

The Anarchist Library (Mirror)

Anti-Copyright



# The Chinese Work-Study Movement in France

Paul Bailey

Paul Bailey

The Chinese Work-Study Movement in France

1988

Retrieved on 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2021 from doi.org

Published in *The China Quarterly*, 115, pp. 441–461.

[usa.anarchistlibraries.net](http://usa.anarchistlibraries.net)

1988



# Contents

Origins of the Movement . . . . .	8
Frugal Study in France . . . . .	11
The Promotion of Work-Study . . . . .	14
Perceptions of Work-Study . . . . .	20
Politicization of Work-Study Students and the End of the Movement . . . . .	24



In its wider context, however, the work-study movement is a fascinating case-study illustrating the fierce competition among the powers for cultural influence in China during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is no coincidence, for example, that at the same time French politicians and educators were welcoming the work-study movement as a means to counter the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon influence in China, a vigorous campaign was under way within China to popularize the study of the French language.<sup>91</sup> The movement should also be seen as an important episode in China's educational modernization that had begun in the last years of the Qing dynasty. In promoting the unity of intellectual and manual work it was hoped that such a movement would not only contribute to China's economic development but would also effect a moral change throughout society, Everyone would become a "worker." The parallel with Mao Zedong's later educational thought is intriguing.<sup>92</sup>

---

<sup>91</sup> In 1918, e.g., the *Comite federal des oeuvres Sino-françaises* was organized in Beijing to campaign for the introduction of French into all higher and secondary schools in China, as well as to promote the sale of cheap French books. *La Politique de Peking*, Nos. 31(4 August 1918), 32 (11 August 1918), 43 (27 October 1918), 44 (3 November 1918).

<sup>92</sup> Interestingly, however, current opinion in China, although acknowledging the movement as an important part of China's educational history, regards the ideals that lay behind it as "Utopian" and "idealistic," code words which carry negative connotations. Gao Sheng, "Shilun fufa qingong jianxue yundong di fazhan heyianbian," *Jiaoyu yanjiu*, No. 3 (1980), pp. 152–59.

In 1920 Wang Guangqi (1892–1936), a founder member of the Young China Association (Shaonian Zhongguo Xuehui) in 1918,<sup>1</sup> wrote that in the past few years a clear division had arisen among Chinese overseas students. Those studying in the United States, having been influenced by the philosophy of "worshipping money" (*baijin zhuyi*) wanted to build a "capitalist" China on the American model when they returned. The work-study students in France, however, were concerned with practical training and participation in the labouring world. While Chinese students in the United States received regular government scholarships and enjoyed material comforts, Wang continued, those in France spent their time "sweating and working in factories." Since the former sought their models in the "oil barons" while the latter looked to the workers for inspiration, Wang concluded, it was inevitable that whereas students returning from the United States would be capitalists, work-study students returning from France would promote "labourism" (*laodong zhuyi*) and become part of the labouring classes.<sup>2</sup>

Wang was referring to the more than 1,500 Chinese students who went to France on a work-study scheme between 1919 and 1921. The episode has attracted attention principally because many future Chinese Communist and government leaders were among those students, including Zhou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yi, Li Fuchun, Nie Rongzhen, Li Lisan, Cai Chang, Xu Teli and Li Wei-

---

<sup>1</sup> The Young China Association was founded by students and teachers (including Li Dazhao) in Beijing to promote "a spirit of rejuvenation, the study of authentic knowledge, the development of society, and the overturning of outmoded customs." Li Yibin (ed.), *Zhongguo qingniandang (The China Youth Party)* (Beijing: 1982), p. 60. For information on Wang Guangqi, see *Minguo renwu zhuan (Biographies of Republican Figures)* (Beijing, 1981), Vol. 3, pp. 326–32.

<sup>2</sup> "Liuxue di liang da chaoliu" ("Two important strands in overseas study"), *Lu-ouzhoukan (Weekly Journal for Overseas Students in Europe)*, No. 58, 18 December 1920. Also reprinted in Zhang Yunhou et al. (eds.), *Liufa qingong jianxue yundong (The Work-Study Movement in France)* (Shanghai, 1986), Vol. 2, pp. 662–65.

han, as well as famous communist “martyrs” such as Cai Hesen (1890–1931), Xiang Jingyu (1895–1928), Zhao Shiyan (1900–1927) and Wang Ruofei (1896–1946).<sup>3</sup> It was while in France that many Chinese students first became acquainted with, and converted to, Marxism, and in 1922 the Chinese Communist Youth Party in Europe (Lu’ou Zhongguo Shaonian Gongchandang) was founded in Paris. It was also during their sojourn in France that many Chinese students participated for the first time in organized demonstrations against western encroachment in China.<sup>4</sup>

Recently, several volumes of materials on the work-study movement have been published in China,<sup>5</sup> and although one might link

---

<sup>3</sup> Biographies of all these figures can be found in H. Boorman and R. Howard (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary of Republican China* (New York, 1967), 4 vols.; and D. Klein and A. Clark (eds.), *Biographic Dictionary of Chinese Communism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 2 vols.

<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, references in English to the political activities of Chinese students in France are sparse. For a general study of the movement, see John Kong-cheong Leung, “The Chinese work-study movement” (Ph.D., Brown University, 1982). For other references see C. Brandt, “The French-returned elite in the Chinese Communist Party,” in E.F. Szczepanik (ed.), *Symposium on Economic and Social Problems of the Far East* (Hong Kong, 1962), pp. 229–39; Kai-yu Hsu, *Chou Enlai: China’s Gray Eminence* (New York, 1968), pp. 27–43; Chan Lau Kit-ching, *The Chinese Youth Party 1923–1945* (Hong Kong, 1972), pp. 10–19; Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1960), pp. 35–40; R. Scalapino, G. Yu, *Modern China and its Revolutionary Process* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 513–17, 618–25. See also M. Levine, “The diligent-work frugal-study movement and the new culture movement,” *Republican China*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (1986), pp. 67–88. For information in French see J. Van der Stegen, *Les Chinois en France 1915–1925* (Mémoire de Maitrise, Univ. de Paris-Nanterre, 1974); and A. Kriegel, *Communismes au Miroir Francais* (Paris, 1974), pp. 57–93. A recent doctorat d’etat also deals with the work-study movement. See N. Wang, “Paris-Shanghai: débats d’idées et pratique sociale, les intellectuels progressistes chinois 1920–1925” (University of Paris, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> Qinghua Daxue Zhonggongdang Shijiao Yanzu (comp.), *Fufa qingong jianxue yundong shiliao (Historical Materials on the Work-Study Movement in France)* (Beijing, 1979–81), 3 vols.; Zhang Yunhou et al. (eds.), *Liufa qingong jianxue yundong (The Work-Study Movement in France)* (Shanghai, 1980, 1986), 2 vols. See also Bi Xiaoxun, “Liufa qingong jianxue ziliao” (“Materials on the

A report drawn up by General Brissaud-Desmaillet, president of the Commission attached to the War Ministry, recommended that all “undesirables” be repatriated.<sup>90</sup> A number of Chinese students were in fact deported, and the ensuing relief felt by French authorities was succinctly captured by an article in the newspaper *Quotidien* (30 June 1925), which reported the deportation of 10 Chinese students to Germany (after being refused entry by Belgium):

The orientals (*celestes*) dispersed quickly over the Germany border, to the great satisfaction of the police commissioner, who gave a sigh of relief when he saw the disappearance over the horizon of, as it were, their Chinese shadows (*ombres chinoises*).

