan*, ed., *Zhonghua minguo shi dang’an ziliao huibian 5.1: Jiaoyu* 中华民国史档案资料汇编 5.1: 教育 [A collection of archival materials from Republican China, Vol. 5.1: Education] (Nanjing: Fenghuang chubanshe, 1994), 700-701. Hereafter *Zhonghua minguoshi dang’an ziliao huibian* will be abbreviated ZMDZ.

Republican China, prior to the Northern Expedition of 1928, were incredibly weak.<sup>4</sup> Neither Yuan Shikai's aborted imperial revival nor the various warlord governments that followed could truly claim to represent the Chinese nation on the global stage, let alone serve as the authority behind the formulation and administration of a singular, centralized national education policy. As such, popular advocates for *guomin* or *pingmin* education were often free to imagine new intellectual standards, new forms of social community, and indeed, new state-society relations without a specific state apparatus in mind. The Guomintang victory in 1927 represented the first time that a Republican Chinese government could truly claim to represent all of China, and even at this stage, the GMD's hold on power was shaky at best. In their struggle to establish themselves as the legitimate and singular authority of a reconstituted China, the Guomintang forcefully reinserted politics into the ongoing debate on popular education. Guomintang party members took up posts at leading universities and teachers colleges, and the new party-state worked with textbook publishers to create a new wave of teacher training manuals, mass literacy pamphlets, civics textbooks (*gonmin keben* 公民课本), and party doctrine readers (*dangyi keben* 党议课本).

Such a change in the oversight and implementation of education efforts required yet another redefinition of popular education, as evidenced by the GMD's embrace of the new term, *minzhong jiaoyu*. In emphasizing new terminology, Guomintang supporters sought to

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<sup>4</sup> Another key explanation for the lack of centralized state involvement in popular education initiatives in particular is that even prior to the abrogation of the civil service examination system, the task of organizing education had largely fallen under the purview of local community leaders, particularly the literati gentry. For more on the typical role of local elites in directing education in the late Qing, see Sally Borthwick, *Education and Social Change in China: The Beginnings of the Modern Era* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), 1-37. Nevertheless, as Cong Xiaoping forcefully argues, the relative weakness of central Chinese state actors (along with the indifference to education policy among most warlord governments) in the period from 1912-1927 meant that most regional education circles articulated policies without a clear, central state authority overseeing their endeavors. See Cong Xiaoping, *Teachers' Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State, 1897-1937* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 52-93.



differentiate these new popular education initiatives from those that had come before, including *pingmin jiaoyu* and *guomin jiaoyu*. Whereas previous efforts at popular education had focused on popular lecturing, short-term literacy training, or modified curricula in local schools, GMD education leaders saw “mass education” as an all-inclusive education agenda that encompassed school-based education, adult education, supplemental training, and public education projects like libraries and museums. At the same time, the new term also provided the Nationalist government with an opportunity to more precisely define the specific curricular contents of “mass education,” often by tying it directly to Guomintang policies and to the inculcation of a specific party ideology as embodied in Sun Zhongshan’s *Three Principles of the People* (*sanminzhuyi* 三民主义). Thus the new discourse on *minzhong*, or “the masses,” allowed the Guomintang to both broaden the scope of their educational efforts, uniting various political, economic, and educational classes into a single Chinese political subject, and narrow the acceptable means by which this political subject related to the party state. As such, the discourse on *minzhong jiaoyu* was crucial to the broader political project of the Guomintang.

The state-building efforts of the Nationalist Party have long been a focus of historians of the Nanjing Decade, and scholars like Lloyd Eastman, Parks Coble, Prasenjit Duara, Frederick Wakeman, and Henrietta Harrison have exhaustively chronicled the often failed attempts of the Guomintang to establish political legitimacy through new forms of political culture, new forms of tax collection, modern policing, and the production of a nationalist material culture.<sup>5</sup> In attempting to explain these failures, scholars have cited the GMD’s inability or unwillingness to

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<sup>5</sup> The above referenced works include Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China Under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1974); Parks Coble, *The Shanghai Capitalists and the Nationalist Government, 1927-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Prasenjit Duara, *Culture, Power, and the State: Rural North China, 1900-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988); Frederick Wakeman, *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); and Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

take advantage of pre-existing civic institutions when developing their own model of state-social relations. Where the current chapter differs from these efforts is in suggesting not only that the discourse on “mass education” was key to the GMD’s state building efforts, but also that Guomindang policy represents not a divergence but rather a crystallization of many of the basic understandings of citizenship and education articulated over the late Qing and early Republican periods.<sup>6</sup> Since 1906, there had been many education reformers who suggested citizenship was a political and moral status that needed to be earned, that education for citizens was a means of ameliorating class conflict and addressing China’s national weakness, or that citizenship should be measured in part according to one’s economic productivity, but all of these arguments competed alongside other possibilities within Republican education circles, within experimental schools, and on the pages of Republican-era textbooks. The GMD effort to implement “mass education” represents a final narrowing of the possibilities for imagining a new kind of citizenship in Republican China, one that selectively built upon previous articulations of popular education and ultimately helped to define *guomin* as a new group of nationally minded, morally upright, economically productive people with a specific political allegiance to the party-state. Whatever tensions or shortcomings remained in this specific articulation of what it meant to be a

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<sup>6</sup> While the second of these two arguments is likely more important in the overall scope of the dissertation, the first—that “mass education” programs represented an important part of GMD state-building efforts—remains an important point that has received comparatively little attention, particularly from English-language scholars. One major consequence of the common historical narrative that the GMD halts or otherwise defers the democratic popular education efforts of the 1920s is that the Nationalist Party’s own popular education efforts are rarely examined closely. By contrast, Chinese-language historians, who are perhaps less invested in rescuing “democracy” from Republican-era Chinese history, have devoted more attention to the substantial efforts made by the GMD in promoting mass education. Recent efforts include Yang Cailin 杨才林, *Minguo shehui jiaoyu yanjiu* 民国社会教育研究 [Research on social education in Republican China] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2011); Zhou Huimei 周慧梅, *Jindai minzhong jiaoyu guan yanjiu* 近代民众教育馆研究 [Research on modern mass education halls] (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011); and Zhou Huimei, *Xin guomin de xiangxiang: minguo shiqi minzhong xuexiao yanjiu* 新国民的想像: 民国时期民众学校研究 [Imagining new citizens: research on Republican-era mass schools] (Beijing: Beijing shifan daxue chubanshe, 2013). All three of the above works position GMD-era “mass education” as central to the broader history of popular education in China, of equal importance to the *pingmin* education initiatives of the late 1910s and early 1920s.

Chinese citizen, they were the product not of abrupt ideological shifts or administrative incompetence, but rather of the colonial conditions in which both the GMD education platform and its policy precursors were produced.

This final chapter examines the ways that articulations of *minzhong jiaoyu* in the Nanjing Decade both distinguished themselves from and built upon previous understandings of popular education. It begins by looking at the emerging discourse on “the masses” (*minzhong*), both in Sun Zhongshan’s political ideology and in the legal framework of the Guomindang in the late 1920s and early 1930s. The chapter then shifts to consider the ways in which education reformers serving within or appointed by the Guomindang Department of Education articulated the meaning and function of “mass education” through teacher training manuals and the materials of the “mass education” movement itself—textbooks, songs, and slogans of the compulsory literacy campaigns instituted by the GMD. Many of these materials, in particular those normal school textbooks designed to explain the meaning of *minzhong jiaoyu*, self-consciously revisit many of the most important keywords from this dissertation, including not only *minzhong*, but *pingmin*, *gongmin*, and *guomin* as well. In evaluating the ways in which professional educators, textbook authors, and party officials employed concepts like *minzhong* and *guomin*, I seek to illustrate the degree to which these words remained contested social categories as well as the means by which reformers tried to limit these contestations, often by recalling many of the arguments that had animated the last thirty years of popular education debate in China.

## *Minzhong* 民众 and the Guomintang State

“Popular education” in all of its previous forms (“citizens’ education,” “commoners’ education,” “social education,” and “adult education,” among others) was a project that captured the attention of a wide spectrum of education reformers, from radical May Fourth Marxists to conservative Confucian revivalists. Discussions of such projects originated on the pages of scientific journals, in textbook publishing houses, on college campuses (both in China and overseas), and in rural education experiments dating back to before the Qing collapse. “*Minzhong* education,” in contrast, was a project specifically tied to Guomintang state-building efforts. When educators of the period presented the history of “popular education” (*puji jiaoyu* 普及教育) or “social education” (*shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育) in China, they harkened back to the earliest literacy training efforts of the late Qing, but when leading mass education theorist Yu Qingtang 俞庆棠 (1897-1949) spoke of the history of “mass education,” she began with the GMD’s own successful effort to establish a government in 1928.<sup>7</sup> GMD leaders believed that mass education was a crucial component of the “period of political tutelage” (*xunzheng shiqi* 训政时期) advocated in Sun Zhongshan’s *Fundamentals of National Reconstruction* [*Jianguo dagang* 建国大纲], and the new Ministry of Education established a central role for itself in directing mass education programs. In short, mass education was central to the GMD’s political ideology, and the GMD state was central to mass education. Thus, in order to go about understanding the possible connotations of the term *minzhong jiaoyu*, it makes sense to begin with the Guomintang itself.

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<sup>7</sup> See the history of mass education presented in Yu Qingtang 俞庆棠, *Shifan xuexiao minzhong jiaoyu* 师范学校民众教育 [Mass education for teachers’ schools] (Nanjing: Zhengzhong shuju, 1935), 67-69. Note, this chronology of mass education as beginning with GMD policy making is also reflected in more recent Chinese language historiography—see, for example, Yang Cailin, *Minguo shehui jiaoyu yanjiu*.

When the Guomindang policy makers attempted to articulate the intellectual origins of the party-state's program of "mass education," they began with the claim that *minzhong* education was based on the values presented in Sun Zhongshan's *Three Principles of the People* [*Sanminzhuyi* 三民主义], a political tract derived from a series of lectures Sun gave in the spring and summer of 1924.<sup>8</sup> This series of lectures was intended not as an abstract statement of political philosophy, but rather as a specific program to combat and ultimately overcome the colonial conditions to which China had been subjected for the past century. In fact, Sun went further than almost any previous reformer in articulating the depth of his nation's plight, calling China a "hypocolony" (*cizhimindi* 次殖民地) whose subjugation to multiple foreign powers placed it below even other colonies in the global hierarchy of power.<sup>9</sup> Sun's critique of imperialism was a dominant theme throughout his later political writing and formed the basis of one of his key principles—nationalism (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主义).<sup>10</sup> In Sun's conception, anti-imperialist politics could serve as the means by which the Chinese people might realize their shared racial and ethnic belonging and, in doing so, work together to re-establish China's

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<sup>8</sup> Examples of GMD officials citing *Three Peoples' Principles* as the basis for policy making are incredibly numerous. For one example relating directly to mass education, see "Jiaoyubu gongbu minzhong xuexiao banfa dagang 教育部公布民众学校办法大纲" [An outline of methods for mass education schools issued by the Ministry of Education] 1929; reprint, ZMDZ 5.1: 692-694.

<sup>9</sup> The term "hypocolony" (*cizhimindi* 次殖民地) originally appears in the second lecture on "Nationalism" (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主义), where Sun explains that even though some might claim China is a "semi-colony" (*banzhimindi* 半殖民地) due to the fact that it nominally maintains political independence, it is in fact a "hypocolony" because it has been made to serve as a colony to so many different nations at once, with none of them taking on the responsibility of providing financial aid or development funds. See Sun Zhongshan, "Minzuzhuyi: di'er jiang 民族主义: 第二讲" [Nationalism: Lecture Two], in *Sanminzhuyi* 三民主义, ed. Huang Yan 黄彦 (Guangzhou: Guangdong chubanshe, 2007), 24-25.

<sup>10</sup> As Marie-Claire Bergère notes, this focus on western imperialism actually marks a shift from Sun's earlier political writing, which placed the blame for China's struggles squarely on the shoulders of the Manchu-led Qing government. While the sharp change toward anti-imperialism may be the product of Sun's encounter with Soviet ideology, Bergère suspects it actually derives from Sun's simple recognition of the political power of anti-imperialism among politically active Chinese students. I would argue further that the critique of Western imperialism is not that different in substance from Sun's earlier complaints against the Manchu government, albeit with a new geographical target in mind. See Marie-Claire Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 359-361.

national assertiveness. Sun's discussion of nationalism was joined by a discussion of democracy (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主义) and social welfare (*minshengzhuyi* 民生主义), both of which were similarly inflected with Sun's anti-colonial preoccupations. Sun's conception of democracy, in particular, was quite different from that of the Western political philosophers that he occasionally cited, in that Sun ultimately prioritized China's national liberty at the expense of individual freedoms. As Sun argued, combating foreign imperialism required China to "break down individual liberty and become pressed together into an unyielding body like the firm rock which is formed by the addition of cement to sand."<sup>11</sup> Even Sun's notion of social welfare was informed more by China's poverty relative to the wealth of imperial powers than by the unequal distribution of wealth within China itself. On a fundamental level, both Sun's politics and the GMD policies they inspired were inflected with an anti-colonial spirit, whereby the political, cultural, and economic self-determination promised by GMD authority could help to justify a wide spectrum of otherwise anti-democratic policy measures.

Given the frequency with which the *Three Principles of the People* is cited as the particular basis for the GMD's mass education programs, it may be tempting to look towards Sun's political thought for the specific intellectual origins of the GMD conception of *minzhong*. Yet even as Sun's lectures extensively chronicled his understanding of "the people" (*min* 民), and more specifically the ideas of "nation" (*minzu* 民族), "people's rights" (*minquan* 民权), and "people's livelihood" (*minsheng* 民生), actual use of the term *minzhong* or "masses" is rather scarce. At the time of Sun's original lecture, *minzhong*, unlike previous buzzwords *pingmin* and *guomin*, was not a new or borrowed term, having had a long history in Chinese texts dating back to the *Guanzi* 管子 [The writings of Master Guan, completed c. 26BCE] and the *Hanshu* 汉书

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<sup>11</sup> Quoted in Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 372.

[The book of Han, completed c. 111CE].<sup>12</sup> Yet its meaning was no less ambiguous on account of its long history in the Chinese lexicon. Even Mao Zedong, for whose political ideology the concept of “the masses” was very central, never truly defined the term, and he often employed the words “people” (*renmin* 人民), “masses” (*minzhong*), and “the great masses of people” (*renmin dazhong* 人民大众) interchangeably in his pre-1949 political writing.<sup>13</sup> Although Sun clearly felt that China’s political strength ultimately lay in the people (*renmin*), and that his proposed policies would help to raise up the “life of the multitudes” (*qunzhong de shengming* 群众的生命), he was at pains to distinguish his economic programs from communism and did not talk about the “masses” in clear social or political terms.<sup>14</sup> Once again, as a practical plan to escape China’s colonial conditions, Sun’s lectures were much more concerned with the process of how to provide sufficient social benefits to “the people” than with defining “the people” itself.

In fact, when Ministry of Education did cite Sun’s thought as the impetus for the term *minzhong jiaoyu*, they almost universally cited the call to “awaken the masses” (*huanqi*

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<sup>12</sup> The compound term *minzhong* also appears in the *Mozi* 墨子 [The writings of Master Mo], although this text had only returned to favor among Confucian scholars in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of these classical references use the term *minzhong* to refer to the large number of people not directly involved in state affairs, often placing *minzhong* in semantic opposition to the lord (*jun* 君) or other governing figure. For more on the historical uses of the term *minzhong*, see Zhang Qijun 張起均, ed., *Zhongwen da cidian* 中文大辭典 [Encyclopedic dictionary of the Chinese language] Vol. 5 (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua chubanshe, 1982), 811.

