

VIOLENCE UPON SEIZING THE RAILROAD: QING
POLICY IN CREATING THE SICHUAN
RAILWAY MOVEMENT

by

Devon O'Neal Williams

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STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

The following faculty members served as the supervisory committee chair and members for the thesis of Devon O'Neal Williams.

Dates at right indicate the members' approval of the thesis.

<u>Janet Theiss</u> , Chair	<u>12/17/2012</u> Date Approved
-----------------------------	------------------------------------

<u>Benjamin Cohen</u> , Member	<u>12/17/2012</u> Date Approved
--------------------------------	------------------------------------

<u>Wesley Sasaki-Uemura</u> , Member	<u>12/17/2012</u> Date Approved
--------------------------------------	------------------------------------

The thesis has also been approved by Isabel Moreira

Chair of the Department/School/College of History

and by Donna M. White, Interim Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

In an effort to build a modern transportation system, an economically bankrupt Qing government approved the funding and construction of provincial railways. When these provinces proved incapable of building these projects, the central government nationalized every proposed railway line to facilitate construction using foreign loans. These loans gave foreign powers considerable leverage in determining China's future railway network. With the central government ignoring local economic and political concerns over these actions, Sichuan province experienced outbreaks of protest over railway sovereignty.

While these issues have been discussed by many scholars, the role of government policy in creating the conditions for protest has not been fully explored. The Qing government's policy of ignoring a politically and geographically isolated province belied Sichuan's increasing importance, both economically and militarily, in the empire. Economically, government actions restricted the means of raising railway funds and a tolerated system of corruption drained the funding already accrued. Politically, the central government promoted a national self-strengthening program centered on the training of overseas students. In Sichuan, these returned students achieved limited political success, but their authority was curtailed by government leaders more concerned with protecting the dynasty. These students then formed an alternative power structure by merging with a secret society in an effort to protect provincial sovereignty. When conflict finally broke

out, Qing officials found that prior military policies focusing on Sichuan's Tibetan frontier aided in their defeat. By analyzing the Qing government's economic, political, and military policies, this thesis argues that government interference in provincial concerns was the central factor in creating a unified, revolutionary society and in its success.

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INTRODUCTION

Since their invention in the nineteenth century, railways were the primary means of connecting an ever-shrinking world in both time and place. They were particularly instrumental in the creation of nation states. In 1911 Sichuan,¹ however, a railway became the catalyst for revolution between a local populace willing to join the empire only on its own terms and a central government that seemed to breed discontent with its every action. Ironically, this separation was over a railway that at the time had seen almost no construction. Rather, the local populace fought for what the railway represented to them. While a few scholars have studied the history of the Railway Rights Recovery Movement² and the subsequent rebellion, the study of government activity within this context has received only cursory scrutiny. By observing the friction created by economic, political, and military policy, a clear picture of how a revolutionary movement was created by government action, or in some cases inaction, will be obtained.

In his history of the Sichuan Revolutionary movement, S.C. Yang has a quote that encapsulates his view of Sichuan's central place within the 1911 Revolution. He wrote, “During the four months that the railroad struggle was on in Sichuan the Manchu

¹ All Romanization within this work has been converted to Pinyin for consistency.

² This Rights Recovery Movement was initially a movement to regain economic rights lost during negotiations during the Unequal Treaties with foreign powers. These included rights to mines as well as railway lines. In Sichuan, this movement is synonymous with a term I use later, the Railway League.

Dynasty was overthrown. What was the reason? There is a proverb: 'In the Empire of China when the provinces are experiencing unrest Sichuan is always the first to start things.'"³ For S.C. Yang and other provincial leaders, Sichuan was the center of the struggle that ended the Qing dynasty. Notwithstanding the immense popularity and focus the Sichuan Cause initially enjoyed throughout China, it quickly became superseded by events outside the province. Sichuan, despite its growing importance in the waning days of the Qing, remained on the periphery of the empire – both politically and geographically.