The political significance of the work-study movement, therefore, lies in the radicalization of students, whose hostility to capitalism and imperialism had been engendered during their stay in France. Many of them, including Zhou Enlai, Wang Ruofei, Cai Hesen and Zhao Shiyan, returned to take up key posts within the CCP and participate in the struggle against both warlordism and foreign privilege, the latter being aimed as much against France as Britain, the United States and Japan. Ironically, at the same time the work-study promoters, Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui and Cai Yuanpei became increasingly identified with the Kuomintang, partly because of their implacable hostility to communism and partly because of their personal ties with Sun Yat-sen that dated from pre-1911 days. It was to be Kuomintang emphasis on state-controlled education emphasizing party indoctrination, however, that sabotaged their attempt to introduce an education system on the French model. French hopes for a massive increase of their cultural influence in China were to remain unfulfilled.

---

<sup>90</sup> Archives du Ministère de l’Intérieur, F7 1348. Brissaud-Desmaillet also suggested that Chinese who had married in France and had families should be encouraged to move to recently depopulated agricultural regions in France.

had not met with unanimous approval. It is significant, for example, that Zhou Enlai himself, writing to friends back home in 1923, admitted that his “natural inclination for harmony” (*diaohe xing*) had prevented him from fully espousing the cause of communism earlier and that it was not until 1922 that he decided to make the commitment.<sup>87</sup> By June 1922, Wang Ruofei, Zhao Shiyan and Zhou Enlai had succeeded in establishing the Chinese Communist Youth Party in Europe (Lu’ou Zhongguo Shaonian Gongchandang), which was formally linked to the CCP in February 1923 and comprised as many as 300 members by 1925.

Although the movement formally ended in 1921, Chinese work-study students who remained in France, and who gradually returned to China over the next few years, continued to attract the attention of the French authorities. A letter from the Ministry of Interior to the Foreign Ministry in June 1922 warned of the increasing susceptibility of Chinese students to Bolshevik propaganda, and by the beginning of 1923 the Foreign Ministry had compiled a list of those Chinese students who were in touch with Chen Duxiu, chairman of the CCP.<sup>88</sup> The fears of French authorities were confirmed in 1925 when Chinese students and workers organized demonstrations in Paris to protest against British and Japanese imperialism following the May 30 Incident in Shanghai. French imperialism in China also became a target of protest. On 21 June 1925 one hundred Chinese students forced their way into the Chinese Legation in Paris and forced the Chinese minister, Chen Lu, to issue a telegram of support to the workers and students in Shanghai, as well as to request the French Government to withdraw its troops from China.<sup>89</sup> The French right-wing press was outraged, accusing the Chinese students of being ungrateful to their French hosts.

<sup>87</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2, No. 2, p. 830.

<sup>88</sup> Archives du Ministère de l’Intérieur, F7 12900.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.* F7 1348. For an account of the Chinese protest in Paris, see N. Wang, “Da Chen Lu: le mouvement du 30 Mai 1925 a Paris,” *Approches Asie* (Université de Nice, 1983).

their appearance with the fact that Deng Xiaoping was a participant,<sup>6</sup> the publication of these materials is perhaps more to be seen as part of the continuing process of emphasizing the importance of Zhou Enlai’s role in the Chinese Communist movement.<sup>7</sup> Although the work-study movement has thus attracted attention primarily because future Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leaders were among the students, the episode deserves to be placed in a wider context. This article will trace the origins of the movement and relate it to the educational thought of the period. It will also

---

work-study movement in France”), *Jindaishi ziliao* (*Materials on Modern History*), No. 2 (1955), pp. 174–208. Short secondary accounts include Jiang Tianwei, “Liufa qingong jianxue xiaoshi” (“A short account of the work-study movement in France”), *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* (*Selections of Historical Accounts*), No. 34 (1962), pp. 30–40; Guo Shang, “Shilun fufaqingong jianxue yundong di fazhan he yanbian” (“A discussion of the development and evolution of the work-study movement in France”), *Jiaoyu yanjiu* (*Educational Research*), No. 3 (1980), pp. 152–59; Terahiro Teruo, “Ryufa kinko-kengaku undo nitsuite” (“On the work-study movement in France”), *Rekishi Kenkyu* (*Historical Research*), No. 11 (1974), pp. 1–22. See also the collection of documents on the movement compiled by Chen Sanjing, *Qingong jianxue yundong* (*The Work-Study Movement*) (Taipei, 1981). Personal accounts by work-study participants include He Changong, *Qingong jianxue shenghuo huiyi* (*Memories of Work-Study Life*) (Beijing, 1958); Sheng Cheng, *Haiwai gongdu shinian jishi* (*A Record of 10 Years’ Work-Study Abroad*) (Shanghai, 1932); Li Huang, “Liufa qingong jianxue yu Zhongguo Gongchan-dang” (“Work-study in France and the Chinese Communist Party”), *Ming bao yuekan* (*Clear-sighted Journal Monthly*), Nos. 45 (September 1969), pp. 2–8; 46 (October 1969), pp. 15–19; 47 (November 1969), pp. 10–16; 48 (December 1969), pp. 22–28.

<sup>6</sup> For a brief introduction to Deng’s activities in France, see N. Wang, “Deng Xiaoping, the years in France,” *The China Quarterly*, No. 92 (December 1982), pp. 695–705.

<sup>7</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vols. 1, 2:2, 3 all begin with long articles by Zhou, which he wrote while in France, while the editors’ introduction to *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, continually underlines Zhou’s leading role among work-study students. Zhou’s letters from Europe, written between 1920 and 1924, have now been reprinted: *Lti-ou tongxin* (*Letters from Europe*) (Beijing, 1979). For an example of the many works dedicated to Zhou since his death, written especially for “youth,” see Hu Hua, *Qingshaonian shiqi di Zhou Enlai tongzhi* (*Comrade Zhou Enlai’s Youth*) (Beijing, 1977).

analyse the expectations held of the movement by its Chinese promoters, the French authorities and the students themselves, and seek to explain why the movement was ended. A combination of economic circumstances, increasing “politicization” of work-study students, and changing priorities on the part of the movement’s promoters and of the French authorities led to a winding down of the scheme in 1921 amid bitter acrimony between the students and the original promoters.

## Origins of the Movement

The founder of the work-study movement was Li Shizeng (1881–1973), the son of Li Hongcao, a Grand Councillor and one-time tutor to the Tongzhi Emperor.<sup>8</sup> In 1902 Li had the chance to study abroad when he accompanied Sun Baoqi, the newly-appointed Chinese minister to France, as an “embassy student” (*suiyuan xuesheng*).<sup>9</sup> With Li went his friend Zhang Jingjiang (1877–1950), who came from a family of wealthy silk merchants and who was to serve for a time as commercial attache at the Paris consulate.<sup>10</sup> Another student who was attached to Sun Baoqi’s mission was Chen Lu (1876–1939), who was to become Chinese minister to France from

---

<sup>8</sup> Li later recalled that he inherited an “anti-official” philosophy from his father, who discouraged him from taking the traditional civil service examinations. *Shizeng biji (Notes of Li Shizeng)* (Taipei, 1961), pp. 77, 148. After his father’s death, Li was awarded official rank anyway, qualifying him to hold the rank of a department head.

<sup>9</sup> Sun’s family had been neighbours of the Li household in Beijing. *Li Shizeng xiansheng wenji (Collected Writings of Li Shizeng)* (Taipei, 1980), Vol. 2, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> Boorman, and Howard (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 1, pp. 73–77. Zhang’s family had purchased for him the rank of expectant taotai. Leung, “The Chinese work-study movement,” p. 53, is mistaken when he refers to Li Shizeng as the “cultural attache” on this 1902 mission.

Lisan and Xiang Jingyu; a few, including Wang Ruofei and Zhao Shiyan, succeeded in escaping and returned to Paris.