<sup>13</sup> For a slightly more robust discussion of the term “masses” in the political writing of Mao Zedong, see Tsou Tang, “Marxism, the Leninist Party, the Masses, and the Citizens in the Rebuilding of the Chinese State,” in *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China*, ed. S.R. Schram (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), 265-267. Tsou contends that in Mao’s writing (and by extension in the larger political discourse on masses in China), one must draw a distinction between the idea of “the masses” and the idea of “citizens,” as the former “[begins] with the position of individuals as members of segments of society,” which underscores “active involvement and performance of duties,” while the later focuses on demands for “abstract legal, civil rights.” While I agree that the concept of “masses” does not focus on the individual political rights of its members, this dissertation would suggest that Tsou’s conception of citizenship, derived in part from the typology produced by T. H. Marshall, is unnecessarily limiting in its scope. It is more productive, I argue, to think of the discourse on “masses” as articulating a different *kind* of citizenship, and as an effort to define the relationship between individuals and states in a manner similar to other citizenship discourses worldwide, rather than as a separate discourse standing in opposition to a specific Eurocentric notion of what citizenship means.

<sup>14</sup> Sun, “Minshengzhuyi: di’yi jiang 民生主义：第一讲” [People’s livelihood: first lecture], in *Sanminzhuyi*, 194-195.

*minzhong* 唤起民众) in Sun's final will about the "unfinished revolution." This belief—that the Chinese revolution would only succeed once a significant number of the Chinese masses had been "awakened"—is more prominent in Sun Zhongshan's writing than the idea of *minzhong* itself. For example, in a letter sent to a fellow GMD party member in Yunnan on September 21, 1919, Sun claimed that "if we want to save the country, it must start with waking up (*huanxing* 唤醒) *guomin*." Similarly, in a speech to the National Business Association in September of 1923, Sun said "When looking at the reason why I have been mostly unsuccessful in founding a state, it may seem like it is due to the resistance of hostile factions, but it is actually due to the fact that the masses (*minzhong*) are unsocial (*guahe* 寡合) and thus cannot achieve this goal."<sup>15</sup>

Leading GMD education experts and Sun himself agreed that awakening the masses was essential to the success of the revolution, and that state-sponsored education was essential to awakening the masses. Sun's *Foundations of National Reconstruction* divided the Chinese revolution into three distinct phases: a military phase, a political training phase, and a final constitutional phase. According to Sun's timeline, the military phase would obliterate the warlords and other vestiges of the *ancient regime*, while the tutelary phase would focus on popular education as a means of fixing the "sheet of loose sand" (*yipansansha* 一盘散沙) that constituted Chinese society and prepare a cohesive social whole to inherit the responsibilities of constitutional governance.<sup>16</sup> This call to "awaken the masses" provided a useful shorthand for future GMD policy makers, and over a decade after Sun's death, the head of the Social Education Department within the Ministry of Education, Chen Lijiang 陈礼江 (1896-1984) continued to reference Sun's will, claiming that "When it comes to the important questions of

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<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Yang, *Minguo shehui jiaoyu yanjiu*, 44.

<sup>16</sup> Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 379, and Yang, *Minguo shehui jiaoyu yanjiu*, 40.



how to ‘awaken the masses,’ how to organize the masses and train the masses—*minzhong jiaoyu* is really the only answer.”<sup>17</sup>

Yet even as Sun’s call to “awaken the masses” effectively established a prerequisite for the National Revolution’s success (and a dire colonial warning if it failed), Sun’s attendant policy prescriptions for how to implement popular education did not provide the clarity or detail necessary to serve as the intellectual basis for a national program of mass education. Sun claimed that the power of the state must derive from the people, but also that a revolutionary party must guide the people. This tension was particularly acute with regards to the issue of local control over education. At times, Sun seemed to endorse a centralized, Soviet-style leadership model, as he did during a 1924 speech to the Reorganization Congress in which he argued that “we must...place the party above the State,” and charge it with developing a single, national model of political tutelage.<sup>18</sup> At the same time, Sun maintained that practical training in democracy would have to take place at the local level and that an effective constitutional government could only be established once local people learned to “exercise [their] rights directly” rather than respond to a dictatorship of the proletariat.<sup>19</sup> Sun’s support for local control over education seems to distinguish it from a Stalinist model of central control and place it more in line with previous educational administrative structures in China, which ceded extraordinary amounts of control to local gentry, but his notion of party-directed political tutelage reaffirms the claim that China’s national development required an unspecified period of temporary authoritarian rule. In her intellectual biography of Sun Zhongshan, Marie-Claire Bergère has suggested that the self-

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<sup>17</sup> For original text, see Chen Lijiang 陈礼江, “Shehui jiaoyu de yiyi ji qi shiye 社会教育的意义及其事业” [The meaning of social education and its implementation], in *Jiaoyuxue* 教育学 3 (1937): 1. Quoted in Zhou, *Jindai minzhong jiaoyu guan yanjiu*, 23.

<sup>18</sup> Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 379.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 380.

contradictory nature of Sun's political works could support a huge number of divergent interpretations and as such, "[i]t may be that the importance of *The Three Principles of the People* lies...at the level of the diffusion of ideas rather than at that of their elaboration."<sup>20</sup>

Indeed, if we are to truly understand the GMD discourse on "mass education," we cannot look to the abstract and often contradictory political discourse in which Sun articulated (or, just as often, failed to articulate) the relationship between "the masses," citizens, the party, and the state. We must turn instead to investigating how and why the Nationalist government mobilized this discourse in the specific historical context of the late 1920s and early 1930s.

The most immediate practical precedent and the most important political context for the Guomindang's embrace of mass education was the large number of "mass movements" (*minzhong yundong* 民众运动) organized during the Northern Expedition from 1926-1927.

These "mass movements" were organized jointly by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the GMD during the period of the First United Front, and they contributed substantially to the success of the two-year military and political campaign that ushered the GMD into power.<sup>21</sup>

"Mass movements," which often mobilized farmers and workers through the establishment of temporary unions and local workers' associations, often eroded local warlord control and supplied the growing Nationalist army with local intelligence gatherers, saboteurs, and combat recruits. In addition to their direct military role, mass campaigns also helped to grow the popular political support for the GMD-CCP alliance, particularly among rural populations who had become increasingly weary of regional authorities seeking to impose local control.<sup>22</sup> "Mass

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 393.

<sup>21</sup> Zhou, *Jindai minzhong jiaoyu guan yanjiu*, 20-21.

<sup>22</sup> For a robust discussion of the role played by "mass" forces in the Northern Expedition, see Donald A Jordan, *The Northern Expedition: China's National Revolution of 1926-1928* (Honolulu: The University Press of Hawaii, 1976), 171-230. For the specific military roles played by mass organizations in the Nationalist Revolutionary Army, see p.

movements” were similarly important to the political narratives of the campaign put forth by each party. The fact that a burgeoning Communist Party would claim a central political role for farmers and workers is unsurprising, but even the GMD self-consciously sought to organize itself as a modern nation-state that was both concerned with and legitimated by popular support.<sup>23</sup> GMD officials cited Sun Zhongshan’s philosophy of “helping the workers and farmers” (*fuzhu nonggong* 辅助农工) as the basis for continued efforts to lend direct support to local peasant associations and the participation of such associations in the successes of the Northern Expedition, whether directly or merely symbolically, were central to fulfilling Sun Zhongshan’s directive that the revolution must “be achieved by the masses.”<sup>24</sup> More practically, these mass movements provided local test cases for GMD propaganda campaigns, which in turn served as models for future popular education efforts. By 1931, the GMD Central Training Division (*zhongyang xunlianbu* 中央训练部) went so far as to claim that the goal of mass education was simply to construct a single, sustained “mass movement” capable of truly incorporating all of the masses.<sup>25</sup> Nowhere is the connection between “mass movements” and popular education more

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191. Donald Jordan has argued that these “mass movements” were ultimately not that essential to the practical success of the Northern Expedition and that their influence has been overstated, particularly by the CCP, in order to fit a political narrative wherein the organized peasants are seen as the primary engines of revolution. As Jordan demonstrates (171-172, 201), most local peasant associations created through “mass movements” only arose *after* the NRA had taken over administrative control of a given territory, and in many provinces, the total activity of labor movements actually declined during the first years of the Northern Expedition, when NRA forces made their biggest advances.

<sup>23</sup> As Michael Tsin has argued, the “social basis” of state power is a central concern within the logic of political modernity, which demands that sovereign legitimate states both mobilize and respond to the interests of their constituents. One could argue (although Tsin does not) that this specific notion of what makes a nation-state politically viable is itself a product of colonial modernity, insofar as the legitimacy of the state in question is based on a normative model self-consciously adapted from the colonial powers themselves. For a further discussion of the relationship between the “social basis” for states and political modernity, see Michael Tsin, “Imagining ‘Society’ in Early Twentieth-Century China,” in *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920*, eds. Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 212-214.

<sup>24</sup> Zhou, *Jindai minzhong jiaoyu guan yanjiu*, 21.

<sup>25</sup> See Guomindang zhongyang xunlianbu, “Sanminzhuyi minzhong jiaoyu jube de mudi 三民主义民众教育具备的目的” [The goals of Three People’s Principles’ mass education] 1931; reprint, ZMDZ 5.1: 700-701.

evident than in the Committee for the Training of Masses (*minzhong xunlian weiyuanhui* 民众训练委员会), a sub-committee of the GMD government established in 1928 and tasked with organizing such a sustained, unified mass movement through national education initiatives.

Despite the importance of “mass movements,” at least politically, to the success of the Northern Expedition, they also provided one of many sources of tension in the uneasy alliance between the CCP and the GMD. Even prior to the start of the Northern Expedition, the GMD and CCP clashed over the organization and mobilization of merchant associations in Guangdong, where GMD efforts to identify and respond to specific social interests in the name of building a national body conflicted with Communist efforts to organize specific social classes in opposition to one another.<sup>26</sup> During the military campaign, the majority of “mass movements” consisted of labor unions organized and mobilized by communists, whose work benefited from their experiences organizing students and workers in other urban centers like Shanghai.<sup>27</sup> Sometimes the communist-led mass movements directly threatened GMD power, as when a leftist farmers’ society based in Changsha attempted to usurp the agricultural associations established and approved by conservative Guomintang members.<sup>28</sup> Other times, the preponderance of local workers’ and farmers’ associations organized around the specific interests of their membership groups simply threatened the more harmonious, unified conception of the national body promoted in Sun Zhongshan ideology. After the end of the military campaign, and especially

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<sup>26</sup> For a much more robust discussion of GMD and CCP organizing strategies in Guangdong, including the ways in which both parties sought to redefine “society” into discrete, governable units, see Michael Tsin, *Nation, Governance, and Modernity in China: Canton 1900-1927* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).

<sup>27</sup> The most notable of such efforts was the May Thirtieth Movement, which mobilized students and workers against the Shanghai Municipal Police after the police force issued a violent crackdown on anti-imperialist protestors within Shanghai’s international concessions. For a more robust discussion of the May Thirtieth Movement, see Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991), 95-148.

<sup>28</sup> C. Martin Wilbur, *The Nationalist Revolution in China, 1923-1928* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 65-66.

after the violent purge of communist and leftist members from the GMD in 1927, the Nationalist Party had become distrustful of the often politically uncontrollable peasants' associations and was looking for ways to more safely incorporate workers and peasants into the revolution without directly threatening GMD authority. In this latter sense, popular education provided both a threat and an opportunity in the GMD's larger plan to construct a modern nation-state.

Nationalist Party fear that popular education could be used as a tool for organizing anti-government and communist sentiment is highly evident in the GMD's early post-1927 education policy. The first major law issued from the GMD's central executive committee concerning popular education was a series of regulations "banning any kind of social education (*shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育) that violates the principles of the party platform." Banned popular education programs included those that "intentionally oppose or compromise local party offices" as well as those that "intentionally insult the national flag, the party flag, the portrait of the deceased president [Sun Zhongshan], or his last will and testament."<sup>29</sup> To better ensure that no popular education schemes could engender heterodox political movements, the GMD central authority instructed local party offices to enforce bans on "counter-revolutionary" education programs, while also stating that the power to draft new "social education" regulations remained solely with the educational and administrative organs of the central government.<sup>30</sup> Yet banning schools alone was not sufficient to ensure that peasants and urban workers energized by the mass movements of the past several years could be smoothly incorporated into the nation and inculcated with Guomintang ideology. To accomplish this later task, the GMD articulated a new, positive education program organized around *minzhong*.

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<sup>29</sup> Guomintang zhongyan zhixing weiyuanhui, "Qudi gezhong shehui jiaoyu jiguan weibei dangyi jiaoyu jingshen tongze 取缔各种社会教育机关违背党义教育精神通则" [Rules banning any kind of social education that violates the principles of the party platform], issued July 19, 1928; reprint, ZMDZ 5.1: 691.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

The language of *minzhong* was useful to the Nationalist Party precisely because it provided a way of talking about the Chinese social and political body as a single unit. Prior to 1928, the GMD party headquarters included separate civil administrative departments in charge of youth, workers, peasants, merchants, and women. In February of that year, however, party leaders Jiang Jieshi, Chen Guofu 陈果夫 (1892-1951), and Ding Weifen 丁惟汾 (1874-1954) called for the creation of a single Committee for the Training of Masses, which would combine all of the previous departments with the express aim of minimizing divisions along occupational lines. GMD leaders hoped that a new committee focused on mobilizing all of the masses would help minimize student participation in “selfish political struggles” and instead help them to foster shared interests across socioeconomic class lines.<sup>31</sup> The party’s more specific plans for “mass education” and “mass schools” reflected this effort to transcend class, gender, and occupational boundaries. By 1929, the Ministry of Education issued an outline of methods for “mass schools” which instructed all uneducated men and women, regardless of occupation or income, to enter a mass school of some kind.<sup>32</sup> Whereas the education reformers and rural reconstruction leaders of the mid-1920s had based much of their education platforms on their ability to specifically target the communities they served—as evidenced by Yan Yangchu’s various thousand character texts

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<sup>31</sup> For a more thorough discussion of the Committee for Training the Masses, see Huang Jianli, *The Politics of Depoliticization in Republican China* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996), 55-76. Notably, Huang argues that the creation of the Committee for the Training of Masses represents a temporary victory of the GMD’s more leftist elements over the more conservative policy line articulated by Cai Yuanpei and Dai Jitao 戴季陶 (1891-1949), who were much more distrustful of active student political participation. Indeed, Dai Jitao’s own “Central Training Department” (*zhongyang xunlianbu* 中央训练部) had more or less retaken the reigns of directing mass movements by January 1930, and this committee provided the basis for mass education law moving forward. While it is certainly true that active GMD promotion of mass movements proved temporary, the discursive shift heralded by the adoption of *minzhong* proved to be more lasting, as even the new, more conservative Central Training Department organized its popular education programs under the banner of “Three People’s Principles’ Mass Education” (*Sanminzhuyi minzhong jiaoyu*) with a similarly universal scope. The ongoing debate between the party’s more leftist and rightist elements about the appropriate nature and scope of student political involvement was ultimately ancillary to the broader political project of redefining the national political subject through the language of *minzhong*.

<sup>32</sup> ZMDZ 5.1: 692

for soldiers, urbanites, and farmers—“mass education” constituted a one-size-fits-all popular education policy, which allowed the GMD to reach all uneducated Chinese citizens in a uniform way and mobilize them on behalf of a unified nation.