The “Lyon Incident” signalled the end of the work-study movement. French authorities, alarmed at the unruly behaviour of the students, preferred now to emphasize the training of a selected elite. At a meeting of the Sino-French Committee of Support in March 1922 Bradier noted that only a minority among work-study students were intelligent and capable enough of benefiting from a higher education in France. Most of them, on their return to China, would simply become “foremen” (*contremaitres*) or “mere workers” and hence be of no benefit to France. They should be repatriated as soon as possible, and, in future, Bradier concluded, only highly qualified students recommended by Chinese or French authorities should be received.<sup>85</sup> Li Shizeng’s grand vision of a vast army of student workers infused with French republican ideals returning to China to contribute to harmonious social and cultural change would not be realized. Li and Cai Yuanpei became increasingly involved in educational politics in China, where they sought to promote the creation of an autonomous education system based on the model of the French University Council.<sup>86</sup>

For the radical work-study students, the Lyon Incident gave impetus to the forming of a communist organization. As early as June 1921, in fact, according to Li Lisan, Cai Hesen had proposed the establishment of a communist youth party, but the proposal

---

<sup>85</sup> NA 47 AS, A/1-1 (3). In 1923 the Committee was amalgamated with the Association Amicale Franco-Chinoise and concentrated its efforts on placing qualified Chinese students in prestigious institutions of higher learning in France. One of its first decisions was to award a scholarship of 6,000 francs to a Chinese student known for his enthusiasm for study, his good behaviour and his feelings towards France.” NA 47 AS, A/1-2(1).

<sup>86</sup> On this, see my chapter “The Sino-French connection 1902–1928,” in D. Goodman (ed.), *China and the West: Ideas and Activists* (Manchester: University of Manchester Press, forthcoming). See also A. Linden, “Politics and education in Nationalist China: the case of the University Council 1927–1928,” *Journal of Asian Studies* (August 1968), pp. 763–77.

turned down. The angry response from the students symbolized the final rupture between themselves and their erstwhile mentors. As the self-pro-claimed representatives of the less privileged, work-study students described the dispute in terms of a class struggle, accusing the work-study promoters of betraying the cause of China's popular education (*pingmin jiaoyu*) in favour of a perfidious "aristocratic education" (*guizu jiaoyu*).<sup>83</sup>

The institute was opened in September 1921 and in the same month the first group of 125 Chinese students arrived. Many of them were scholarship-holders and university graduates, in marked contrast to work-study students. A few days before they arrived over 1001 work-study students from Garenne, Fontainebleau, St. Germain, Montargis and Le Creusot descended on Lyon in an attempt to occupy the institute. Chinese accounts indicate that the Chinese minister, Chen Lu, may have given the students travelling expenses in the hope that their demonstration in Lyon would result in French authorities taking the initiative and deporting them.<sup>84</sup> French police confiscated the students' passports and detained them for nearly a month before the Foreign Ministry finally decided to deport them on 14 October 1921. Included among the 104 deportees were Cai Hesen, Chen Yi, Li

---

<sup>83</sup> Students from Le Creusot, in a letter to Li Shizeng, claimed that poor work-study students were being abandoned in favour of "wealthy aristocrats" from China. *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, p. 66.

<sup>84</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, p. 74; *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 24. It would seem, however, that French authorities were equally concerned that any deportation should appear to be the responsibility of the Chinese Government. In a communication to his government on 1 September 1920, the French minister in Beijing argued that "it would be wise to allow Chinese students in Paris to engage in demonstrations against their legation in order to enhance the Chinese Government's resolution to deport them. We must avoid any appearance of being responsible for such a deportation." Quoted in D. Bouchez, "Un défricheur méconnu des Etudes Extrême-Orientales: Maurice Courant (1865–1935)," p. 117.

1920 to 1927.<sup>11</sup> It was through important contacts such as these, as we shall see, that Li was able to promote his scheme of work-study.

While in France Li enrolled at the Ecole Pratique d'Agriculture in Montargis, just south of Paris; on graduating in 1905 he studied chemistry and biology at the Institut Pasteur in Paris. During this time Li became attracted to anarchism, particularly to the thought of Elisée Reclus (1830–1905) with whose nephew he was personally acquainted.<sup>12</sup> Li was especially impressed with Reclus's confident prediction that science and education would bring about an equal society in which the ideals of "mutual assistance" (*huzhu*) and "co-operation" (*hezuo*) would be realized.

At the same time Li became an enthusiastic Francophile and his admiration for French culture and ideals never wavered throughout his life. For Li, France was the centre of humanism and he was continually to contrast the freedom, creativity and pacifism characteristic of French culture with the autocracy, utilitarianism and militarism characteristic of German culture.<sup>13</sup> During the following years he established a wide network of contacts among French intellectuals and politicians, which was to be of considerable benefit when he set up the work-study scheme.<sup>14</sup> Zhang Jingjiang, also, must have established similar contacts since he was listed as a member of the editorial committee of the Bulletin issued by the Association Amicale Franco-Chinoise, an organization created in Paris in 1907. The honorary president was the senator and foreign affairs minister, Pichon, and other notables belonging to the Association

---

<sup>11</sup> Boorman and Howard (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 1, pp. 211–13.

<sup>12</sup> Shao Kelu (Jacques Reclus), "Wo suorenshi di Li Yuying Xiansheng" ("The Li Shizeng I knew"), *Zhuanji wenxue (Biographical Literature)*, Vol. 45, No. 3 (1984), pp. 87–88. Jacques Reclus was the son of Elisée's nephew, Paul Reclus. See also *Li Shizeng xiansheng jinianji (Commemorative Volume to Li Shizeng)* (Taipei, 1973), pp. 1–2, 236.

<sup>13</sup> See, e.g., Li's articles in *Lii-ou zazhi (Magazine for Chinese Overseas Students in Europe)*, No. 2, 1 September 1916; *Lii-ou zhoukan*, No. 2, 22 November 1919, No. 3, 29 November 1919.

<sup>14</sup> In 1925 Li was created a Commander of the Legion of Honour.

included the director of the Banque de Paris, a former minister of colonies, and Georges Dubail, a former minister to China.<sup>15</sup>

In 1906 Li Shizeng and Zhang Jingjiang were joined by Wu Zhihui (1864–1953), who had earlier been involved in anti-Manchu activities in Shanghai, and together they published *Xin shiji* (New Century), which served as a forum for their anarchist philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid*, for example, was translated into Chinese. All three joined Sun Yat-sen's revolutionary anti-Manchu organization, the Tongmenghui (Alliance League) in the same year. In addition to his publishing activities, Li opened a bean-curd factory (*Usine Caseo-Sojaine*) in 1908 just outside Paris in Colombes and recruited 30 Chinese workers from his native village in Zhili.<sup>17</sup> Taking advantage of his father's acquaintance with the governor of Zhili, Yang Lianpu, Li was able to secure a personal interview with Yang when he returned to China in 1909. Yang was apparently enthusiastic about the project and contributed funds.<sup>18</sup> Such an episode is an interesting example of how, in the closing years of the dynasty, many anti-Manchu radicals were able to function in both revolutionary and official circles.

It was among the Chinese workers at the bean-curd factory that Li promoted "diligent work and frugal study" (*qingong jianxue*). A workers' school was opened near the factory in which Li and Wu taught Chinese, French and general scientific knowledge. A strict regimen was imposed on the workers—no smoking, gambling

---

<sup>15</sup> The *Bulletin de l'Association Amicale Franco-Chinoise* was published between 1907 and 1916.

<sup>16</sup> For information on Wu Zhihui, see Boorman and Howard (eds.), *Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 3, pp. 416–19. The views of the Chinese anarchists in Paris are discussed in A. Dirlik, "Vision and revolution," *Modern China*, Vol. 12, No. 2 (April 1986), pp. 123–62.

<sup>17</sup> Li, who became a strict vegetarian, was confident that France would appreciate the nutritional value of the bean-curd.

<sup>18</sup> Notes of Li Shizeng, p. 78. See also Li Shuhua, "Xinhai geming qianhou Li Shizeng xiansheng" ("Li Shizeng at the time of the 1911 Revolution"), *Zhuanji wenxue*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (February 1974), p. 44.