At the same time, the new language of *minzhong* education provided the GMD with the space to carve out a more central role for itself in directing and educating this national body. As historian Huang Jianli notes, the Committee for the Training of Masses had originally been titled the “Committee for Mass Movements” (*minzhong yundong weiyuanhui* 民众运动委员会) but during the plenary discussion was renamed in order to better emphasize the party’s central role in guiding and instructing such movements.<sup>33</sup> This focus on the central role of the party in directing mass education was evident in the legal framework establishing the creation of mass schools. While the law allowed for the creation of schools founded by private citizens and encouraged individual institutions to “adapt themselves to local conditions,” all mass education schools were subject to the supervision of the county education department and all schools were required to use textbooks that had been examined and approved by the national Department of Education.<sup>34</sup> Certain exemptions to these rules were carved out for select “experimental schools,” such as Yan Yangchu’s “people’s schools” in Dingxian, which the party tentatively endorsed, but even in this instance, the GMD conducted inspections of such projects through a committee for investigating rural experimental enterprises within the Ministry of Education.<sup>35</sup> To be clear, budget shortfalls, uncooperative local administrations, ongoing student protests, and a succession of regulatory changes ensured that the educational authorities in Nanjing never fully achieved the level of

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<sup>33</sup> Huang, *The Politics of Depoliticization*, 63.

<sup>34</sup> ZMDZ 5.1: 693.

<sup>35</sup> For an example of the contents of one such inspection, see “Jiaoyubu guanyu zhonghua pingmin jiaoyu cujinhui dingxian shiyanqu gaikuang de diaochabiao 教育部关于中华平民教育促进会定县实验区概况的调查表” [Questionnaire from the Ministry of Education regarding the situation at the Chinese National Association for the Promotion of Commoners’ Education’s Dingxian experimental district] 1935; reprint, ZMDZ 5.1: 775-782.

central administrative control that the law suggested.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Guomindang's efforts to impose a new degree of centralized control, no matter how successful it ultimately was, represented an intellectual innovation in the way that the party-state conceived its own political role and that of the Chinese national subject.

In making “awakening the masses” a central feature of its educational platform, the GMD asserted that *minzhong* were essential to China's sovereignty and that the GMD was essential to prepare them for this role. In some respects, this basic framework directly reflects the political platform outlined by Sun Zhongshan. As in Sun's political writings, the need for tutelage from the party-state was predicated primarily on a colonial discourse that asserted that the average Chinese person was unfit for political independence and blamed China's national weakness on the lack of education among the masses. An outline of literacy movement publicity materials from the central government's Ministry of Propaganda succinctly illustrates these colonial anxieties. In a section on the relationship between “literacy movements and nationalism” (*minzuzhuyi* 民族主义), the ministry repeats Sun's assertion that China is a hypocolony (“that ranks even below Canada and the Philippines”) and that this condition is directly attributable to a lack of education:

The strength of a country can be measured by the level of knowledge of its members. Nationalities (*minzu* 民族, perhaps used here to mean “races”) are also this way... There are an extreme variety of races in the world: the white race is the strongest of all, while

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<sup>36</sup> This lack of control was prevalent in all levels of GMD education policy. John Israel's classic study of student nationalism in China notes that the Nationalist government Ministry of Education was plagued by turnover of both personnel and regulations, and many local teachers and headmasters often failed to comply with new regulations based on the assumption that they would simply change again in the coming months. In some ways, this degree of regulatory turnover is itself a further reflection of the degree to which the Nationalist government sought to involve itself in affairs of the nation's schools, even if GMD education leaders could never decide exactly what that involvement should be. Also, conditions within the Ministry of Education seemed to stabilize under the leadership of Wang Shijie 王世杰 (1891-1981), who served as Minister of Education from 1933 to 1938. See John Israel, *Student Nationalism in China, 1927-1937* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 89-93.



the yellow, brown, black, and red races are endangered of seeing their end and dying out; while the causes are many, their level of knowledge is definitely a factor.<sup>37</sup>

Indeed, the broad outline of this belief stretches back to Liang Qichao, and to multiple generations of political and education reformers struggling with the question of how to improve China's international condition through popular education policy. In other respects, however, the GMD's embrace of *minzhong jiaoyu* represents a more calculated response to a specific historical condition. By articulating a program for *minzhong* education in a moment when the GMD found its grasp on authority threatened by communist organizers and unruly university students, the Nanjing government was able to reclaim a space for farmers, workers, women, and students within its political vision while simultaneously diffusing the tensions between them. This rhetorical shift to an undifferentiated conception of "masses" marks one way in which the GMD was able to elide the class-based tensions that undermined previous articulations of *pingmin* education, and it served as a platform for a legal framework that united the party and the masses in a common nationalist purpose.

But what did this mass education project look like to professional educators? One final way in which the GMD state asserted new levels of central administrative control over popular education projects was by involving itself in the training of new teachers and professional education scholars. On the level of individual school personnel, headmasters of public mass education schools were required to be selected from among the county or city's central administrative organs, and teachers at mass education schools were required to undergo special

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<sup>37</sup> Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu 中国国民党中央执行委员会宣传部, *Shizi yundong xuanchuan gangyao* 识字运动宣传纲要 [An outline of literacy movement propaganda] (Nanjing: Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu, 1929), 3-4. This rhetorical equation of natural strength with education rates is reflected in much of the literacy movement propaganda issued in the late 1920s and early 1930s. For another example, see "Zhejiang sheng shizi yundong nianbao 浙江省识字运动年报" [Annual report on the literacy movement in Zhejiang province] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang shizi yundong xuanchuan weiyuanhui, 1930), 1-3.

training at normal schools overseen directly by provincial party-led education departments.<sup>38</sup> To help develop better mass education pedagogy, the GMD also directly partnered with the Jiangsu University College of Education to sponsor “mass education experimental districts” in and around Nanjing.<sup>39</sup> Many of the leading proponents of mass education during this period, including Chen Lijiang, Yu Qingtang, and Gan Yuyuan 甘豫源 (1903-1999), held leadership positions within the Jiangsu College of Education and published extensively on proper mass education methods and materials, which they shared at annual conferences sponsored by the GMD state itself. These professionals were responsible for articulating and promoting the nuts and bolts of the Guomindang’s popular education projects, and while they were certainly interested in achieving the party-state’s broader political agenda of “awakening the masses” and inculcating all Chinese with the values, skills, and beliefs necessary to strengthen the nation, they were also occasionally willing to criticize the shortcomings of the law. In engaging the political aims of GMD education policy as well as two decades of pedagogical debates among education circles both in China and abroad, these individuals helped to truly define the meaning of *minzhong jiaoyu*, and their efforts are ultimately responsible for producing new understandings of citizenship and education during the Nanjing Decade.

### **Defining *Minzhong* Education: Teaching Manuals and Textbooks**

One of the primary arguments of this dissertation is that for most of the late Qing and Republican periods, popular education reformers in China suffered from a lack of stable referents

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<sup>38</sup> For the legal basis for this control, see ZMDZ 5.1: 693. For a more thorough discussion of the Nationalist Party’s success in establishing national control over local schools, see Cong, *Teachers’ Schools and the Making of the Modern Chinese Nation-State*, 121-149.

<sup>39</sup> For a very brief history of the GMD’s involvement with the Jiangsu University College of Education, see Yu, *Shifan xuexiao minzhong jiaoyu*, 67-68.

when discussing the intended objects of their education reform programs. Although many of the earliest proponents of popular education agreed on the need to provide “education for *guomin*,” they often differed in their understanding of who could be considered a *guomin* and what made them such. At the same time, the very newness of terms like *guomin* often obscured many of these tensions within the shared discourse on popular education, effectively blinding reformers to the radically divergent understandings of “citizenship,” “knowledge,” and “the state” contained within their education proposals. In other words, one of this dissertation’s central concerns—the discursive instability of historical catachreses like *guomin* or *pingmin*—was *not* a concern for many of the dissertation’s historical subjects, who were often excited by the political possibilities of their new terminology, and in any event were much more focused on practical problems like the lack of national consciousness among the rural poor, the enduring appeal of the Confucian curriculum among the elite, and the broader class inequalities threatening China’s national unity. By the late 1920s and early 1930s, however, professional teachers and education theorists had an opportunity not only to articulate new models of popular education, but also to reflect back on the mostly failed popular education projects of the past few decades. In comparing their own work to previous education systems—not just the Qing civil service examination system but Republican experiments in *guomin* and *pingmin* education as well—proponents of “mass education” tasked themselves with explaining why so many of these projects fell short of their original goals. In contrast to their predecessors, the supporters of *minzhong* education who looked back on the popular education failures of the Republican period were much more aware of the limitations of language, and they identified the ambiguities inherent in popular education discourse as one of the primary reasons these projects failed. In this sense, the early 1930s marks

the moment in which the categories of practice that defined Chinese approaches to popular education came under the direct analysis of Chinese education reformers themselves.

At a National Education Conference sponsored by the Guomindang in 1928, the assembled coalition of professional educators issued the following analysis of the problems facing Chinese education:

The Republic of China was established seventeen years ago, and although it defined educational aims, these aims were lacking in specificity and easily subject to different interpretations; in other words, they had no clear guiding principle (*zhuyi* 主义), which was like having no education at all. After seventeen years of this nation's existence, not only have we been unable to establish a foundation [for popular education], but the bumping and shaking has increased day after day; when it comes to establishing a “*guomin* culture,” not only have we been unable to build a path forward, but we have seen nothing but retreats and sidesteps. This is naturally due to the fact that in a political sense the revolution is not yet finished, but a portion of the blame should be given to the fact that education does not have a clear goal.<sup>40</sup>

Other reformers laid the blame on the specific failings of previous terminology. Many popular textbooks on mass education intended for use in normal schools, such as *Minzhong jiaoyu* 民众教育 ABC and *Xin Zhonghu minzhong jiaoyu* 新中华民众教育 [New China mass education], devote entire sections to differentiating between the term *minzhong jiaoyu* and previous names for popular education, including “adult education” (*chengren jiaoyu* 成人教育), “social education” (*shehui jiaoyu* 社会教育), “commoners’ education” (*pingmin jiaoyu* 平民教育), and “supplementary education” (*buxi jiaoyu* 补习教育). As *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC* editor Fan Wanghu 范望湖 asserts, “The term ‘social education’ has been around a long time... but the object of social education is this very abstract term “society” (*shehui* 社会), which does not

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<sup>40</sup> Gan Yuyuan 甘豫源, ed., *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu* 新中华民众教育 [New China mass education] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1932), 15-16.

necessarily refer to any specific group.”<sup>41</sup> Another textbook, edited by Jiangsu College of Education professor Gan Yuyuan 甘豫源 (1903-1999), dismissed terms like *pingmin jiaoyu* and *tongsu jiaoyu* 通俗教育 (“popular education”) as being “too vague and likely to produce ambiguous meanings which cannot be expressed in practice.” Gan, who had deep ties to the GMD state and was recommended to his post by GMD head of social education Chen Lijiang, asserted that if mass education were to be successful on the national level, it would require textbooks like Gan’s to provide “a thorough explication of the term *minzhong jiaoyu*” to avoid this kind of ambiguity.<sup>42</sup> Although previous reformers like Tao Xingzhi had criticized the preponderance of new buzzwords among China’s reform community and compared neologisms to mysterious strangers in one’s home, popular education reformers to this point had not yet embarked on such a sustained and rigorous effort to explicate their own programs and differentiate them from previous efforts at the level of terminology.<sup>43</sup>

Thus, the educators tasked with explaining the GMD-led program of *minzhong* education, more than previous reformers, were keenly aware of the power of language to shape how teachers, administrators, and students understood their place within the education system, and, by extension, the nation. As such, they saw *minzhong* education as an opportunity not only to expand the educational opportunities available to those who had previously been denied access to school but also to self-consciously redefine the relationship between the state and the people.

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<sup>41</sup> Fan Wanghu 范望湖, ed., *Minzhong jiaoyu* 民众教育 ABC [Mass education ABCs] (Shanghai: ABC congshushe, 1929), 6.

<sup>42</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 1-2, 6.

<sup>43</sup> For the reference to Tao’s claim that neologisms are “strangers,” see Tao Xingzhi, “Guomin yu xiamin 国民与瞎民” [Guomin and blind people] in *Shenbao* 申报, January 7, 1925; Reprint, *Tao Xingzhi quanji* 陶行知全集 [The complete works of Tao Xingzhi] (Chengdu: Sichuan jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), 227. Note, Tao himself, while increasingly skeptical of “the West” as a source of solutions for addressing China’s education woes, was certainly no stranger to neologisms himself, as his later publications in the 1930s found him increasingly using a mantra of “life education” (*shenghuo jiaoyu* 生活教育), his own buzzword adapted from his reading and critique of John Dewey’s writing on social education.

In articulating this redefinition, the teaching materials produced by “mass education” experts reveal two primary goals. First, reformers sought to discursively establish “the masses” as a singular, unified political subject, which united the otherwise separate interest groups that constituted Chinese society. Second, reformers used the materials of *minzhong* education to redefine knowledge itself, supplanting vocational skills like literacy and agronomy to embrace a more specific political consciousness defined by awareness of national symbols and adherence to the GMD party-state. While reformers were eager to establish mass education as a new direction in the ongoing struggle to popularize education in China, reformers also lent legitimacy to their efforts by placing *minzhong jiaoyu* within an ongoing international narrative of popularization that made their pedagogical project seem more like a natural inevitability than an instance of GMD social engineering. These goals are evident not only in the teacher training manuals provided to potential mass education instructors, but also in the textbooks given to the masses themselves, the latter revealing the process by which reformers and publishers made their vision of the nation more legible to a broad community of citizens.

One of the most important goals of mass education was to define precisely what was meant by the term “masses” (*minzhong*), and in this endeavor, reformers hewed closely to the inclusive narrative promoted within the GMD legal framework. In his mass education teacher-training textbook, Gan Yuyuan acknowledged that because *minzhong* itself was not a new term, many people already used it to refer to “those who have not received an education” or “those who exist outside the party, the government, and the school.” Dismissing this particular definition as needlessly classist, Gan counters that “those who have received a school education are part of the *minzhong*, just as those who have not received a school education are also part of the *minzhong*.” In short, Gan argued, “the entire nation’s people are part of *minzhong*, regardless

of differences in education level, property, age, or any other difference.”<sup>44</sup> Mass education theorist Yu Qiantang, meanwhile, suggested that “mass education’s greatest aspiration is for the entirety of the masses within the whole of society (*quan minzhong zai zhengge shehui shang* 全民众在整个社会上) to advance onward and upward.”<sup>45</sup> When Yu herself did refer specifically to those lacking an education, as when she argued that “saving the uneducated masses is the same as saving the Chinese race,” she used the term *qunzhong* 群众, thereby reserving *minzhong* to speak explicitly about a national collective on which a democratic (*minzhu* 民主) government might be based.<sup>46</sup> Civics and party doctrine readers, used in both traditional schools and normal academies, further reinforced this inclusive vision of society. As Robert Culp has demonstrated, the civics textbooks of the Nanjing Decade focused primarily on “themes...of social integration and the priority of the social whole over individual or sectional rights and interests,” and even as the practice of *minzhong* education remained focused on non-formal schooling initiatives, the conception of “masses” as an organic social whole helped to reinforce these basic themes.<sup>47</sup>

Within the more narrow discourse on popular education, this desire to establish the inclusivity of *minzhong* as a national signifier motivated many of the most prominent critiques of *pingmin* education, which reformers feared did not do enough to transcend the class differences that threatened Chinese society. Gan Yuyuan acknowledged that *pingmin* had a great deal of political power among the idealistic education reformers of the May Fourth period, conceding that “some people say *pingmin* education is “education for equal people” (*pingdeng de renmin de*

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<sup>44</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 2.