The original work-study promoters, meanwhile, had lost interest in the scheme by 1921, principally because Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui and Cai Yuanpei were now devoting their attention to expanding Sino-French higher education links. Li was particularly interested in creating a Sino-French Institute of higher learning in Lyon, with whose mayor, Edouard Herriot, Li was personally acquainted. Li hoped that such an institute would form a branch of the Sino-French University that had already been established in Beijing in 1920. As early as 1919 Li had met with the director of the Lyon Academy, L. Joubin, and Maurice Courant, newly-appointed to a chair of Chinese at Lyon University, to discuss funding for such a project.<sup>81</sup> It was no coincidence that Lyon should have been chosen as the site for a Sino-French institute. It was the only French city outside Paris to have direct commercial links with the Far East. The city's chamber of commerce had sent representatives to accompany the French diplomatic mission which concluded the 1844 Whampoa Treaty and from 1855 on Lyon began to import silk from China.

Work-study students assumed that such an institute would be open to them, but it was soon made clear by both Li Shizeng and the Lyon authorities that prospective students would be recruited in China on the basis of competitive examinations. Furthermore, such students were expected to have a certain level of income and knowledge of French before they could be considered. Wu Zhihui, who was appointed director of the institute, insisted that it was designed to train an advanced specialized elite and had nothing to do with work-study students.<sup>82</sup> The latter's demand that the Lyon Institute be opened to them without prior conditions was curtly

---

refused to take on a Chinese student out of concern to preserve the secret of French textile skills. NA 47 AS, A/1-2(8).

<sup>81</sup> For a discussion of the Sino-French Institute de Lyon, see D. Bouchez, "Undefricheur meconnu des Etudes Extreme-Orientales: Maurice Courant (1865–1935)," *Journal Asiatique*, Vol. 271, Nos. 1–2 (1983), pp. 43–138.

<sup>82</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2, No. 2, pp. 528–32, 537.

in 1920 to facilitate joint loans to China), the French Government shelved the plan.

On the other hand, French prestige in China demanded that something be done to alleviate the students' plight. In May 1921 the Sino-French Committee of Support (Comite Franco-Chinois des Patronnage) was formed to provide emergency funds for the summer and help persuade factories and schools to take on Chinese students. It was clear, however, that the new committee, drawing on the support of French politicians and businessmen, as well as the Chinese legation, hoped that greater control could now be exerted over the students. E. Bradier, representing the French Foreign Ministry and one of the chairmen of the committee, remarked at its first meeting that with greater supervision "we will be in a position to retain and welcome only an elite which, from the point of view of our influence in China, will be of more benefit intellectually and economically."<sup>78</sup> In its correspondence with enterprises and schools to persuade them to accept Chinese students, the committee emphasized the need to safeguard French influence and prestige in the Far East;<sup>79</sup> at the same time enterprises and schools were asked to keep in close touch with the committee and inform it of the character and activities of the students. Reaction was mixed. Thus, for example, while the principal of a college in Sancerre (worried about depopulation in the area) welcomed the prospect of receiving Chinese students in order to keep enrolment up, the director of an industrial electricity school in Paris curtly refused the committee's request to accept a Chinese student on reduced fees (for the sake of the national interest).<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> NA47 AS, A/1-1(1).

<sup>79</sup> See, e.g., NA 47 AS, B/1-1(2), C/10-1(1).

<sup>80</sup> NA 47 AS, B/6-56(3), B/16-4(5). Some enterprises complained that Chinese students would often leave their jobs as soon as they had enough money to enroll in a school. NA 47 AS, A/1-2(5), C/4-3(12). The owner of a silk factory at Louviers

or alcohol was permitted—and they were expected to devote their spare time to study.<sup>19</sup> For Li, work-study was to have a moral as well as an educational function. In addition to making workers more knowledgeable, work-study would eliminate their "decadent habits" and transform them into morally upright and hard-working citizens,

Li was, in fact, echoing a concern prevalent among Chinese reformers since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In 1898 Kang Youwei contrasted the hard-working and disciplined peoples of the west with the superstitious and disorderly people in China and pointed to the danger of western ridicule. The Boxers in 1900 were condemned by literati opinion as the products of a backward and uncivilized popular culture. Reformist journals such as *Dongfang zazhi* (*The Eastern Miscellany*), which began publication in 1904, continually referred to the "lazy and decadent" habits of the people (although, as will be noted later, such criticisms were also to be levelled at students in the modern-style schools), while Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao, on their visits to North America in the early years of the century, bewailed the lack of moral fibre they perceived among Chinese communities there. Finally, work-study also accorded with Li's belief in the unity of intellectual and manual work as the means to bring about mutual assistance, co-operation and equality in society.<sup>20</sup>

## Frugal Study in France

Li was also keen that Chinese students should go to France, and with the establishment of the Republic in 1912 he organized the *Association for Frugal Study in France* (*Liufa Jianxue Hui*) to "cut down

<sup>19</sup> *Lu-ou jiaoyu yundong* (*The Educational Movement in Europe*) (Tours, 1916), p. 50.

<sup>20</sup> For a more detailed discussion of these points, see my unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, "Popular education in China 1904–1919: new ideas and developments" (University of British Columbia, 1982).A

on expenditures in order to expand overseas study, and by labour and a simple life to cultivate habits of diligence and hard work.”<sup>21</sup> Li was supported in his venture by Cai Yuanpei (1868–1940), who had studied in Germany before 1911 and was now education minister, and Wang Jingwei (1883–1944), a prominent member of the Tongmenghui and close associate of Sun Yat-sen. Like Li Shizeng, both Cai and Wang were fervent admirers of France, describing it as a model republic free of the corrupting influences of monarchism and religion.

A preparatory school, financed by the founders of the Association, was opened in Beijing in which students were taught French and other general subjects for six months in preparation for their sojourn in France.<sup>22</sup> By keeping expenditures to a minimum—for example, students were expected to perform all menial tasks of the schools themselves—the tuition fees were low. With the help of contacts he had made in France before 1911 Li was able to arrange for the students’ reception in schools and colleges in Paris, Montargis and Fontainebleau. While in France the students were expected to live frugally and refrain from gambling, drinking, smoking and “being improperly familiar with prostitutes” (*xiaji*). Between 1912 and 1913 approximately 100 “frugal study” students went to France, most of them going to Montargis College, the principal of which was a personal acquaintance of Li’s.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> The Work-Study Movement in France, Vol. 1, p. 15. The regulations for the association are in *The Educational Movement in Europe*, pp. 50–55; *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, pp. 14–18; *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 169–74.

<sup>22</sup> As minister of education, Cai allowed the school to be located in a section of the former Imperial College (Guozijian). A similar school was opened in Chengdu, Sichuan by Wu Yuzhang (1878–1966), who was to be elected to a number of educational posts after 1949. Leung, “The Chinese work-study movement” erroneously notes (p. 59) that Wu was the principal of the Beijing school.

<sup>23</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 15. An account of the Beijing Preparatory School by Li Shuhua, a graduate of its First Class, is printed in Chen Sanjing, *The Work-Study Movement*, pp. 23–24.

with Cai Hesen’s Montargis group to form a common front against the “reactionary Chinese and French authorities.”<sup>74</sup> Relations between the students and their French and Chinese mentors became increasingly strained.

The French authorities, in fact, were caught on the horns of a dilemma. As early as 1920 the French minister in Beijing was advising the Quai d’Orsay that all mail addressed to work-study students in France be carefully investigated.<sup>75</sup> After the “February 28 Incident” the prefect of police informed the Chinese minister that any students he would care to designate as “subversive” would be deported.<sup>76</sup> Suspicion of work-study students was heightened during the summer of 1921 when they protested against a projected French loan to China, to be secured on Chinese tobacco, alcohol and stamp duties.<sup>77</sup> Confronted by over 300 angry students in August, who denounced the loan conditions as a further infringement on Chinese sovereignty, official representatives of the Chinese minister were compelled to announce publicly their opposition to the loan. Embarrassed by the publicity and fearing potential opposition from the other powers (who had resurrected the Banking Consortium

---

<sup>74</sup> For Li Lisan’s recollections, see *Historical Materials*, Vol. 3, pp. 453–59. See also “Zhao Shiyan shengping shiliao” (“Historical materials on the life of Zhao Shiyan”), *Wenshi ziliao xuanji*, No. 58 (1979), pp. 53–55.

<sup>75</sup> Letter from the French minister to the foreign minister, dated 21 June 1920, in it Archives du Ministère de l’Intérieur, F7 2900.

<sup>76</sup> See Supra, Fn. 74. Authorities in China also began urging the government to bring the students home, warning that they should not be allowed to “linger” in Shanghai but should quickly be sent back to their home provinces. See the telegram sent by the Jiangsu Education Association and Shanghai Chamber of Commerce to the Education Ministry, in *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2:1, pp. 409–410.

<sup>77</sup> The loan was to have been deposited with the Banque Industrielle de Chine, which was in serious financial difficulties in the summer of 1921. See Jean-Noël Jeanneney, “Finances, presse et politique: l’affaire de la Banque Industrielle de Chine,” *Revue Historique* (April–June 1975), pp. 377–416. For Zhou Enlai’s account of the loan demonstrations, see *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2:2, pp. 459–66. See also *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2:2, pp. 483–92, 493–504.)

cultural links with France, Cai Hesen advocated close ties with the Soviet Union.

The disillusionment work-study students felt was exacerbated by the attempt of the Sino-French Education Association in early 1921 to distance itself from the movement. Cai Yuanpei, for example, in announcing to the students in January that subsidies would be discontinued, insisted that the Association had other more important functions than being responsible for work-study students. At the same time he sent a telegram to the Ministry of Education in Beijing advising that no more work-study students be permitted to come to France.<sup>71</sup> The Chinese minister to France, Chen Lu, warned Beijing of the potential harm to China's reputation as a result of the growing number of impoverished and unemployed Chinese students in and around Paris.<sup>72</sup>

On 28 February 1921 over 400 students, led by Cai Hesen, Xi-ang Jingyu and Wang Ruofei, converged on the Chinese legation in Paris to express their dissatisfaction and to demand guaranteed funds for full-time study. The Chinese minister was "manhandled" while meeting with the students, some of whom forced their way into the Legation buildings and had to be dispersed by police.<sup>73</sup> A number of other students, such as Li Lisan and Zhao Shiyan, did not at first agree with Cai's protest campaign, arguing that students should continue to pursue the work-study ideal rather than seek "hand-outs." Li, however, in his reminiscences noted that after the "February 28 Incident" and the "barbarous action" of the authorities, the group centering around himself and Zhao Shiyan joined up

with stiffer resistance. Nevertheless, Cai was still confident that a vanguard party could instill class consciousness among workers and peasants. For Mao's response to Cai's letters, see S. Schram (ed.), *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung* (New York, 1963), pp. 214–16.

<sup>71</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 13–14; Vol. 2:1, pp. 399–400, 402–403.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 2:1, 378.

<sup>73</sup> Report by the prefect of police to the Ministry of the Interior, 4 March 1921, Archives du Ministère de l'Intérieur F7 12900. Zhou Enlai's account of the incident is in *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 27–30.

The scheme for "frugal study" in France represented a significant departure from previous attempts at overseas study in two ways. Firstly, whereas during the late Qing only a restricted number of Chinese students had gone to Europe and the United States, most of whom were government sponsored graduates of the newly-established training institutes such as the army and naval academies or language schools,<sup>24</sup> the frugal study scheme was designed to allow as many students as possible to study abroad. In this way, Wang Jingwei remarked, others than the rich or influential could go abroad and a more positive contribution would be made to the raising of the educational level of the population as a whole.<sup>25</sup> The founders of the frugal study scheme anticipated in 1912 that over the following five years more than 3,000 students could be sent to France.

Secondly, there was more emphasis placed on the social and moral functions of study abroad rather than on the acquisition of specialized knowledge. The rules of the association stated that the primary reason for study in France was not to obtain a diploma but rather to cultivate the habits of hard work and frugality. Wu Zhihui commented in 1912 that if the scheme could attract the children of the rich the country would benefit since they would be cured of their extravagance and idleness. In blunter terms, Wu argued that the more people who went on the scheme the better since "even if they do not study anything if at least they learn how

<sup>24</sup> On this, see K. Biggerstaff, *The Earliest Modern Government Schools in China* (Ithaca, 1961). It is true that during the last years of the Qing dynasty a large number of Chinese students went to Japan (many of them self-financed and coming from well-off gentry families) but here too the Qing Government, wary of the radical influences on Chinese students there, imposed restrictions during the final years of the dynasty, so that by the end of 1911 the number had declined to approximately 1,400 from a peak of nearly 10,000 in 1905–1906. Huang Fuqing, *Qingmo liuri xuesheng (Chinese Students in Japan at the end of the Qing)* (Taipei, 1975), pp. 24–29.

<sup>25</sup> *Liufa jianxue baogaoshu (A Report on Frugal Study in France)* (Guangzhou, 1918), pp. 66–71.

to clean toilets it will be worth it.”<sup>26</sup> It was hoped that with these newly-acquired habits, in addition to their exposure to progressive and republican ideals in France, frugal-study students would on their return to China effect a widescale reform of Chinese society. In contrast to the fears of Chinese officials in the 1870s and 1880s that those studying abroad might abandon Chinese customs and mores, Li Shizeng promoted frugal study in France precisely to allow Chinese students to be exposed to *new* values.

In advocating frugal study as a means to “reform students’ habits,” Li Shizeng and Wu Zhihui shared the views of many Chinese educators during the final years of the Qing who had condemned the new-style modern schools that had begun to be established after the abolition of the traditional civil service examinations in 1905. Instead of benefiting the country, they bewailed, the modern schools had simply produced a new elite of pleasure-seeking and idle graduates who disdained any kind of manual work.<sup>27</sup>

The frugal study scheme came to an abrupt end in 1913 when President Yuan Shikai, increasingly suspicious of the Association and fearful of the potentially subversive effects of large-scale overseas study in France, closed down the preparatory school. In any event, with the outbreak of war in Europe in 1914 no more students could be sent to France.

## The Promotion of Work-Study

Li’s attention was therefore redirected to the education of Chinese workers already in France, of whom there were approximately 150

<sup>26</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 26; *Collected Writings of Li Shizeng*, Vol. 2, p. 61. See also Tao Yinghui, “Ji minguo silao” (“A recollection of the four elder statesmen of the Republic”), *Zhuanji wenxue*, Vol. 23, No. 5 (November 1973), p. 23. The “four elder statesmen” referred to Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui, Cai Yuanpei and Zhang Jingjiang.

<sup>27</sup> On this, see Bailey, “Popular education in China 1904–1919.”

and arguing that changes in the economic and political system had to precede educational change.<sup>67</sup> A number of students, such as He Changgong, Sheng Cheng and Jiang Zimin, have noted in their personal memoirs that it was during this period they first became acquainted with, and took an interest in, Marx and Lenin.<sup>68</sup>

The most radical questioning of the movement came from Cai Hesun, leader of the Xinmin Xuehui group of students at Montargis. Cai, who had immersed himself in Leninist works and was an avid reader of the French Communist Party newspaper, *L’Humanite*, rejected the idea — espoused by Xiao Zisheng, another member of the group — that education and gradual reform could bring about significant change. Whereas the original work-study promoters, especially Li Shizeng, advocated local autonomy and class harmony through educational interaction, Cai, in two letters he wrote to Mao Zedong in 1 August and September 1920, expounded on the concept of the dictatorship of the proletariat and urged Mao to prepare for an “October 1917 style” revolution in China.<sup>69</sup> A centralized vanguard party ushering in a proletarian dictatorship was essential, Cai insisted, in order to combat anarchism on the one hand and bourgeois dictatorship on the other. Class struggle and workers’ Soviets were to be the order of the day.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, in contrast to Li Shizeng’s vision of a China having close educational and

<sup>67</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 3, pp. 454–458; *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 11.