<sup>45</sup> Yu, *Minzhong jiaoyu*, 3.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Culp, “Setting the Sheet of Loose Sand: Conceptions of Society and Citizenship in Nanjing Decade Party Doctrine and Civics Textbooks,” in *Defining Modernity: Guomindang Rhetorics of a New China, 1920-1970*, ed. Terry Bodenhorn (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Center for Chinese Studies, 2002).

*jiaoyu* 平等的人民的教育), and that such an egalitarian scheme would seem to be a good fit for mass education in a republican state. Nevertheless, Gan argues, “the two characters *pingmin* will always have a certain historical connotation such that if one mentions *pingmin*, it will cause people to think of the antonym *guizu* 贵族 (“aristocrats”).” Thus, for Gan, “*pingmin* education is just another kind of class-based education and is not education for the entirety of the masses.”<sup>48</sup> Fan Wanghu’s *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC* similarly notes that “the existence of *pingmin* education implies that one also has aristocratic education, which can very easily lead to confusion, making [the term *pingmin*] not as suitable to describe mass education.”<sup>49</sup> Similar critiques were made of previous popular education buzzwords like “adult education,” specifically because they were seen as serving individual communities rather than the national whole.<sup>50</sup> In explaining the shortcomings of previous popular education attempts, *minzhong* education proponents rarely objected to the actual teaching methods or curricular content of such programs; rather, their critiques reflect reformers’ hopes that “*minzhong*” could reframe the intended targets of popular education reform using a more singular and formally inclusive language.

These efforts to present the targets of popular education programs as a singular national whole are reflected in the textbooks and materials of the mass education movement themselves. One such text is *Minzhong qianzi keben* 民众千字课本 [Mass thousand character text], a simplified literacy textbook published by the Shanghai-based World Book Company and modeled after the pioneering readers produced by Yan Yangchu in the mid 1920s. The textbook’s very first lesson signals its broad audience, proclaiming, “Farmers, workers,

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<sup>48</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 8.

<sup>49</sup> Fan, *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC*, 6.

<sup>50</sup> Gan, *Xin zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 9-10.



businessmen, everyone: come! Come and read books!”<sup>51</sup> Other lessons in the book, whose cover advertised it as being part of “Three People’s Principles Education,” taught readers the use of various pronouns with the phrases, “I am a Chinese person, you are a Chinese person, he is a Chinese person, we are all Chinese people!”<sup>52</sup> Another textbook designed for use in “New Era Mass Schools” reminded readers that “we should encourage men, women, old and young to all read books, all speak the same national language, and all live under the same law.”<sup>53</sup> Similarly, a “massified” play entitled *Heavens! I Want to Read Characters!* developed by the Zhejiang literacy movement boasts that it is “designed to make people feel the suffering of being illiterate without drawing barriers between men and women or old and young.”<sup>54</sup> Lessons like these demonstrate how reformers hoped that in promoting universal literacy, they could establish a basis for inclusion in a single national community defined by shared intellectual achievements rather than individual or group interests. In this sense, literacy represents not so much a specific skill to be utilized in one’s civic behavior as a means of group membership in a modern national

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<sup>51</sup> Wei Bingxin 魏冰心, ed., *Minzhong qianzi keben* 民众千字课本 [Mass thousand character textbook] (Shanghai: Shijie shuju, 1929), 1. The three groups identified in the lesson—farmers, workers, and businessmen—reflect the three classic Confucian social classes who did not receive a formal education during the Qing period. While the call to readers does not include the fourth Confucian social category—scholars—this is likely because the *Mass Thousand Character Text* was primarily intended for use by those who had been denied a formal education.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 4. This basic format for introducing pronouns was used in many literacy textbooks throughout the Nanjing Decade. The lesson is reprinted almost word for word as the first lesson in the Ministry of Education’s own *Minzhong xuexiao keben* 民众学校课本 [Mass school textbook] (Nanjing: Ministry of Education, 1937), published just prior to the beginning of the war with Japan.

<sup>53</sup> Shen Baiying 沈百英, ed., *Shizi keben* 识字课本 [Literacy textbook] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1934), 24. In addition to claiming its suitability for use in mass schools, Shen also notes that his textbook was designed in accordance with the mass school regulations put forth by the Ministry of Education, demonstrating the degree to which textbooks from major publishing houses like the Commercial Press worked to comply with the law. My own sense is that advertising a textbook as being compliant with Ministry of Education standards was less a matter of legal necessity and more a matter of making one’s textbook appear attractive to school headmasters looking to make use of “officially licensed” materials.

<sup>54</sup> “Zhejiang sheng shizi yundong nianbao,” 13. The Chinese title of the play is *Tian’a, wo yao shi de zi* 天啊, 我要识得字. Note that plays like this one, which specifically promoted literacy among the rural poor, often featured plots involving well-educated characters using their literacy skills to cheat or injure those who lack literacy. Nevertheless, the authors of these plays maintain that “When literate people deceive others, it is not the fault of the literate people themselves, but rather of the fact that not everyone is literate and thus only a small group of people can read.” This specific passage is from a play entitled *Shei de zuiguo* 谁的罪过 [Whose fault?].

community.<sup>55</sup> These efforts to specifically target multiple groups extended to the cover art and interior illustrations of mass education literacy textbooks, many of which depicted groups of boys and girls reading together or provided illustrations of Tibetans and Manchus to demonstrate the idea of legal equality.<sup>56</sup>

This embrace of equality and inclusion across age, gender, occupational, and ethnic lines did not mean that textbooks were without any kind of bias or omission. For example, a prominent series of primary school literacy textbooks published by the Commercial Press, *Xinshidai guoyu jiaokeshu* 新时代国语教科书 [New era national language textbook], featured boys and girls reading together on its cover, but illustrations of classrooms within the volume only included male students.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile, the illustrations depicting different ethnic groups in Shen Baiying's literacy textbook consistently show the "Han" race in modern-style "Sun suits" (modeled after the preferred costume of deceased prime minister Sun Zhongshan and conveying

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<sup>55</sup> In some ways, this conception of literacy as a strategy for including diverse groups seems to echo the argument put forth in Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* that "vernacular languages-of-state" provided the basis for establishing state control and included the masses in the history of the nation itself. Yet in the case of mass literacy readers, the actual content of the material being read seems less important than the mere fact of literacy itself—by simply asserting that everyone should have this basic skill, reformers were able to establish an inclusive basis for a national community and a justification for popular education reform programs. Of course, there were many other language reformers who were more directly involved in the creation of a "vernacular language-of-state" through which to deliver political tutelage, as evidenced by ongoing conversations about the simplification of Chinese characters and the growing abundance of civic readers festooned with simplified phonetic alphabets. For an example of the latter in a mass education context, see Ministry of Education, ed., *Minzhong xuexiao keben*, the first nine pages of which are printed entirely in the *zhuyin fuhao* 注音符号 phonetic semisyllabary developed earlier in the Republican period. For Anderson's discussion of language and nationalism, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism: Revised Edition* (London: Verso Books, 2006), 67-82.

<sup>56</sup> For an example of a mass literacy text featuring boys and girls reading together, see Qinghai Provincial Government Department of Education, ed., *Minzhong shizi keben* 民众识字课本 [Mass literacy text] (Xining: Chunming shudian, 1942); for an example of lessons on the equality of ethnic minority groups, see Shen, *Shizi keben*, 20-21.

<sup>57</sup> He Zhenhui 胡贞惠, ed., *Xinshidai guoyu jiaokeshu* 新时代国语教科书 [New era national language textbook] (Shanghai: Shanghai Commercial Press, 1928). The equality of the boys and girls on the book's front cover is reinforced by their identical poses. This particular series of texts was personally edited and approved by Cai Yuanpei, who was then serving as head of the Nanjing Education Academy, which was itself responsible for approving all mass education textbooks. Cai had a large personal influence on GMD popular education policy, particularly after 1930. For more on Cai's role in the GMD Ministry of Education, see Huang Jianli, *The Politics of Depoliticization*, 77-98.

a sense of urban sophistication), while other ethnic groups are shown wearing more traditional garb.<sup>58</sup> To a certain degree, these gender and racial juxtapositions helped to demonstrate the ways in which “citizen” is an inherently exclusive signification, whereby individual attempts to depict a true or ideal citizen fail to represent the lived realities of individual Chinese people, especially women and racial minorities.<sup>59</sup> Yet even as the pictographic representations of citizenship within mass literacy readers reveal how the costume and behaviors of modern political subjecthood were still associated primarily with ethnically Han men, the intent of the textbooks authors and mass education pedagogical experts represent a significant shift from earlier efforts to incorporate women into the realm of popular education. Whereas late Qing articulations of *guomin* education were quick to assert that women should be educated in order to serve as “mothers of citizens,” mass education textbooks made clear efforts to place women on equal educational footing as men, with one review assignment claiming, “we should promote men helping women and women helping me. The four hundred million countrymen of China must all help one another.”<sup>60</sup> While lessons like those in the *Minzhong qianzi keben* continued to acknowledge the existence of separate occupational groups like farmers or workers, and some local mass education departments even continued to develop supplementary training programs

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<sup>58</sup> Shen, *Shizi keben*, 20-21. For a more focused analysis of the role of the Sun suit in expressing cosmopolitan modernity, see Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 60-85. As Harrison argues, schools (and, to a lesser extent, textbooks) were one of the most important avenues through which often foreign-educated teachers and state actors “conveyed the norms of costume and etiquette,” such as wearing the Sun suit, which defined one as being a modern citizen. The fact that the Sun suit could only be worn by men reflects another way in which depictions of the modern Chinese national subject continued to exclude women, and while markers of urban sophistication like the Sun suit were less central to popularizing enterprises like mass education (in which most students could not afford Western-style dress), the casual exclusion of women within the depictions of the Han race is reflective of the degree to which gender biases continued to inform the marketing of Chinese political modernity.

<sup>59</sup> It is precisely this aspect of citizenship that Iris Marion Young criticized in her seminal essay on universal citizenship, which posits that any vision of citizenship deemed to be representational of a general will almost necessarily excludes particular groups (often women). See Iris Marion Young, “Polity and Group Difference: A Critique of the Ideal of Universal Citizenship,” in *The Citizenship Debates: A Reader*, ed. Gerson Shafir (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 263-290.

<sup>60</sup> Shen, *Shizi keben*, 24.

designed to address the educational needs of specific communities, the rhetoric of professors, publishers, and textbook censors at the Jiangsu College of Education makes clear that they viewed the targets of mass education as a single national community of masses with shared interests and abilities.<sup>61</sup>

Because mass education proponents thought of themselves as serving a singular community of masses, they also began to increasingly promote an undifferentiated education system that eroded the distinctions between formal and non-formal schooling. One of the earliest texts on mass education, *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC*, which was published independently of the GMD Ministry of Education, drew a distinction between mass education and school education, even going so far as to say that “the word ‘*minzhong jiaoyu*’ refers to any kind of education other than ‘ordinary school education.’”<sup>62</sup> Such a distinction seems to be in keeping with Sun Zhongshan’s own vision of democratic governance, which despite generally embracing equality continued to draw a distinction between “the masses” and elites on the basis of educational attainment. As Sun suggested, “The foundation of national government must be built upon the rights of the people, but as for the administration of government, this task is best left to experts (*zhuanmenjia* 专门家),” who received the necessary school training to fulfill their duties.<sup>63</sup> By the mid-1930s,

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<sup>61</sup> The Hankou Municipal Mass Education Teacher Training Academy provides one example of a local institution that continued to offer specialized supplementary training to workers, merchants, farmers, and women based on their unique social position. Classes for women included household chores, nursing, cooking, and childcare, while those for farmers included lessons on agricultural policy, new village groups, rural economics, and production methods. These curricula, however, were clearly meant to supplement a singular mass education curriculum that applied to all groups. One could even argue that specific education issues like agricultural production methods were given their own supplementary training course because their lack of universal appeal made them a poor fit for any curriculum labeled “education for *minzhong*.” See Hankou Municipal Bureau of Education, *Shili minzhong jiaoyu jiaoshi jiangxisuo baogao* 市立民众教育教师讲习所报告 [Report on the city’s mass education teacher training institute] (Hankou: Hankou shili jiaoyu si, 1930), 3.

<sup>62</sup> Fan, *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC*, 1.

<sup>63</sup> Sun Zhongshan, “Minquanzhuyi: di wu jiang 民权主义: 第五讲” [Democracy: fifth lecture], in *Sanminzhuyi*, 171. Marie-Claire Bergère suggests that Sun’s attitudes towards education represent one of the areas where his elitism shown through, and his belief in the natural variability of intellectual abilities among people allowed him to

however, mass education training manuals had moved away from Sun's multi-tiered education system, suggesting instead that "life is a whole thing, society is a whole thing, and education is a whole thing." Yu Qingtang even went as far as to suggest that the ultimate aim of education reform was to make "mass education and school education completely integrated" into a single whole.<sup>64</sup> Indeed, one of the reasons why education reformer Gan Yuyuan rejected the term "social education" was not because of the ambiguity of the signifier "society," but simply because "what is today called 'social education' really only deals with education outside of schools," whereas *minzhong* education included formal and non-formal schooling, up to and including "augmented university education and mass colleges (*minzhong daxue* 民众大学). On this front, Gan was even slightly critical of the GMD Ministry of Education for continuing to administer mass education projects through Chen Lijiang's Department of Social Education, which Gan felt unnecessarily limited the scope of mass education to previous popular education initiatives.<sup>65</sup> In justifying this more undifferentiated approach to popular education, scholars like Gan and Yu were less likely to cite Sun Zhongshan thought and more likely to reference recent pedagogical theory, which equated education with experiential learning within and beyond the classroom. Like Tao Xingzhi and Yan Yangchu before them, mass education supporters were especially eager to cite the work of John Dewey, with Gan claiming that "according to Dewey's understanding, we receive an education everyday that we are alive simply because our lives are compromised of various activities...which in turn form a continuously changing set of experiences."<sup>66</sup> Thus, reformers used the language of experiential learning to further the GMD's

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privilege an enlightened minority tasked with "making democracy" over the masses themselves. See Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 374-376.

<sup>64</sup> Yu, *Minzhong jiaoyu*, 3.

<sup>65</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 10-11.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

goal of establishing a singular discursive framework for envisioning the Chinese political subject, even as they moved away from the specific educational models suggested by Sun Zhongshan himself.