<sup>68</sup> He Changgong, *Memories of Work-Study Life*, pp. 38–41; Sheng Cheng, *A Record of 10 Years’ Work-Study Abroad*, p. 54; *Historical Materials*, Vol. 3, pp. 454–58.

<sup>69</sup> Cai’s letters (13 August, 16 September 1920) are printed in *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2:2, pp. 810–25. The first letter has been translated into French by C. Gipoulon, in *Extreme-Orient Extreme-Occident*, No. 2 (1983), pp. 143–48.

<sup>70</sup> Cai noted, however, that a communist revolution might encounter greater opposition in China than in Russia because, first, in China there were far more small landholders, and, secondly, traditional Chinese government had exerted only slight control over the individual economy and hence there had been more economic freedom in China than in Russia. Collectivization would hence meet

Chen Yi, who worked at the Michelin plant at Clermont Ferrand, complained that factory life had nothing to do with the ideals of equality, freedom and fraternity supposedly characteristic of French society. Rather, it had shown him the “evil nature” of European capitalism at first hand.<sup>64</sup> (It might be noted, however, that although later Chinese Communist historiography praised the heroic attempt by students to “enter the labouring world,” some students retained elitist attitudes. Wang Ruofei did not think highly of French workers, describing them as idle and pleasure-seeking, while Li Fuchun, writing of his experiences at Schneiders in Le Havre, referred disparagingly to the “uncleanliness” of the Chinese workers there.<sup>65</sup> In his first letter from Europe in March 1921, while he was in London, Zhou Enlai remarked on the social unrest, unemployment and economic exploitation he saw as being prevalent in both England and France. In contrast to the lavish praise Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui and Cai Yuanpei had heaped on European civilization, Zhou preferred to emphasize the depths to which in his view it had sunk.<sup>66</sup>

More importantly, some students began to question the relevance of work-study for China, taking issue with the notion that “industry and education can save the country” (*shiyè jiàoyù jiùguó*)

<sup>64</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2:1, pp. 212–38, 291–92; Vol. 3, pp. 47–57. See also the disparaging comments of another student at Schneiders in Le Havre, in *ibid.* Vol. 2:1, pp. 249–51.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 2:1, pp. 218, 220; Vol. 3, pp. 107–116. A revealing letter from the principal of Montargis College in 1921 to the Chinese legation noted that of the 110 students at Montargis some had decided to continue their studies while those unable to pay fees would “accept suitable work that could be found for them, that is to say, not manual work” (emphasis added). NA 47 AS B/6-2(2). Neither did Chinese students closely identify with non-white workers. Wang Ruofei objected to being housed in an immigrant workers’ dormitory along with blacks and Arabs, while Chen Yi made it clear that he resented illiterate French workers treating him the same as blacks. *Historical Materials*, Vol. 3, p. 56. Note also He Changgong’s surprise at French girls going out with blacks. *Memories of Work-Study Life*, pp. 23–24.

<sup>66</sup> *Letters From Europe*, pp. 1–4.

in 1914. Their numbers had increased the previous year when Li had recruited 49 to take up employment at an artificial silk factory at Arques-la-Bataille in Normandy.<sup>28</sup> When, in 1915, representatives of the French Government began negotiating in Beijing with the semi-official Huimin Company (under the control of Liang Shiyi, acting minister of finance) for the recruitment of Chinese labour to work in factories in France, Li announced the creation of the Diligent Work and Frugal Study Association (Qingong Jianxue Hui) to promote “diligence and perseverance in work, and frugality (in order to save money) for study, thereby advancing the labourers’ knowledge.”<sup>29</sup> The first group of 1,700 Chinese workers arrived in France in August 1916.<sup>30</sup> Great Britain also was to recruit Chinese labourers for war-service work in France, and the first group of 1,000 arrived in Plymouth in April 1917.<sup>31</sup> Li anticipated enormous benefits accruing to China as a result of sending large num-

<sup>28</sup> For a February 1914 report on these Chinese workers by the commissioner of police at Dieppe, see Archives du Ministère de l’Intérieur, F7 1348. The commissioner noted that they were “mediocre” workers but very “correct” in their behaviour. See also *L’Humanité*, 30 March 1914.

<sup>29</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 52.

<sup>30</sup> *Lu-ou zazhi*, No. 3 (September 1916), p. 3. For information on the negotiations involved in the recruitment of Chinese labour, see Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, E-110-2, E-22-15. It is interesting to note that between 1915 and 1916, 58,000 Chinese workers were also recruited to work in Russia, most of them in factories east of the Volga. For information on Chinese workers in France, see Chen Ta, *Chinese Migrations with Special Reference to Labor Conditions* (U.S. Dept. of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, Washington, D.C., 1923), pp. 142–158; P. Wou, *Les Travailleurs Chinois et la Grande Guerre* (Paris, 1939); H. McNair, *The Chinese Abroad* (Shanghai, 1924), pp. 235–38; J. Blick, “The Chinese labor corps in WWI,” *Harvard Papers on China* (August 1955), pp. 111–45; J. Chesnaux, *The Chinese Labor Movement* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1968), pp. 138–40. See also the report published by the Huimin Company, *Huagong fufa* (*Chinese Workers in France*) (n.p. 1918).

<sup>31</sup> On the recruitment of Chinese workers by the British, see M. Summerskill, *China on the Western Front* (London, 1982). Britain had previously been involved in the recruitment of Chinese contract labour when 63,695 labourers (mainly from Zhili and Shandong) were recruited to work in the Transvaal gold mines between

bers of workers to France. In a 1917 article he claimed that Chinese workers in France would form the nucleus of a future skilled working class that would contribute to the diffusion of industrial skills on their return to China. Further-more, having been exposed to European civilization, such workers would also help in the reform of society and the elimination of undesirable social customs.<sup>32</sup>

Eventually, there were to be 100,000 Chinese workers under British control and 35,000 under the French. The former worked on roads, in dockyards and tank and ordnance workshops, while the latter went to work in arms-manufacturing, metallurgical and chemical plants, and construction enterprises.<sup>33</sup> Since Chinese workers under British control had three-year contracts, their repatriation was completed in April 1920. Those under French control had five-year contracts and had the option of staying on in France (in which case their return fare home would not be paid). A report by the Interior Ministry in 1925 noted the presence of 3,000 “Chinese workers and apprentices” in France.<sup>34</sup> The continued presence of Chinese workers in France was to provide an important rationale for sending work-study students to France.

In 1916 Li Shizeng established a Chinese workers’ school in Paris and it was hoped that some of the workers could be trained as interpreters in the factories. Cai Yuanpei gave a series of lectures at the school, which drew attention to the “bad habits” of the Chinese people such as extravagance, uncleanness, cursing and adherence to superstitious beliefs, and which stressed the need to adopt “western customs” such as politeness, concern for the public interest and loving animals.[3S] This reflected a concern prevalent among

---

1904 and 1907. See P. Richardson, *Chinese Mine Labour in the Transvaal* (London, 1982).

<sup>32</sup> *Collected Writings of Li Shizeng*, Vol. 1, pp. 220–25.

<sup>33</sup> Chen Ta, *Chinese Migrations*, pp. 147–48. For a first-hand account of the labour battalions recruited by Britain and France during the First World War, see *The Times*, 26, 27, 28 December 1917.

<sup>34</sup> Archives du Ministère de l’Intérieur. F7 1348.

Tianjin publication *Yishi bao* (*Journal to Benefit the Times*) and who himself worked at the Renault factory in Billancourt (near Paris) for a time, calculated that there were 700 Chinese students in the Paris region unable to attend school (due to a lack of money) or find a job.<sup>60</sup> The Sino-French Education Association provided temporary subsidies and accommodation (at its headquarters in Colombes) for some of the students but for many times were hard. Li Huang, studying in France at the time, remembers that up to 1921, 61 students had died as a result of sickness and hunger, while another 80 were in hospital.<sup>61</sup>

Although some work-study students participated in educational activities among Chinese workers,<sup>62</sup> and an article in *Lu’ou zhoukan* (*Weekly Journal for Overseas Students in Europe*) confidently predicted in 1920 that such interaction would ensure that “today’s workers in the future can become students, while today’s work-study students will soon become ‘complete workers,’”<sup>63</sup> the potential benefits of work-study began to be questioned. Even those who did find a job became disillusioned. The work schedule certainly seems to have been punishing. Wang Ruofei, future Chinese delegate to the Comintern, noted in his diary that he studied in the morning and evening, in between working a 10-hour day at the Saint-Chamond steelworks; Luo Xuezan claimed that students in the Montargis area worked eight hours a day and studied a further four to six hours in the evening.

---

<sup>60</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 6–11, 55.

<sup>61</sup> Li Huang, “Liufa qingong jianxue yu Zhongguo gongchandang,” *Ming baoyuekan*, No. 46 (October 1969), p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Students from Montargis, for example, organized a lecture group which regularly visited Chinese workers in neighbouring factories and gave talks on science and hygiene. *Lu-ou zhoukan*, No. 1 (15 November 1919), No. 5 (13 December 1919). Workers were also encouraged to form associations of their own to promote the elimination of gambling and other “incorrect behaviour.” *Huagong zazhi* (*Journal for Chinese Workers*), Nos. 28 (25 November 1918), 33 (25 April 1919).

<sup>63</sup> *Lu-ou zhoukan*, No. 16 (28 February 1920).

tinually bewailed Anglo-Saxon cultural hegemony in China,<sup>55</sup> and the work-study movement was welcomed as a means to counteract this. Already in 1916 the prominent socialist senator Marius Moutet (1876–1968) had welcomed the arrival of Chinese workers, predicting that they would “become the best agents for French propaganda in their country.”<sup>56</sup> A 1919 article in the journal, *Le Temps*, referring to Chinese work-study students, confidently asserted that “it is obvious these newly-arrived students, educated in France, knowing our country, and imbued with our ideas, will have an influence in China beneficial to us.”<sup>57</sup> Such a result was inevitable, it was frequently claimed, because not only were there similarities between the French and Chinese cultures,<sup>58</sup> but also because French culture, unlike Anglo-Saxon culture, which sought only to dominate, was more benign and humanistic.<sup>59</sup>

## Politicization of Work-Study Students and the End of the Movement

The ambitious hopes held of the movement were quickly dashed. By 1920 the post-war depression had begun to take effect in France, with many factories laying off workers or closing down completely. Zhou Enlai, who reported on the situation for the

---

<sup>55</sup> See, e.g., *Asie Francaise*, No. 159 (June 1914); *La Politique de Peking*, No. 16 (21n April 1918).

<sup>56</sup> Archives Nationales: Section Outre Mer, NF 269 (1).

<sup>57</sup> “La Reforme de l’enseignement,” *Le Temps* (September 1919), pp. 4–5.

<sup>58</sup> Alphonse Aulard, at the opening meeting of the Sino-French Education Association in June 1916, maintained that the humanist philosophy of Confucius anticipated the ideals of the French Revolution. *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 202–203. Louis Grillet, on an official mission to China in 1918 to investigate how French influence could be increased, claimed that the Chinese were the “French of the Far East” because they were “philosophers, poets and artists.” Archives du Ministeredes Affaires Etrangeres, E-28-1/6.

<sup>59</sup> *La Politique de Peking*, No. 45 (10 November 1918), pp. 705–708; No. 1 (4 January 1920).

Chinese reformers and educators that Chinese workers should not become the target for western ridicule.

In the same year Li and Cai helped organize the Sino-French Education Association (Huaafa Jiaoyu Hui), presided over by Cai and the French historian Alphonse Aulard. The aim of the Association was to “develop relations between China and France and, especially, with the aid of French scientific and spiritual education, to plan for the development of China’s moral, intellectual and economic well-being.”<sup>35</sup> Branch associations were later set up in a number of Chinese cities, including Shanghai, Guangzhou and Chengdu.

Li now hoped that Chinese students could also take advantage of new opportunities for work in France. In 1917 the Beijing Preparatory School, which had been closed since 1913, was reopened with the aim of preparing students for work-study in France. It was thus from this time on that work-study became associated with a student movement. Other preparatory schools were opened in Baoding and Chengdu, where students undertook practical training such as metalwork in addition to studying French.<sup>36</sup> In 1918 a preparatory class was opened in Changxingdian on the Beijing-Hankou railway. Regulations for the Baoding classes stipulated that students going to France were to participate in Chinese workers’ education in their spare time.<sup>37</sup> Fees were minimal, ranging from one to three yuan a month, and training lasted from one to two years. Students were to pay their own passage to France (although provision was made for loans

---

<sup>35</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 76. The regulations of the association are also in *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 206–209.

<sup>36</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, pp. 63, 100, 164–66.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 1, p. 66. Another interesting feature of the regulations was that they suggested the metal or other goods produced by the students be sold in order to help contribute towards the school’s expenditures. Vocational schools in the last years of the Qing and early years of the Republic had already begun to implement such a measure.

to those who could not afford the fare), but once in France the Sino-French Education Association would place them in factories or preparatory French classes attached to secondary schools (colleges).

The first group of work-study students embarked for France in early 1919. Between March 1919 and December 1920, 17 groups left for France, totalling nearly 1,600. The largest group was the 15<sup>th</sup>, which included Zhou Enlai among its 197 members. Chen Yi, Li Fuchun, Li Weihan and Nie Rongzhen were included among earlier groups.<sup>38</sup> Figures produced by the Sino-French Education Association in November 1920 show that 498 students were placed in factories and 579 were in schools (out of a total of 1,414). For those working in factories the largest groups were located in iron and steel plants in Firminy and Saint-Chamond (near the large industrial centre of Saint-Etienne in south-central France) and the Schneider armaments plants at Harfleur and Le Creusot. Most of the students in educational establishments were in secondary schools, mostly in Montargis, Melun and Fontainebleau (all near Paris), 71 were in lycées while another 34 were in specialized vocational schools. The majority of work-study students came from the three provinces of Hunan, Sichuan and Guangdong.<sup>39</sup> The ages of the students ranged from 16 to 25 (with Deng Xiaoping one of the youngest), although the oldest student was Xu Teli, the future com-

---

<sup>38</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 65–158. See also *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, pp. 506–507, 518–19, 522–25, 528–29, 615–23, 679–83, 711–13, 775–77, 790–91.

<sup>39</sup> These figures are from the documents of the Sino-French Education Association and the Sino-French Committee of Support now kept in the National Archives, Paris (hereafter cited as NA47 AS). For the November 1920 report giving the numbers of work-study students, see NA 47 AS, A/2-1. For a guide to these documents, see G. Barman, N. Dulioust, *Etudiants-Ouvriers Chinois en France 1920–1940* (Paris, 1981). In 1921 the Association reported a total of 1,576 registered work-study students. Of the 21 women students, most were from Hunan, Sichuan and Guangdong. Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, E-27-4 s/d.

were granted funds by Governor Chen Jiongming.<sup>50</sup> Deng Xiaoping and Nie Rongzhen, having graduated from the Sichuan Preparatory School, were provided with travelling expenses by the head of the Chongqing Chamber of Commerce, Wang Yunsong.<sup>51</sup> Zhou Enlai, also, received money from Yan Xiu, the founder of Nankai University and middle-school (where Zhou had studied) and prominent educational official during the last years of the Qing.<sup>52</sup> The hope that returning work-study students would benefit their home provinces was illustrated by the arrangement made by Henan authorities. They decided to send 20 students a year, each to be given 700 yuan, on the condition they work in the province for at least three years on their return.<sup>53</sup>

As far as the French were concerned, the work-study movement, by increasing the number of Chinese students familiar with French industry and educational institutions, would enhance French prestige and expand her educational and economic influence in China. Since the United States' decision in 1908 to remit the Boxer indemnity funds in order to subsidize the sending of Chinese students to American colleges, competition among the powers, often referred to by the French as a *lutte* (struggle),<sup>54</sup> for cultural influence in China had been especially keen. French publications con-

---

<sup>50</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, pp. 489–90.