Reformers' eagerness to cite foreign pedagogical theorists to support their proposals is further reflected in the ways that mass education proponents historically framed their projects. Although Gan was quick to distinguish *minzhong* education from the history of failure that plagued popular education projects in Republican China, reformers were keen to juxtapose their efforts with a broader history of popular education successes outside of China. In his introduction to *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC*, for example, Fan Wanghu cites educational psychologist Edward Thorndike's maxim that "education is change" and suggests that if readers truly want to understand the destiny of mass education in China, they must first look to the history and direction of educational trends in the West, where education systems had undergone rapid changes over the past half-century.<sup>67</sup> In Fan's thumbnail sketch of the history of Western education theory, he asserts that European education used to be dominated by church-based educational institutions, which focused on cultivating individual morals, while more recent educational systems, inspired by the pedagogical advances of Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Friedrich Fröbel, and Johan Friedrich Herbart, began to focus more on the needs of society. This trend toward meeting the needs of society culminated in the theory of "social education" developed by William Chandler Bagley and John Dewey, which provided the immediate precedent for contemporary educational advancements in France, England, and the United States. In summing up this intellectual history of Western pedagogy, Fan concludes that while Western education had previously "laid stress on the individual, they have gradually shifted to looking at

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<sup>67</sup> Fan, *Minzhong jiaoyu ABC*, 2.

social conditions, so that they now lay particular stress on the whole society.” Among the major global powers of the early twentieth century, Fan argues, “there is not a single country that has not changed from a two-track system to a one-track system or from an education system defined by social class to an education system designed for the whole people (*quanmin* 全民).”<sup>68</sup> While a full discussion of the intellectual shifts among the educational theory of scholars like Herbart, Bagley, and Dewey lies beyond the scope of this dissertation, it seems clear that Fan’s assertion of a global trend away from the individual and toward a collective view of society relies upon a rather selective interpretation of these authors’ works, many of which used the language of educational psychology to argue that schools needed to focus *more* on the individual needs and abilities of students so that they might better acquire specific vocational skills or serve specific communities. Indeed, this focus on the individual was a key theme in the translations of Dewey’s lectures that appeared in the pages of May Fourth journals like *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 and *Jiaoyu chao* 教育潮 a decade earlier.<sup>69</sup> For Fan and the promoters of mass education, however, individuals (and individual social groups) were simply not as important to the broader goals of mass education, which sought to “achieve freedom and equality for the whole Chinese people” rather than for its individual constituents.<sup>70</sup> By positioning their own mass education efforts as part of a broader global trend, however selectively described, reformers were able to reinforce

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> For a celebratory translation of a lecture from Dewey on individuality and education, see Pan Gongzhan 潘公展, “Pingmin zhuyi de jiaoyu (ji Duwei boshi zai Jiangsusheng jiaoyuhui yanjiang de dayao) 平民主义的教育 (记杜威博士在江苏省教育会演讲的大要)” [Democratic education (an outline of remarks made by Dr. John Dewey at the Jiangsu Provincial Education Society)], *Jiaoyu chao* 教育潮 [Educational tide] 1.2 (1919): 85-93. This lecture was also printed in *Xin jiaoyu* 新教育 1.3 (1919): 109-114. Although the lecture in question does take care to distinguish “individuality” (*gexingzhuyi* 个性主义) from “individualism” (*gerenzhuyi* 个人主义), the latter of which was seen by Dewey’s translators as detrimental to education and social wellbeing, the May Fourth students recording Dewey’s ideas were nonetheless excited by an education program focused around meeting the needs of specific individuals and communities rather than creating a one-size-fits-all education policy.

<sup>70</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 16-17.

the idea that *minzhong* education was a modern and almost universal tool of continued social progress. Collapsing China's diverse interest groups into a single class of masses, then, was not just one possible means of combating China's most pressing and politically disruptive social problems. To mass education reformers, it was practically inevitable.

Before moving on to the second major goal of mass education theorists, it is worth considering the ways in which this effort to redefine the Chinese political subject as a singular, classless whole was connected to previous popular education programs in China. Although mass education supporters tried to distinguish their efforts from the failures of the past two decades, the basic motivations and anxieties that inspired their programs would have been familiar to their late Qing and early Republican forebears. Late Qing education reformers distinguished their programs from the civil service examination by arguing that popular education should target "all citizens (*guomin*)" and not simply the literati elite. Although this desire to educate a broad national community was not necessarily motivated by a fear of class conflict, it nevertheless stemmed from a belief that China's global position would be determined by the collective achievements of its people, the political unity of whom was vital to China's national strength. In 1921, *Pingmin jiaoyu* editor Chang Daozhi went even further when he defined *pingmin* education in English as "education for equalizing society" and proclaimed that its primary goal was to "eliminate social classes," thereby uniting the Chinese political subject into a single, cohesive whole.<sup>71</sup> These previous attempts at popular education in the Republican period primarily sought not the creation of new rights-bearing individuals, but rather the construction of a singular national body of citizens, universally cognizant of their obligations to the nation, and entitled to the benefits that would help them fulfill those obligations. The embrace of *minzhong*

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<sup>71</sup> Chang Daozhi 常道直, "Pingmin jiaoyu zhi xin jieshi 平民教育之新解释" [A new interpretation of *pingmin* education], *Pingmin jiaoyu* 29 (Feb 1921); reprint WSST 3: 291.



as a stable descriptor for this national whole represents not a fundamental change in the way that reformers envisioned Chinese society, but rather a sharpening of the rhetorical strategy by which reformers made that national whole legible to teachers, administrators, and everyday students. Whereas terms like *pingmin* and *guomin* contained sufficient semantic ambiguity as to allow for alternative visions of the Chinese political subject, mass education supporters worked to ensure that *minzhong* could not be misinterpreted as anything but a unified national body. In his own analysis of Nanjing-era civics textbooks, Robert Culp suggests that the Maoist social engineering “built its structure of the ‘People-as-One’ on the foundations of national reconstruction left by the Nationalist regime,” which emphasized a single organic social whole.<sup>72</sup> What the struggle of mass education reformers illustrates is that the roots of this endeavor actually extend back before the Nanjing period to the *guomin* and *pingmin* education projects that inspired the GMD’s collectivist vision.

Having effectively expanded the scope of popular education to include all of the Chinese people, regardless of age, class, gender, or educational attainment, the question remained of what knowledge, values, skills, and behaviors *minzhong* education sought to instill in its students. In some respects, the universalist scope of the targets of mass education bled into its contents as well, with reformers claiming that mass education should include every variety of information, skills, and values. Whereas previous reformers such as Yan Yangchu had focused explicitly on literacy education, vocational training, and civic organization, mass education reformers now

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<sup>72</sup> Culp, “Setting the Sheet of Loose Sand,” 81-82. In making this particular critique, Culp is actually responding to Mayfair Yang, who has suggested that Maoist efforts to collectivize society were in stark contrast with the social disintegration that characterized the Republican period. In the main, I agree with Culp that the foundations for this collectivist vision of society was actually fairly well established during the Nationalist period, at least among the intellectual elite, and that in general, the visions of society offered by the GMD and CCP did not differ as substantially as their constituents may think. For Mayfair Yang’s original claim, see Mayfair Meihui Yang, *Gifts, Favors, and Banquets: The Art of Social Relationships in China* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), especially chapter seven.

criticized these goals as too narrow. According to Gan Yuyuan, too many of the previous decade's *pingmin* education initiatives did not provide sufficient attention to teaching students how to keep fit, manage the household, and understand Sun Zhongshan's political philosophy. His own outline for the contents of mass education was incredibly diverse, including classes on hygiene education, vocational education, home economics education, political education, language education, and group training exercises.<sup>73</sup> Yu Qingtang provided a slightly more concise vision, claiming that mass education should "cultivate and develop the mores of citizenship, productive skills, and the ability to lead a collective life."<sup>74</sup> But which of these diverse goals was the most important, and what did new curricular goals like political education (*zhengzhi jiaoyu* 政治教育) and citizenship mores (*gongmin daode* 公民道德) actually entail? In prescribing the contents of these new curricular categories, mass education theorists and mass education textbook editors were both defining the intent of the GMD's "period of political tutelage" and establishing the intellectual acts that would be required of Chinese citizens in the new order. Reformers were certainly not uniform in their descriptions of the contents of mass education—Gan claimed in 1932 that it was still "an unresolved issue"—but within the ongoing debate over mass education, several points of consensus emerge.<sup>75</sup>

On the question of literacy, professors and textbook authors were clearer than ever that literacy was a necessary but insufficient skill for all citizens, with the act of "reading books" especially singled out as being merely a means to an end. One national language textbook, first published in 1928 and revised in 1932 after the GMD's mass education program was well underway, included the following exchange between a teacher and a young student:

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<sup>73</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 5-6.

<sup>74</sup> Yu, *Minzhong jiaoyu*, 4.

<sup>75</sup> Gan, *Xin zhonghua minzhon jiaoyu*, 1.

The teacher asked Su'er, "Why do you come to school?" Su'er answered, "Because my mother tells me to go to school." The teacher then asked, "but why does your mother tell you to go to school?" Su'er replied, "She tells me to go to school because she wants me to read books." "No!" scolded the teacher, "your mother tells you to go to school because she hopes that in the future you will be able to work and to become a useful person. When you are in school, you are studying how to do work and how to be useful. School does not teach you how to rigidly read books (*si du shu* 死读书) because rigidly reading books is not useful!"<sup>76</sup>

Passages such as these represent a common belief among mass education proponents and directly echo the language used by Tao Xingzhi, who questioned the value of reading and warned students of the need to "use living books" (*yong huo shu* 用活书) and "use books in a flexible way" (*huo yong shu* 活用书).<sup>77</sup> Even textbooks explicitly focused on mass literacy, such as *Shizi mingli* 识字明理 [Reading made reasonable], edited by Yang Xiaochun 杨校春 (1895-1938), noted in the introduction that "for a person living in society, reason is more important than literacy; as such this textbook is not called a 'thousand character text' but rather a textbook for 'knowing characters and understanding reason.'"<sup>78</sup> Wei Bingxin, whose own textbook retained

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<sup>76</sup> Hu Zhenhui, *Xin shidai guoyu jiaokeshu*, Vol. 5, 2. The theme of this passage is reinforced by the next lesson in the textbooks, which tells the story of a man who learns to swim by reading books on swimming, but then nearly drowns when he actually enters the water because he lacks practical experience. This rather frightening incident is actually presented as humorous in the text, but nevertheless illustrates that the practical application (or, in this instance, misapplication) of literacy could be a matter of life and death.

<sup>77</sup> Tao Xingzhi first began to develop this language in his seminal essay "The False Intelligentsia," which was published as part of the collection *Zhongguo jiaoyu gaizao* in 1928. By the early 1930s, Tao frequently spoke of the harms of "rigidly reading books" and "reading dead books" in essays such as "Xinjiu shidai zhi xuesheng 新旧时代之学生" [Students in new and old eras], in *Shenbao* 申报 (Nov 11, 1931), "Muqian Zhongguo jiaoyu liang tiao luxian 目前中国教育两条路线" [Two paths facing Chinese education today], in *Jiaoyu zhouban* 教育周刊 [Education weekly] 137 (Nov 1932), and "Shenghuo jiaoyu 生活教育" [Life education], the lead essay in the inaugural addition of Tao's journal by the same title, first published in February 1934. All of the above essays are reprinted in *Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, Chen Heqin jiaoyu wenxuan* 陶行知黄炎培徐特立陈鹤琴教育文选 [Selected education writings of Tao Xingzhi, Huang Yanpei, Xu Teli, and Chen Heqin] (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1992), 35-36, 36-39, and 50-52, respectively. The fact that the Chinese characters for "life" (*huo* 活) and "death" (*si* 死) can also mean "flexible" and "stiff" helped lend rhetorical elegance to Tao's formation of how best to read books. Also, the prevalence of Tao's language in textbooks of the era help to demonstrate that even as Tao himself was widely shunned by the Guomindang following the closure of his Xiaozhuang Experimental School, his ideas were still popular among members of the education reform community.

<sup>78</sup> Yang Xiaochun 杨校春, ed., *Shizi mingli* 识字明理 [Reading made reasonable] (Shandong: Shandong xiangcun jianshe yanjiu yuan, 1934), 1-2. Yang, who previously worked as a "political instructor" at Xiaozhuang

the name “thousand character text” and whose first lesson encouraged farmers, workers, and businessmen to “come and read books,” also immediately followed the first lesson by claiming “Good citizens (*hao guomin* 好国民) must do work...to be a good citizen, one must read books earnestly and work hard.”<sup>79</sup> Although the Ministry of Education continued to sponsor focused “literacy movements” (*shizi yundong* 识字运动), and individual literacy initiatives like the Zhejiang Literacy Movement working group continued to promote reading as “the key to opening the storeroom of knowledge,” mass education publishers made it clear that literacy alone was not enough to achieve the loftier goals of mass education.<sup>80</sup>

Rather, the knowledge seeming most central to mass education was political knowledge—specifically an awareness of the symbology of the Guomindang state, of the details of Sun Zhongshan’s life, and of the perilous conditions of China’s present political struggle. In outlining a basic framework for the goals of mass education, Gan Yuyuan cited GMD national education law, which stated that “schools of all levels should teach the Three People’s Principles...and ensure that both knowledge and morality are presented primarily within a Three People’s Principles framework.”<sup>81</sup> The editors of mass education textbooks clearly took this directive to heart, as even the most practically-oriented textbooks, whose introductions claimed they were designed to serve “the everyday needs of the people,” consisted primarily of lessons

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Experimental School and had since been appointed as headmaster of Huanglu Normal School at the suggestion of Tao Xingzhi, chose the somewhat loosely translated English title “Reading Made Reasonable” himself.

<sup>79</sup> Wei, *Minzhong qianzike*, 3.

<sup>80</sup> For the promotion of literacy by the Zhejiang literacy committee see Zhejiang shizi yundong weiyuanhui, *Zhejiang sheng shizi yundong nianbao*, 1. Many of the education projects explicitly branded as “literacy movements” continued to suggest that literacy was both an essential skill for citizens and a central collective measure of national worth, but when viewed in context with other initiatives within mass education, it becomes clear that the early 1930s witnessed a continued de-emphasis on literacy as an end in itself, with even the GMD’s literacy propaganda bureau lamenting the “uselessness” of literacy among the scholarly classes alongside the lack of literacy among farmers and workers. See, for example, Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang zhixing weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu *Shizi yundong xuanchuan gangyao*, 1-2.

<sup>81</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 17.

on *Sanminzhuyi*, the national flag, Sun Zhongshan's personal biography, and even descriptions of his mausoleum.<sup>82</sup> In a learning environment in which many students could not be guaranteed to finish an entire text, editors even worked to place this kind of civic awareness ahead of lessons with more obvious personal utility. For example, a textbook produced for Shanghai's mass literacy programs by the Commercial press began with lessons on political unification and how to be a good citizen, even preceding more basic lessons on providing one's name.<sup>83</sup> Another textbook, published directly by the Ministry of Education, devoted full color ink to a second lesson illustrating the meaning of the national flag, before turning to similar lessons on the importance of buying Chinese goods, and only much later to lessons on keeping accounts.<sup>84</sup> Many of the practical economic lessons that had previously found themselves at the forefront of popular education textbooks in the mid 1920s found themselves pushed aside in favor of these more political lessons, and the trend continued through to start of the war with Japan, when education departments in interior provinces like Qinghai and Jiangxi published mass education texts on "loving the nation," "paying taxes," and "serving in the army" before turning to more mundane topics like geography, weather, and the cardinal directions.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> For a textbook explicitly claiming to be designed in accordance with the "needs of everyday people," see Shen, *Shizi keben*, 1. The descriptions of Sun Zhongshan in these textbooks tended to be especially hagiographic in character, with one text in Shen's book claiming that a fourteen-year-old Sun was especially diligent in speech, hardworking in character, and treated everyone equally (see pp. 36-37).

<sup>83</sup> Shanghai shi jiaoyubu, *Shanghai shi minzhong shizi keben*, 1-4.

<sup>84</sup> Jiaoyu bu, *Minzhong xuexiao keben*, 10-11.