<sup>51</sup> Li Huang, “Liufa qingong jianxue yu Zhongguo gongchandang,” *Ming baoyuekan*. No. 48 (December 1969), pp. 27–28.

<sup>52</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 3, p. 400.

<sup>53</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 493. Provincial prestige was also at stake. Thus the head of the Guangdong branch of the Sino-French Education Association appealed to the provincial governor for funds in 1919, declaring that the more Guangdong students who went to France, the better equipped the province would be in participating in the future national revival. *Ibid.* Vol. 1, p. 491.

<sup>54</sup> See, e.g., the letter (29 March 1920) from the French consul in Shanghai to the French Foreign Ministry, in Archives du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, E-27-4. The French minister in Beijing also warned his government in December 1919 of American attempts to woo Chinese students away from France and study in the United States. *Ibid.* E-27-4.3

One day you will return  
And unfurl the banner of freedom,  
Singing the praises of independence.  
Struggling for women's rights  
And seeking equality  
You will put these to the test in society.  
The overthrow of traditional ethics  
Entirely depends on such an outlook.<sup>47</sup>

Of course, other students had more immediate aims in mind. Chen Yi, future foreign minister in the 1950s, later noted that he went to France, not because he was responding to the slogan of the “sanctity of labour,” but because he needed quick work in order to obtain the financial means to study.<sup>48</sup>

Work-study students were supported by various official organizations and wealthy patrons within China, indicating a widespread enthusiasm for the scheme. Hunanese students, some of whom were members of the *Xinmin Xuehui* (*New People's Study Society*) created in April 1918 by Mao Zedong and Cai Hesen, received funds from the Overseas Chinese Workers' Bureau while they were attending the Beijing Preparatory School.<sup>49</sup> Students from Fujian

---

<sup>47</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, pp. 814–15.

<sup>48</sup> *Historical Materials*, Vol. 3, pp. 47–53.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Vol. 2:1, pp. 51–52; He Changgong, *Memories of Work-Study Life*, pp.8–11. See also Cai Hesen's August 1918 letter to Luo Xuezan, in *Cai Hesen wenji* (*The Collected Works of Cai Hesen*) (Changsha, 1978), Vol. 2, p. 242, as well as his letter to Mao Zedong and others, in the same month. *Ibid.* Vol. 1, pp. 4–10. Mao himself, in 1920, noted that he would have preferred to go to Russia since he felt egalitarian philosophy was more profound there than in Western Europe. *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, pp. 158, 159. R. Scalapino overlooks this in his article “The education of a young revolutionary: Mao Zedong in 1919–1921,” *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. XLII, No. 1 (November 1982), pp. 29–61. Scalapino's description of Mao as a “liberal” at this time is a rather meaningless one since, according to his definition of a “liberal” (i.e. one who was attracted to a variety of political ideologies), the term could be applied to practically all student activists in the 1919–20 period.

missar of education at Yan'an in 1937. Xu was 42 when he went to France at the end of 1919.

The large number of students from the inland provinces of Hunan and Sichuan contrasted with the earlier predominance of Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Hubei students among those who went to Japan in the early years of the century. (Jiangsu and Zhejiang, traditionally two of the richest provinces, had always been noted for having the highest number of traditional degree-holders, while the large number of overseas Hubei students in Japan was principally due to the encouragement of Governor-general Zhang Zhidong, one of the first Qing officials to promote overseas study in Japan.) This suggests that the movement opened up opportunities for overseas study to a wider range of people, confirmed by the fact that many of the work-study students were graduates of middle-school level or below.<sup>40</sup> The Beijing Preparatory School only required of its entrants that they have the equivalent of a middle-school education, while the schools at Baoding and Changxingdian stipulated that entrants were simply to have a basic knowledge of Chinese and that they were not to possess “bad habits” such as smoking or gambling.<sup>41</sup> The low tuition fees charged by the preparatory schools and the specially reduced boat fares Li Shizeng negotiated with French authorities also contributed to the large numbers of students.<sup>42</sup>

---

<sup>40</sup> Of the 1,237 students who left for France between May 1919 and August 1920, 500 were primary- or middle-school graduates. Three hundred were from the various preparatory schools, but since only a middle or lower vocational school education was required to enter these schools, many of them can be included in the former group. *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, pp. 85–87.

<sup>41</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 63.

<sup>42</sup> Boat fares were reduced from 200 to 100 yuan. *Ibid.* Vol. 1, p. 208.

## Perceptions of Work-Study

For the original promoters of the movement — Li Shizeng, Wu Zihui and Cai Yuanpei — work-study would expose Chinese students to the civilizing influence of France as well as cultivating habits of frugality and hard work. The interaction between students and workers would result in the narrowing of the gap between manual and mental labour and hence contribute to the achievement of social equality,<sup>43</sup> thus eliminating the traditional distinction between “those who worked with their minds” and those “who worked with their hands.” Such ideals were an important feature of the May Fourth Movement. Articles and speeches increasingly referred to the “sanctity of labour” (*laogong shensheng*) after 1915,<sup>44</sup> while Beijing University students promoted the cause of popular education and created “work-study mutual assistance groups” (*gongdu huzhutuan*) to encourage the combining of mental and manual work.

The students who embarked for France in 1919 were also fired by such ideals. Wang Ruofei noted in his diary that he went to France to cultivate the habit of hard work and gain first-hand experience of the labouring world. Wang worked at the Saint-Chamond steelworks after studying for four months at Fontainebleau. He admitted that at first the smoky industrial environment deterred him but then, in that combination of idealism and condescension which characterized much of the students’ attitudes towards the “labouring world,” he claimed:

---

<sup>43</sup> See Li Shizeng’s preface to the regulations of the work-study association in *The Educational Movement in Europe*, p. 75, and Wu Zihui’s article in *ibid.* pp. 76–80.

<sup>44</sup> In 1915 Cai Yuanpei insisted that work was everyone’s “sacred task.” *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, p. 184. For Cai’s 1918 speech on the “sanctity of labour,” see Gao Pingshu (ed.), *Cai Yuanpei jiaoyu wenxuan (A Selection of Cai Yuanpei’s Writings on Education)* (Beijing, 1980), p. 57. See also *The Complete Works of Cai Yuanpei*, p. 523.

Our labouring spirit convinced us and we felt that these clouds of black smoke were also important products of culture and that these rough and ready labourers were, after all, leading the true way of life and were the builders of civilization. Why should I reject such a way of life?<sup>45</sup>

Another student noted that work-study would enable students who came from a society in which the masses were considered inferior and only the intellectual was considered worthy, to “take off their long gowns and get down off their high horses and personally enter factories to work.”<sup>46</sup>

You are leaving our homeland  
To cross the seas and oceans,  
Amidst the roaring billows  
That will carry you to France,  
The birthplace of freedom.

There you will handle the tools of industry  
And pour forth the sweat of labour,  
Winning glorious achievements  
Your abilities steeled and tempered  
And your shining sincerity of purpose preserved.

---

<sup>45</sup> Wang’s diary is printed in *Historical Materials*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 212–38.

<sup>46</sup> *The Work-Study Movement in France*, Vol. 1, p. 8; *Historical Materials*, Vol. 1, p.84.