<sup>85</sup> See Qinghai Provincial Government Department of Education, 1-2; and Jiaofei qu jiaoyu sheji weiyuanhui 剿匪区教育设计委员会 [The Educational Planning Committee of the District for Suppressing Bandits], *Minzhong keben* 民众课本 [Mass textbook] (Nanchang: Nanchang headquarters of the Nationalist Government Military Committee, n.d), 1-2. The second text was published sometime after 1938, and the military focus of this later volume can be explained in large part by the ongoing military hostilities between the Nationalist government and their enemies, including both the Communists and the invading Japanese army. The text features multiple lessons on military service, including a lesson on bravery that reads, "If you do not kill bandits, bandits will kill you; it is better to risk one's life than to simply be killed. Cravenly fearing death is especially disgraceful." A later lesson in the same text makes clear that "bandits" (*fei* 匪) refers primarily to Communist military organizers, but the lessons could be applied just as easily to Japanese troops. Lessons and passages like these make clear that even textbooks with

Another distinguishing feature of Nanjing Decade mass education textbooks, and a clear component of the political knowledge required of all masses in China, was a focus on China's fundamentally colonial condition, and the role of the Guomindang in overthrowing foreign domination. An introduction to the *Shanghai Municipal Literacy Textbook* claimed that one of its primary goals was to help "adults and young people who have been denied an education" to "understand the present situation of the country, and to inspire an enthusiasm for saving the country."<sup>86</sup> Lesson twenty-nine of the textbook made clear that "the present situation" was one of national humiliation (*guochi* 国耻), which had begun with the Opium War but recently reached new depths with the Japanese acquisition of four northeastern territories following the "September 18<sup>th</sup> Incident," sometimes referred to in English as the Mukden incident or Manchurian incident.<sup>87</sup> This event, which served as the pretext for the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, was a particularly important topic for mass education supporters, as many within China felt that the uneducated status of the masses was partly to blame. In the words of mass education promoter Zheng Yihua 郑一华, the Japanese were able to take over China's northeastern territories so quickly because the people there lacked the national consciousness necessary to mount a strong resistance, and the incident thus served as a dire warning to what might happen elsewhere should the GMD fail to enact popular education in the rest of the country.<sup>88</sup> Lessons on "saving the motherland" and "overthrowing imperialism" frequently

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universalist aims were often edited to serve specific local conditions, but that the political content continued to supersede lessons focused on more everyday topics.

<sup>86</sup> Shanghai shi jiaoyubu, *Shanghaishi minzhong shizi keben*, 1.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>88</sup> Zheng Yihua 郑一华, ed., *Minguo nianyi nian de minzhong jiaoyu* 民国廿一年的民众教育 [Mass education in 1932] (Wuxi: Jiangsu shengli jiaoyu xueyuan yuanjiu shiyan bu, 1933), 1-2. Zheng even claimed that the September 18<sup>th</sup> incident constituted a turning point not just in the history of China, but in the history of mass education, as it marked a moment when the need for mass education became most apparent.

emerged in texts published by the Commercial Press, the World Book Company, and other leading publishers, most of which operated under direct oversight from the GMD Ministry of Education, but were also operating under the same colonial crisis.<sup>89</sup> One lesson on Three People's Principles in Wei Bingxin's *Mass Thousand Character Text* adopted the common rebranding of Sun's political philosophy from "Sanmin-ism" (Three People-ism) to "Saving the country-ism" (*jiuguozhuyi* 救国主义) in order to better reinforce the notion that Sun's ideas (and by extension the GMD state) were a fundamental means of achieving national salvation.<sup>90</sup> Lessons like these formed the core contents of mass education textbooks, despite their claiming to provide only the most efficacious "600 daily-use characters" required to be a productive citizen. By cloaking their lessons in the language of practical education but reorganizing their contents to reflect the political goals of the GMD, mass textbook authors effectively redefined the meaning of experiential learning itself, transforming national consciousness and anti-imperial politics into practical skills that constituted "the fundamental knowledge required of *guomin*."<sup>91</sup> Notably, it was specifically this kind of national *awareness* (and identification with fellow members of the national political community), rather than individual political *action*, that truly qualified one as a citizen of China.

To be clear, political dogma did not entirely monopolize the GMD's mass education initiatives. Many reformers no doubt agreed with Yu Qingtang, who suggested that the very best mass schools would follow traditional school education in targeting students' "physical health, the cultivation of their moral character, the amplification of their consciousness, the cultivation of their artistic interests, the expansion of their vocational knowledge, and the training necessary

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<sup>89</sup> Wei, *Minzhong qianzi keben*, 23 and Shen, *Shizi keben*, 38-39.

<sup>90</sup> Wei, *Minzhong qianzi keben*, 24.

<sup>91</sup> Shanghai shi jiaoyubu, *Shanghai shi minzhong shizi keben*, 1.

to live a collective life.”<sup>92</sup> Even the political content that was present in textbooks, such as the simplified lessons on Three People’s Principles, was no doubt subject to many of the same divergent interpretations that emerged from its source material. In fact, when it comes to examining the impact of these politically-minded texts on the broader Chinese populace, there is ample evidence presented by historians that students only occasionally internalized these political messages in the ways intended by textbook authors.<sup>93</sup> Yet the practical implementation of mass education pedagogy, as revealed in the textbooks offered to students, nevertheless demonstrates the privileged position afforded to political knowledge within the mass education curriculum, as well as the ways in which previous vocational skills like literacy were now seen as a means of accessing the values that bound the Chinese people to the GMD state and to one another. Although mass education readers were not entirely devoted to expressly national symbols and party doctrine, they represented one of the primary ways that the GMD was able to

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<sup>92</sup> Yu, *Minzhong jiaoyu*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Henrietta Harrison argues quite persuasively that many of the Nationalist revolution’s most important symbols and holidays, including the National flag, the Sun suit, and even the image of Sun Zhongshan himself, were very malleable, and that even as the GMD proved successful in spreading the adoption of these national symbols over a larger geographic area, they continued to mean different things to different constituents (Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen*, 225-243). Notably, Harrison argues that GMD promotion of the “Shining Sun” flag (with a white sun in a blue square on a red background) helped promote equality and “served as an effort to move way from the Leninist rhetoric that defined the republic against imperialism and warlordism” (p. 189). The evidence presented here suggests that anti-colonial narratives remained central to GMD politics well into the 1930s, even in areas like mass education, where they seemed more tangential to reformers’ stated goal of spreading basic knowledge and skills. More recently, Robert Culp has suggested that the GMD was actually quite successful in inculcating at least a certain segment of students with a basic framework of active citizenship defined by participation in student clubs and school government. His own analysis of student journals reveals that many Nanjing-era students (at least in relatively wealthy schools) deeply internalized the political lessons of their civics textbooks and enacted them on a local stage. See Culp, *Articulating Citizenship*, 209-277. Although a lack of evidence from “mass education” students precludes me from saying whether they were as likely as their traditional school counterparts to adopt the political language of their readers, the continued emphasis on such issues over a broad span of time reflects their ongoing importance to the textbook publishers. And on a very broad level, the immense levels of popular participation in the anti-colonial political initiatives of the CCP several decades later suggest that such colonial awareness was not entirely new to mass audiences.



disseminate the texts, images, and ideas associated with the GMD, and in so doing, foster a broader identification with the nation-state.<sup>94</sup>

The focus on developing national consciousness also helped to reinforce educators' other stated goal of imagining "the people" as a single organic whole. Mass Education leaders working within the Jiangsu University Department of Education certainly saw the value in vocational training and remained committed to developing "productive skills" (*shengchan de jineng* 生产的技能) among their students, but many also feared that too heavy an emphasis on specific vocational training would potentially re-establish the same class and vocational boundaries that the discourse on mass education was intended to eliminate. Gan Yuyuan even criticized the Ministry of Education's Social Education Division on precisely these grounds, noting that when one analyzes the contents of "supplementary vocational education for farmers, workers, and merchants, or special education for those with mental and physical disabilities," one finds that they "unavoidably end up leaving something out while repeating something else," and thus cannot truly be called "mass education."<sup>95</sup> For Gan, political mobilization of GMD ideology and a practical awareness of China's colonial status reflected universal conditions that, unlike focused vocational training, could be applied equally to all of the masses.

In many respects, the twin goals of *minzhong jiaoyu*—targeting a single group of undifferentiated masses and training them in the political knowledge necessary to fulfill their national obligations as citizens—echo the very first articulations of popular education launched

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<sup>94</sup> For a more detailed discussion of how the GMD mobilized the image of Sun Zhongshan, see Chen Yunqian 陈蕴茜, *Chongbai yu jiyi: Sun Zhongshan fuhao de jiangou yu chuanbo* 崇拜与记忆: 孙中山符号的建构与传播 [Worship and memory: the design and spread of Sun Zhongshan symbology] (Nanjing: Nanjing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 562-583. Chen argues that the mobilization of symbols of Sun Zhongshan, particularly in the realm of education, required an effort to reorganize time and space on the level of everyday lived experience, and thus serves as a prime example of the new forms of "knowledge-power" made available by modern technology.

<sup>95</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 5-6.

almost three decades earlier. Like the late Qing educators who advocated on behalf of *guomin* education in *Jiaoyu zazhi*, mass education supporters sought to create a new national community united by shared norms and values. According to both these late Qing thinkers and their Nanjing Decade counterparts, “*guomin* values” could effectively transform the Chinese populace from Liang Qichao’s (and Sun Zhongshan’s) “sheet of loose sand” into a strong body of modern citizens, and it was the individual possession of these values that defined one as a full member of the Chinese political community. Similarly, both sets of reformers saw universal education not as a guaranteed right of a pre-existing body of citizens, but rather as a prerequisite to China’s national survival and an obligation that the people should fulfill. The similarities between these two groups are not attributable to the intellectual influence of any particular education reformer. After all, when Nanjing Decade mass education supporters explained the history of their own policy proposals, they turned to international popular education movements rather than the precedent set by Chinese reformers of the late Qing and Republican period. Rather, the resonances between early Qing and Nanjing Decade reformers stem from the shared colonial context in which such programs arose. Given the recent educational advancements in nations like England, Germany, the United States, and Japan, combined with China’s precarious international position as revealed through international treaties with these same states, reformers were convinced that universal popular education was both essential and essentially modern. Forming a nationalist whole defined by shared values was the only way that China could join the other powers and assume its place on the world stage.

Where the Nanjing reformers diverged from the popular education projects of the late Qing was in the contents of these shared values, and in the kinds of knowledge that were considered most fundamental to Chinese citizenship. Whereas many late Qing and early

Republican reformers saw literacy as an educational end in itself, one that both provided individuals with access to the Confucian classics and provided the nation with a statistical benchmark by which to measure its development, *minzhong* education supporters had internalized many of the popular education debates of the 1920s, which repositioned literacy as a vocational tool and a means to “do work.” In the intervening years, colonial discourses on China’s backwardness, which had been appropriated and redeployed by May Fourth leaders like Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi, had rendered Confucian texts and the social values they represented obsolete. Like Yan Yangchu before them, *minzhong* education advocates redefined “morals” (*daode* 道德) to focus less on textual knowledge and more on the practical skills associated with group cooperation and “living a collective life.”<sup>96</sup> Unlike Yan, however, the GMD-affiliated promoters of mass education abandoned the local framework within which individual citizens were supposed to enact these morals, and instead embraced a collective national consciousness based on awareness of China’s colonial status and identification with the GMD nation-state. In repositioning national symbols like the GMD party flag and the image of the “national father” (*guofu* 国父) Sun Zhongshan at the center of the “practical knowledge” required of citizens, *minzhong jiaoyu* scholars established a clear place for the GMD state as a tutelary leader at the head of a cohesive group of Chinese masses. In effect, the rhetoric of *minzhong* education wedded the moral goals of *guomin* education to the pedagogical critiques and practical strategies produced by *pingmin* education initiatives to create a singular and specific vision of the Chinese national subject.

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<sup>96</sup> Yu, *Minzhong jiaoyu*, 4.

## Coda: Guomin and the Guomindang

For all of its usefulness in describing a cohesive national community, the relative syntactical specificity of the term *minzhong* meant that it could not signal some of the political and social possibilities that had animated earlier generations of education reformers. For many late Qing political theorists and May Fourth social critics, neologisms like *guomin* and *pingmin* were popular because they refocused attention on a broader community of people but also represented a vision of what China might one day become: a strong nation empowered by politically aware individuals and a society defined by educational, economic, and political equality. *Minzhong* did not describe China's future. No education leader was looking for a way to teach the Chinese people to become "masses" in the way that previous reformers hoped to transform students into *guomin* or *pingmin*. The Chinese people simply *were* masses by virtue of their presumably shared stake in the fortunes of the Chinese nation-state and the novel rhetoric reformers adopted to label them as such.<sup>97</sup> Thus, while this chapter has demonstrated that *minzhong* education served as a popular platform from which to re-envision the Chinese national subject and to redefine the types of knowledge that this new national subject required, it was not itself synonymous with modern citizenship in China.

To fully understand the ways in which teachers', administrators' and social activists' ideas about citizenship had changed by the middle of the Nanjing Decade, we must return instead

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<sup>97</sup> Even as reformers continued to insist that *minzhong* education had broad horizons, the education community still often used the word "*minzhong*" to refer to the previous group of uneducated commoners targeted by other social education programs. Education journals like *Jiaoyu yu minzhong* 教育与民众 [Education and the masses], for instance, focused extensively on the work done by Yan Yangchu and other popular education reformers, while Yu Qingtang noted that "mass education," whatever its broader political intentions, should really start with educating "children, young people, and adults who have been deprived of an education" (Yu, *Minzhong jiaoyu*, 3). For examples of the continued elisions between *minzhong* education and *pingmin* education in the journal *Jiaoyu yu minzhong*, see "Zuijin minzhong jiaoyu xiaoxi: Shan shi zhi pingmin jiaoyu 最近民众教育消息: 汕市之平民教育" [Latest mass education news: Shan city's *pingmin* education], *Jiaoyu yu minzhong* 2.3 (1930): 9-10, and Chen Lijiang, "Dingxian pingmin jiaoyu shiyanqu canguanji 定县平民教育实验区参观记" [Tour diary of the Dingxian *pingmin* education experimental district], *Jiaoyu yu minzhong* 4.9 (1933): 1835-1862.

to the language that first animated early-twentieth-century approaches to popular education: *guomin*. After all, the bulk of the mass education campaigns of the late 1920s and early 1930s were formulated under the direction of the Guomindang, or literally “the party of *Guomin*.” The name “Guomindang” was first chosen in August 1912, when Sun Zhongshan and fellow Revolutionary Alliance (*tongmenhui* 同盟会) member Song Jiaoren 宋教仁 (1882-1913) sought to transform the political organization that had helped overthrow the Qing dynasty into a new political coalition capable of defending Republican political institutions during the chaotic months following the 1911 Revolution.<sup>98</sup> At the time of its selection, the name “*Guomin* party” no doubt contained much of the same energy and possibility that made *guomin* a popular choice for education activists of the late Qing. It reoriented the Revolutionary Alliance away from the tools of “blood and iron” that had fueled the recent revolution, and hinted at the existence of a broad national community whose collective action could stand in opposition to the neo-imperialist politics of Yuan Shikai. The party’s early victories in national parliamentary elections suggest that this inclusive language was actually quite popular, and the early party may have achieved even greater success had Sun Zhongshan not resigned from a leadership position and Song Jiaoren not been gunned down by assassins on March 20, 1913.<sup>99</sup> Yet even as the party’s political fortunes waned during the first decades of the Republic and the various warlord governments shifted away from the language of *guomin* in defining their social programs, the

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<sup>98</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the specific meeting that led to this rebranding, including a focused explanation of the political stakes involved for the effort’s chief intellectual architect, Song Jiaoren, see David Strand, *An Unfinished Republic: Leading by Word and Deed in Modern China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 38-51.

<sup>99</sup> Strand suggests that much of the appeal of the early GMD lay in the very ambiguity of its platform. The party had resulted from the merger of several previously distinct political factions, and new leaders like Song Jiaoren consistently prioritized electoral victories over ideological consistency. In this sense, the multiple valences of the term *guomin* suited the party well. Even still, several members of the new alliance disliked the name Guomindang, and the official rebranding was only settled after several rounds of debate (Strand, *An Unfinished Republic*, 40-42). For a deeper discussion of Sun Zhongshan’s role during this period, see Bergère, *Sun Yat-sen*, 227-236.

idea of *guomin* remained central to GMD rhetoric when it re-emerged as a national political force in the late 1920s. The term also remained a fundamental part of the GMD's mass education programs in the early 1930s, as many mass education texts sought to spread "*guomin* knowledge" (*guomin zhishi* 国民知识) and instill "*guomin* values" (*guomin daode* 国民道德).<sup>100</sup> A brief examination of the use of the term *guomin* within GMD education policy allows us not only to better understand how GMD-affiliated actors articulated the idea of citizenship in the Nanjing Decade, but also to compare this discourse to the first discussions of *guomin* several decades earlier, and to assess the degree to which ongoing tensions remained within Chinese conceptions of *guomin* over time.

On the surface at least, mass education reformers' use of the term *guomin* appears to retain many of the same ambiguities that motivated but ultimately undermined late Qing conceptions of citizenship, particularly with regard to the question of whether *guomin* constituted a pre-existing community in possession of certain rights and entitled to certain benefits or an aspirational political category dependent upon the acquisition of specific skills. An outline of the literacy movement published by the GMD Ministry of Propaganda seems to presume that all ethnically Chinese persons were inherently *guomin*, stating that the nation's fortunes would ultimately be determined by "whether or not the *guomin* are literate."<sup>101</sup> In his training manual for mass education teachers, Gan Yanyuan similarly laments that "the majority of *guomin* lack basic skills" and that it was the responsibility of the state to ensure that "all *guomin*," regardless

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<sup>100</sup> Lu Shaochang 陆绍昌 and Liu Chuahou 刘传厚, eds., *Xin Zhonghua gongmin keben* 新中华公民课本 [New China civics textbook] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1931), 1-2 and Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 16. For another example, see the Qinghai Department of Education's mass literacy textbook, the capstone lesson of which is about the obligations and rights of *guomin* (Qinghai sheng jiaoyubu, *Minzhong shizi keben*, 102).

<sup>101</sup> *Shizi yundong xuanchuan gangyao*, 1.

of their education level, receive mass education.<sup>102</sup> This use of *guomin* seems to be virtually synonymous with *minzhong* in that it seeks to describe a singular, cohesive social body that encompassed everyone in the nation. Furthermore, in making *guomin* a pre-existing designation, such claims seem to emphasize the obligation that the GMD state had to a group of citizens bound together by their status as Chinese nationals and by their status as shared recipients of social welfare like public education.

At the same time, many primary school and mass education textbooks overseen by the GMD Ministry of Education asserted a desire to “create perfect *guomin*,” and to help students “gain the fundamental knowledge required to be *guomin*.”<sup>103</sup> These texts continued to position *guomin* as set of specific skills, learned behaviors, and political values that could only be provided by the GMD party-state, especially during the year period of political tutelage prescribed in Sun’s political writings. As Robert Culp has argued, these specific values—at least as presented in primary and middle school textbooks—focused not on the political mobilization of individual or group interests, but rather on “instruction in the tropes of social integration and collective service.”<sup>104</sup> This particular self-development understanding of *guomin*, which was frequently used interchangeably with the even more aspirational *gongmin* 公民 (“public people”), clearly implied that citizenship was a social and cultural status that had to be earned, even and perhaps especially outside of politics.<sup>105</sup> Furthermore, the task of acquiring this status, as stressed in mass education textbooks, was a responsibility that individuals had to assume for themselves.

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<sup>102</sup> Gan, *Xin Zhonghua minzhong jiaoyu*, 2-3, 34-35.

<sup>103</sup> Shanghai shi shizi weiyuanhui 上海市识字委员会, *Duanshi xiaoxue keben* 短时小学课本 [Short-term primary school textbook] Vol. 2 (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935), 65 and Shanghai shi jiaoyuju, *Shanghai shi minzhong shizi keben*, 1.

<sup>104</sup> Culp, “Setting the Sheet of Loose Sand,” 50-51.

<sup>105</sup> If *minzhong* clearly referred to a pre-existing community, *gongmin* just as clearly referred only to those who had received a civic education. One early civics textbook, edited by Zhu Wenshu 朱文叔 (1895-1966) and overseen by

The stable cohabitation of these competing positions reveals a substantial shift from the broader but more contested discourses of earlier decades. Recall that during the late Qing, competing visions of *guomin* training revealed deep fissures within the popular education community over the relationship between the people and the state, as well as the role of knowledge in mediating that relationship. Modernizing textbook editors like Zhuang Yu insisted that *guomin* education should embrace new standards of physical fitness, Western science, and civic morals to prepare the Chinese people to meet modern political challenges, even if that meant focusing first on a smaller circle of elites who had participated directly in the civil service examination system. Simplified literacy proponents like Lu Erkui, meanwhile, felt that popular education should actually try to lower its standards in order to incorporate the farmers, workers, and women who had previously been denied an education but were now the responsibility of the constitutional Qing state. These two proposals represented fundamentally different visions of popular education, which would require targeting different communities, allocating different resources, and spreading different values. By contrast, 1930s mass education advocates were able to conceive of a single popular education scheme that effectively elided these two positions, promising an education system that would serve a universal pre-existing group of *guomin*, while also transforming them into “good *guomin*” capable of thinking and acting on behalf of the nation.

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former *Jiaoyu zazhi* contributor and simplified literacy advocate Lu Feikui, claimed that *gongmin* could only apply to those who were “able to carry out the duties required by law.” The text further clarified that to be considered a *gongmin* one had to be a certain age, live in the Republic of China, own a certain amount of property, graduate from a certain level of school, and serve in some kind of public office for a certain period of time (a later lesson conceded that of the final three requirements, any one of them would likely be sufficient to be considered a *gongmin*). See Zhu Wenshu, ed., *Gongmin keben* 公民课本 [Civic reader] Vol. 4 (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1925), 1-2. This specific vision of citizenship was incredibly common among textbooks that labeled themselves “*gongmin* readers” during the Nanjing Decade.



This elision between being and becoming citizens was made possible by two key historical factors. The first was the ongoing set of political and epistemological conditions that attended colonial modernity in China. When Liang Qichao surveyed international politics at the turn of the twentieth century and declared that the power of states rested on a political, social, and moral foundation of *guomin*, he was essentially announcing a radical position derived from German and Japanese political philosophy and at odds with Qing imperial understandings of state power.<sup>106</sup> By the 1930s, Liang Qichao's equation of national strength with a strong community of unified *guomin* had become a matter of almost universal consensus among China's leading political parties, who considered a broad social basis of state power to be the *sine qua non* of political modernity. This general belief in the necessity of a unified body of *guomin* was given increased political urgency by China's precarious international political position. As one 1929 bulletin on literacy propaganda put it, "China is oppressed politically by Europe and America, its national strength grows weaker by the day, its territory is cut away more and more by the day...China could be destroyed at any moment."<sup>107</sup> This sense of crisis was only further exacerbated in 1931, when Japanese military forces seized control of Northeastern China, a defeat that many education reformers blamed directly on the lack of mass education among the people living there. With the threat of national extinction looming, the Chinese state could simply not afford to educate only part of the population, nor could it provide the national community of masses with anything less than the full suite of knowledge and skills required for

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<sup>106</sup> For a more detailed discussion of Liang's understanding of *guomin* as a social and moral basis of state power, see Marianne Bastid-Brugère, "The Japanese-Induced German Connection of Modern Chinese Ideas of the State: Liang Qichao and the *Guojia lun* of J.K. Bluntschli," in *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao's Introduction of Modern Western Civilization to China*, ed. Joshua A. Fogel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 120-121; and Sung-chiao Shen and Sechin Y.S. Chien, "Turning Slaves into Citizens: Discourses of *Guomin* and the Construction of Chinese National Identity in the Late Qing Period," in *The Dignity of Nations: Equality, Competition, and Honor in East Asian Nationalism*, eds. Sechin Y.S. Chien and John Fitzgerald (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2006), 51-52.

<sup>107</sup> *Shizi yundong xuanchuan gangyao*, 3-4.

them to defend the nation. Under such conditions, the pre-existing community of *guomin* represented by the GMD state and the good *guomin* ideal presented in mass education textbooks were necessarily one and the same. A future in which the Chinese *guomin* were not the nationally-minded, collectively-conscious, self-sacrificing, and practically-skilled *guomin* of the mass education readers was one in which China itself ceased to exist.

The second factor that enabled the GMD to envision such a broad *guomin* education program is that they were able to draw from over three decades of popular education policy developed by wildly creative policy minds from across the political spectrum. Many *minzhong* education supporters of the 1930s, like the education historians that followed them, were tempted to see Republican China's popular education history as a failure. Yet even while organizations like the Qing Ministry of Education, the Beida Lecture Corps, or the Chinese National Association for the Promotion of Popular Education were unsuccessful in creating a sustainable popular education model capable of mobilizing large numbers of rural people or transforming China's dire literacy statistics, they nevertheless helped to provide other teachers and administrators with a new language for thinking about how the modern Chinese state could envision, respond to, and possibly direct a broad Chinese political community. The discourses on citizenship produced by these so-called failures were thus often responsible for the comparative successes that followed. Whereas late Qing literacy proponents were forced to promote a self-consciously compromised curriculum in order to appeal to uncultured farmers, *minzhong* education leaders drew from the pedagogical work of Columbia-educated *pingmin jiaoyu* supporters to claim that their mass education programs represented the most advanced and modern educational techniques. Whereas the Beida Lecture Corps relied upon a nearly messianic conception of their own abilities to project a national scope for their lecturing activity, the GMD

was able to adapt the locally-oriented civic training developed in Dingxian and apply it to a nationwide mass civics curriculum organized around recognition of political symbols and colonial threat. These innovations, albeit more discursive than practical, were absolutely central to the GMD's effort to position itself as the transformative educational force between *guomin* and good *guomin* during the period of political tutelage.

The GMD-led vision of a single, cohesive community of Chinese citizens, united by their shared possession of practical and political skills, was by no means predetermined by these earlier efforts. Although the primary political motivation for this vision seems already fully formed in Liang Qichao's critiques of national weakness (later rearticulated in Sun Zhongshan's description of Chinese society as a "sheet of loose sand"), the conception of citizenship embodied in *minzhong* education programs was frequently challenged throughout the Republican period. Early Republican Minister of Education Tang Hualong sought a public education system organized around Confucian moral principles and literacy in classical Chinese. Rural reconstruction radical Tao Xingzhi envisioned Chinese society not as a single organic whole, but as a collection of self-sufficient, self-defending, self-regulating village communities empowered by an education curriculum fully integrated with the challenges and experiences of everyday life. The popularity of these visions speaks to the incredibly broad possibilities available to Republican Chinese educators for imagining the meaning and function of *guomin*. Yet even these alternative efforts helped to establish political discourses, pedagogical approaches, and organizational technologies that the nascent GMD state was able to mobilize on behalf of its particular educational vision.

The full onset of the Japanese invasion in 1937 brought an abrupt end to the period of Guomindang rule and to the implementation of a national policy of mass education. When the

fighting finally ended in 1949, after the 1945 Japanese surrender and another half-decade of civil war, the Guomindang's specific reading of the possibilities and threats facing Chinese society was ultimately supplanted by that of the Chinese Communist Party. Yet even as Mao Zedong declared on October 1, 1949 that China had been liberated from its colonial past and had entered a new era, many CCP policies and rhetorics strongly echoed earlier GMD models. In the field of education, the CCP declared its intentions to invest heavily in mass literacy programs for the rural poor, but, just as the Nationalists experienced, this stated focus on literacy was often supplanted, in practice, in favor of political mobilization and recognition of party ideology.<sup>108</sup> Similarly, even though the more politically neutral term *renmin* 人民 ["the people"] swiftly came to assume the place of *guomin* in the CCP's political discourse, as in the nation's official title *Zhonghua Renmin Gongheguo* 中华人民共和国, it served much the same political function. The discourse on *renmin* provided the Chinese Communist Party with a way of speaking legibly about a singular Chinese national community, united in support of a strong party-state whose legitimacy was defined by its ability to represent and provide services to the national collective of *renmin*. Thus even as the CCP instituted profound changes to the social, political, and economic fabric of China, the fundamental role of education in defining the boundaries of

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<sup>108</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the CCP's early popular education efforts, and specifically their approach to literacy, see Glen Peterson, *The Power of Words: Literacy and Revolution in South China, 1949-95* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997). Peterson argues that much of the CCP's earliest popular education efforts focused on establishing volunteer-run *minban* 民办 (literally "people-run") schools in local villages, a strategy that echoed many of the rural reconstruction efforts first developed by Yan Yangchu and Tao Xingzhi. With regard to national policy, Peterson asserts that "the CCP's consuming interest in mass literacy in the pre- and immediately post-1949 periods is usually assumed rather than carefully investigated" (p. 41). Contrary to the popular history the CCP tells about itself, Peterson shows that early CCP literacy policy was incredibly fraught, not just from debates within the CCP over the political meaning and values of mass literacy, but from tensions between national CCP leaders and local school teachers, many of whom saw it as their mission to preserve local control in the face of an overreaching central state. In the early 1950s, the CCP even went so far as to prohibit literacy education in areas still undergoing "land reform." In areas where Communist Party cadres had still not established firm control, schools were to be used as a means of political mobilization rather than spreading literacy (p. 52-53, 58-72).

Chinese citizenship under the PRC would have been familiar to many students of Republican era mass education programs, and indeed to anyone who identified with the term *guomin*.

## CONCLUSION

### THE FATE OF DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHINA

When judged according to the lofty goals reformers set for themselves, almost all of the popular education campaigns discussed in the previous pages were practical failures. The *guomin* education proponents operating within the Qing Ministry of Education and among the broader community of professional educators hoped to establish a modern school system that would train “all citizens,” but the expensive, progressive *guomin* schools that emerged in the wake of these efforts were only accessible to those wealthy families who had previously sent their sons to train for the civil service examinations. The May Fourth student activists on Beijing’s college campuses sought to radically equalize educational opportunities by sharing their own learning on global politics and American education theory, but were repeatedly confronted with disinterested listeners and confused readers. Rural education experiments such as those carried out by Tao Xingzhi and Yan Yangchu were intended to serve as models for a national transformation in rural education, and even though Yan found a comparable degree of success (not to mention international acclaim) through his work at Dingxian, his innovative network of rural “people’s schools” remained an isolated achievement. Even the Chinese Nationalist Party, which channeled extraordinary amounts of time and energy into a new system of “mass education” failed to meaningfully transform the educational landscape of China, such that by the end of the Nanjing Decade in 1937, national literacy rates had not shifted decisively from where they were

during the final years of the Qing dynasty.<sup>1</sup> Whether stymied by lack of funding, an absence of state support, or the simple disinterest (and occasional hostility) of illiterate Chinese, reformers were frequently forced to acknowledge that their efforts to spread popular education were often not very popular at all.

Nevertheless, this dissertation has argued that despite these practical setbacks, education reformers were extraordinarily successful in another sense. Although the overall proportion of citizens who could read remained more or less unchanged through the early Republican period, popular education activists had helped contribute to a new consensus about how to discuss, educate, and govern the Chinese political subject. In the immediate aftermath of the abolition of the examination system, textbooks editors such as Zhuang Yu helped cement the idea that *guomin* education must constitute a transformative experience that would teach aspirational values and skills associated with modern citizenship rather than fulfill a right to education among a pre-existing national body of citizens. Although the educational activist groups of the May Fourth period met with very limited success in the field, Beijing students were successful in refocusing attention on the urban workers, poor children, and women—the *pingmin*—who had been denied access to the new system of modern schools. As popular education leaders shifted their focus from urban workers to rural peasants, leaders like Yan Yangchu and Tao Xingzhi

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<sup>1</sup> When, exactly, literacy rates in China rapidly improved to their currently high levels is a matter of relatively intense historical debate, as some scholars such as Gilbert Rozman contend that universal literacy was “virtually achieved” relatively early in the history of the People’s Republic of China, while a recent PhD dissertation from Vilma Seeberg suggests that there was actually very little change in national literacy rates between 1949 and 1979. A 1982 census conducted within the PRC found that the literacy rate among adults (over 12) was 68 percent, a substantial improvement over literacy rates four decades prior and a figure that compares favorably to other large developing countries, although even this statistic has been called into question. For a summary of the debate over the history of literacy rates in China (including the authors mentioned above), see Peterson, *The Power of Words*, 4-5. Given the level of scholarly debate on these issues, Peterson ultimately adopts a theoretical paradigm that asserts that “definitions of literacy are not objective inferences drawn from empirically calculated minimum skill requirements.” Instead, Peterson suggests, we should “view literacy definitions as implicit or explicit ideological statements” (p. 11). Similarly, this dissertation does not seek to make concrete or definitive statements about China’s overall educational landscape during this period; what interests me here is that popular education programs were *perceived* as failures according to the ideologically loaded terms in which the projects were first conceived.

effectively redefined the political, social, and economic meaning of literacy, transforming it from a moral good to an economic foundation for building the skills that would allow farmers to become more productive members of society. Finally, the textbook editors and policy makers trained within the Guomindang's educational administration effectively adopted the praxis of previous popular education efforts and used it to help redefine a national community of "masses" united in their recognition of national symbols and stripped of the potential for class-based antagonism previously embedded within the term *minzhong*. By the time China's fledgling popular education programs were effectively dismantled in the wake of the Japanese invasion in 1937, nearly all popular educators adopted a rather uniform model of popular education—one that established "citizenship" as an aspirational social category defined by shared economic and practical skills, and one that established "citizens" as an inherently unified national political body subject to the tutelage of the party-state. Such a consensus would not have been possible without the collective efforts of education administrators, professional education theorists, student activists, textbook editors, rural reconstruction reformers, and individual school headmasters who contributed to these readings of the Chinese political subject.

Yet even within this increasingly sturdy ideological formation of what it meant to be a citizen in modern China, there exists a tension between the diverse social, cultural, and political ideals that first animated these programs and the increasingly singular vision of citizenship that emerged from them. Perhaps nowhere is this tension more evident than in regards to democracy. When Beijing University president Cai Yuanpei declared in 1918 that China had entered "the age of bright democracy (*pingminzhuyi* 平民主义)," he could draw on ample evidence from a generation of education reformers who shared his enthusiasm for democratic politics and saw popular education as a means as a means of investing political power in a broad community of



citizens who had been excluded from previous education regimes.<sup>2</sup> So why, then, given what I have asserted were educators' relative successes in contributing to the intellectual foundations of citizenship, were reformers so *unsuccessful* in translating their democratic political ideals into a more robust system of democratic education, let alone a stable democratic political culture that endured into the rest of the twentieth century?

I have suggested in the first chapter that we should not treat unstable political categories like *citizenship*, or, for that matter, unstable political ideals like *democracy*, as distinct phenomena with a historical trajectory or intellectual "life" separate from the specific individuals and contexts that produce such signifiers. Even asking why China is not a democracy seems to presuppose a kind of normative or prescriptive political modernity that exists outside of Chinese history, and had the dissertation treated such an inquiry as a guiding research question, it would have risked continually subjecting Chinese historical actors to a set of ahistorical assumptions that reformers themselves did not share. Indeed, the historical context of debates over democracy in China was markedly different than in most Western countries. T. H. Marshall's own analysis of citizenship as a social political category was based on the experience of English political history, whereby eighteenth-century discourses on civil rights were followed by the nineteenth-century development of suffrage and other tools of political representation, before finally incorporating forms of social welfare developed in the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> As Joan Judge has noted, this entire body of Western rights thinking, developed over hundreds of years, entered China all at once and at a time of national crisis.<sup>4</sup> Under such conditions, Chinese historical

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<sup>2</sup> Cai Yuanpei, "Hei'an yu guangming de xiaozhang 黑暗与光明的消长" [The waning and waxing of the dark and the light], in *Cai Yuanpei Quanjì*, 3: 217.

<sup>3</sup> Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class, and Other Essays*, 10-11.

<sup>4</sup> Joan Judge, *The Precious Raft of History: The Past, the West, and the Woman Question in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 8. Early studies have suggested that Chinese reformers themselves were aware of

actors did not have the luxury of engaging the political question of representative democracy hundreds of years before engaging the social question of how to include everyone in the national political body, as their counterparts in England, France, and America had done.<sup>5</sup> Thus simply asking why Chinese political actors did not embrace democracy in the manner of those who inspired Cai Yuanpei's 1918 celebration of popular politics risks ignoring or eliding these vital differences.

Nevertheless, even within the specific context of early twentieth-century China, many popular education proponents *did* embrace democracy in a manner inspired by internationally circulating education discourses and *did* presume democracy to be constitutive of political modernity. As such, the prevalence of these democratic visions among education reformers, when juxtaposed with the lack of democratic ideals among the tutelary regimes these education discourses inspired, represents a historical puzzle worth exploring. After all, it is precisely this question of democracy, or perhaps more specifically, the question of whether more recent reform initiatives within the PRC imply a movement toward "democratization," that prompted many of the initial historical inquiries into the meaning of Chinese citizenship in the first place.<sup>6</sup> By

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the unique (and uniquely rapid) circumstances in which they had been exposed to multiple centuries of Western political thought, and some even treated the rapid influx as an opportunity to potentially leap ahead of the West in their own stated political ideals. See Mary Clabaugh Wright, "Introduction," in *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913*, ed. Mary Clabaugh Wright, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 60-62.

<sup>5</sup> By making this comparison, I do not mean to suggest that early conceptions of democracy in America and elsewhere were without contradiction, ambiguity, and tension. As Laura Edwards has persuasively argued, the American post-revolutionary institutional order was defined by a tension between expanding participation in government to include "all people" and limiting who could be included among such a group. Indeed, broad social participation in the Revolution by women and enslaved people suggested that the social basis of the American polity could have indeed been much broader than the social vision ultimately enshrined in early American political institutions. Nevertheless, whereas post-Revolutionary legislators and jurists could place heavy restraints on the political rights of all social groups other than white men while still retaining the rhetoric of democracy for "the people," I maintain that Chinese political reformers were unable to imagine popular democracy in such restrained terms. For Edwards' full argument, see Laura Edwards, "The Contradictions of Democracy in American Institutions and Practices," in *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions*, eds. Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, 40-56 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013). I am indebted to Josh Lynn for pointing me toward this particular article.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, Goldman and Perry, eds. *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*. The editors of this volume note that historical investigations of Chinese citizenship are worthwhile precisely because

returning to these issues at the end of my investigation rather than allowing them to shape it from the beginning, I hope that I can shed light on the broader question of the fate of popular politics in China while still ensuring that these questions were generated by my sources and not by the artificial boundaries of my historical inquiry.

So, why did the popular political visions that so frequently inspired education reformers not ultimately yield a broader democratic political culture? Previous historians have suggested that fault lies primarily with China's leading political parties. According to narratives from Arif Dirlik, David Strand, and John Fitzgerald, among others, the totalitarian, anti-liberal agenda of China's Nationalist and Communist parties effectively stamped out or curtailed the otherwise thriving liberal politics of an earlier generation of Chinese intellectuals.<sup>7</sup> The careers of some educators, such as Tao Xingzhi, whose anarchist vision of rural education at Xiaozhuang was forcibly closed by the Nationalist army in 1930, might seem to confirm this narrative. Yet the experiences of the popular educators discussed in this dissertation reveal that challenges to democratic visions of China were present almost from the moment of their inception. In fact, many of the individual ideas contained within specific notions of popular education—from Zhuang Yu's insistence that primary schools must establish new standards of citizenship, to Yan

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democratization efforts in Taiwan and the increasing number of "village elections" in rural mainland China raise doubts about the historical trajectory of democracy in China.

<sup>7</sup> In Arif Dirlik's narrative, an ideologically rigid Chinese Communist Party, operating under the instruction of Comintern agents, conditioned party members to accept an increasingly narrow understanding of Marxism and actively worked to eliminate more eclectic strains of socialism rooted in anarchism and scientific Marxism, which had previously dominated the intellectual milieu of an earlier generation of Chinese intellectuals and labor organizers (see Dirlik, *The Origins of Chinese Communism*). David Strand similarly argues that the early Republican period represented a unique democratic moment in which public speech-making emerged as a dominant form of republican political expression that was available to all citizens, but that the Chinese Communist Party worked to undermine the autonomy of socially active groups like workers and students, ultimately replacing more spontaneous speech-making with drab policy reports to bureaucratic cadres. See David Strand, "Citizens in the Audience and at the Podium," in *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*, eds. Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J Perry, 44-69 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002). John Fitzgerald incorporates the Nationalist Party into this narrative of suppression, arguing that Nationalist Party journals like *Weekly Commentary* (*Xingqi pinglun* 星期评论) and a series of regional *Republican Daily* newspapers, helped to displace a diverse array of May Fourth-era literary journals, replacing them with monotone nationalist propaganda (see Fitzgerald, *Awakening China*, esp. 180-213).

Yangchu's portrayal of uneducated commoners as a social and political problem for the state to solve, to Tao Xingzhi's insistence that literacy constitutes not a normative good but a means to be productive—actually *prefigure* the basic tutelary logic behind the Leninist party-state regimes that followed. Thus, if we are to truly understand the broader historical trajectory of democracy in China, we must look not simply at where these ideas end—in the hands of the Nationalist and Communist parties—but also at the specific historical conditions in which they were first produced in the pages of professional education journals, popular literacy textbooks, and teacher-training manuals.

I have argued that no matter their specific understanding of “education for citizens,” nearly every organization or individual arguing on behalf of popularizing education found themselves constrained by the specific political and epistemological conditions that attended colonial modernity in China. Forms of colonial control and modern governmentality provided the language and the science by which early Qing administrators became self-conscious about popular literacy rates in the empire, and normative understandings of the basic knowledge and standard of fitness required of modern citizens ensured that more democratic and accessible classical literacy programs would ultimately be discarded in favor of standardized but expensive modern public schools. The threat of colonial domination provided the impulse behind Beijing University students' insistence that urban workers conform to the educational standards of the university itself, and a devotion to colonial discourses incorporating both the necessity of progressive education and the inevitability of Chinese cultural backwardness insured that contributors to journals like *Pingmin Jiaoyu* constantly found themselves unable to imagine a democratic China in concrete terms. Those education reform programs that were relatively efficacious, such as Yan Yangchu's early 1920s urban literacy campaigns and his late 1920s

rural Dingxian Experiment, succeeded in part because they confirmed the colonial anxieties of China's administrative and financial elite, while promising to rectify Chinese national weakness through transformative educational measures. The sheer variety of ways in which reformers embraced then often abandoned their democratic visions demonstrates that we cannot reduce the issue of democracy's "failure" in China to some immutable feature of a singular, essentialized Chinese political culture. Rather, we must strive to understand democratic politics as a product of dialogical exchanges occurring in the specific context of early twentieth-century China—one in which discourses on China, education, and citizenship were inextricable from colonial relations of power.

The uneven relations of power that conditioned early discussions of citizenship in China are in many ways still with us. Both the 1989 student protests at Tiananmen Square and the 2014 student protests in Hong Kong have sparked speculation over when mainland China will finally embrace democratic politics of a kind recognizable to post-industrial Western states, as if such conditions were the natural endpoint of any modern society.<sup>8</sup> Within the historical discipline, prescriptive notions of democratic citizenship have continued to undergird analyses of the non-Western past (including the Chinese past), where they often serve as the unspoken political ideal against which we measure the success or failure of our historical subjects' political struggles. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued, the celebration of democracy and the modern democratic state

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<sup>8</sup> As recently as November 2014, current Chinese President Xi Jinping 习近平 gave a speech to the Australian parliament in which he expressed hope that China would become "a modern socialist country that is prosperous, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious by the middle of the century." Assuming that Xi's invocation of a democratic society represented a commitment to Western-style democracy, the Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott praised Xi for "declar[ing] that his country would be fully democratic by 2050," even though Xi himself never made such a commitment. Although a relatively minor diplomatic imbroglio, the confusion reflects the extent to which narrow understandings of democracy derived from Western political experience continue to dominate the international conversation about how states and societies should organize themselves. See Bree Feng, "What 'Democracy' Means in China is Not What Australia's Abbott Thinks," *New York Times* Blog, last modified November 18, 2014, <http://sinosphere.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/11/18/what-democracy-means-in-china-is-not-what-australias-abbott-thinks>

contained within the intellectual tradition of post-Enlightenment rationalism has helped to establish a fundamentally pedagogical character to our investigation of the subaltern past, whereby “[historians] write, ultimately, as part of a collective effort to help teach the oppressed of today how to be the democratic subject of tomorrow.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, this embrace of democracy as a universal political ideal necessarily reduces the (subaltern) historical subject to a secondary position in our dialogue with the past.

This dissertation has been an attempt to make that dialogue between historian and historical actors a more democratic and equal one. Rather than seek out and elevate those education reformers who articulate the “true” meaning of democratic citizenship, I have tried to let my historical subjects speak first on what it means to be a citizen in China. To be clear, I do not reject democratic citizenship or the enshrinement of abstract individual rights as a worthy—even necessary—goal for ensuring justice and equality for all members of the Chinese national community, nor do I believe that the current state of citizenship rights in China will endure indefinitely. Similarly, I cannot claim to have completely abandoned the modern state and modern state-society relations as a normative pole of my analysis. Despite my best efforts, the languages of the state, of society, of development, and of democratic citizenship continue to cut across the project, because I cannot fully imagine a society outside the boundaries of those features that have become coterminous with political modernity. At the same time, to the extent possible, I want to prevent my own reading of democratic citizenship as a political ideal from obscuring or detracting from the daring and creative intellectual labor that popular education reformers contributed to the ideological construction of *guomin*, *pingmin*, and *minzhong* in early twentieth-century China.

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<sup>9</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Subaltern Histories and Post-Enlightenment Rationalism,” in *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies*, ed. Dipesh Chakrabarty (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 33.

In reading these terms, early twentieth-century Chinese educators made legible to a broad community of people fundamentally new ways of thinking about the Chinese political subject. In having their visions of a more equitable or democratic society challenged by the practical realities of forging a national community that meets the normative requirements of a modern nation in a global capitalist system, they have also made evident the fundamentally colonial conditions under which many historical actors, in early twentieth-century China and elsewhere, have attempted to reconcile an abstract belief in universal political equality and the practical drive to ensure that all members of the political community are properly prepared to accept the burden of governing and being governed. The fates of their education programs do not indict a failure to learn what it truly means to be a citizen. Indeed, the experiences of early twentieth-century popular education reformers may have much to teach *us* about the tutelary forms of state control embedded within our own supposedly democratic education systems. Rather than ask why so many democratic conceptions of “citizens’ education” worked to produce such an authoritarian political system in China, we might consider why and to what extent our own conception and practice of “democracy” remain circumscribed by the same fundamentally uneven relations of power.

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