Sichuan was considered a backwater during most of the dynasty. Depredations by the invading Manchu armies at its conquest depopulated the area, and it still had not recovered its standing by the reign of the Emperor Kangxi (1661-1722). In his work on Sichuan's political institutions during this period, S.A.M. Adshead wrote, "Down to the Taiping Rebellion Sichuan remained in effect an interior off-shore island in relation to the main body of the Chinese empire: a continental Taiwan or Hainan; and its political importance was relatively slight except in times of crisis on the Tibetan border."⁴ Accentuating its political separation, Sichuan also remained remote because of the isolation of the province by its mountainous terrain and a series of treacherous rapids in the Yangzi River above Yichang. Although roads existed, they were not useful in the transportation of goods owing to the steepness of the mountains. Thus while an overland

³ Shao-ch'üan (S.C.) Yang, "The Revolution in Szechwan, 1911-1912," *West China Border Research Society* 4 (1933-1934): 69. Yang Shaoquan's observations are critical for this work. In addition to being an eyewitness of these events, he was selected as a foreign minister during the time between the success of the rebellion and Sichuan subsequently joining the Republic of China.

⁴ Samuel Adrian M. (S.A.M) Adshead, *Province and Politics in Imperial China: Viceregal Government in Szechwan, 1898-1911* (London: Curzon Press, 1984), 9.

journey from Chongqing to Chengdu may have taken roughly ten days for people to travel by foot, “goods conveyed up-river from Chongqing are frequently ten or more weeks in reaching the capital.”⁵

By the middle of the nineteenth century, this situation radically changed. From 1850 to 1864, China experienced one of the worst military conflicts in history. Hong Xiuquan (1814-1864), a disaffected scholar from Guangdong, started the conflict after receiving a vision of a holy war to cleanse China of the Qing. Rebels wrecked the former rich provinces in the Jiangnan⁶ region leaving an untouched Sichuan as one of the wealthier provinces in the Chinese empire. As Sichuan's power and position in the empire increased in the second half of the nineteenth century, its wealth supported other provinces decimated by the rebellion.⁷ Between the recorded years of 1886 to 1900, “more revenue was spent outside of the province than in it.”⁸

By the twentieth century, Sichuan was a prize for foreign governments as well as the Qing. The report of the Blackburn Chamber of Commerce mission wrote, “Rich in everything which goes to support trade, agriculture, mineral wealth, products of skilled labour, and the comparative wealth of its people, this province is par excellence the

⁵ Robert John Davidson and Isaac Mason, *Life in West China: Described by Two Residents in the Province of Sz-Chwan* (London: Headley Brothers, 1905), 36.

⁶ The Jiangnan Region was the area of China south of the Yangzi River. It was considered the economic and cultural heartland of the empire. In addition, the Taiping Rebellion killed tens of millions of people.

⁷ Masao Nishikawa, "Shisen horo undō: sono zen'ya no shakai jokyō" [The Railway Protection Movement in Sichuan: Social Conditions on the Eve of Movement], (*Tōyō bunka kenkyūjo kiyō*) [Minutes of the Institute of Oriental Culture] 45.3 (1968): 110. In his study of Jiangjin County, Nishikawa demonstrates the heavy burden this caused. After the Taiping Rebellion, taxes there had increased something like 2.3 times by 1888, and 5.9 times by 1911.

⁸ Adshead, 17.

market, of all others, it should be our endeavor to gain."⁹ Because of this potential market, foreign powers attempted to gain access rights to build a railway from Hankou in Hubei Province to Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan. Xiliang (1853-1917), Governor-general of Sichuan in 1903, memorialized the Emperor that a railway must be built with local funds as a means of cutting off foreign control of this newly proposed railway. He wrote, "If we still do not have an officially established provincial railway company and still do not call upon all-Chinese capital to build the road and preserve sovereignty, then the situation will be indeed perilous."¹⁰ It was from this memorial that the momentum to build a railway from Chengdu to Hankou began.¹¹

Ways to fund the railway were proposed and provincial leaders propagandized a populace increasingly enthusiastic about constructing a locally owned railway. Despite this, corruption and inefficient management would prove to be the downfall of the project. The Qing government nationalized all of the provincial railway projects and secured a loan with the Four Powers to build the system. Movements to retain railway rights sprung up in Sichuan, Hunan, and Zhejiang to protest the negotiation of foreign loans, which meant foreign control of China's interior. In writing about why opposition to foreign control existed, Wang Ching-Chun stated:

⁹ Frederick S.A. Bourne. *Report of the Mission to China of the Blackburn Chamber of Commerce 1896- 87* (Manchester: The North-east Lancashire Press Co., 1898), 333. This report was an economic survey conducted by British officials in appraising China's value for investment.

¹⁰ "Sichuan zongdu butang xi zouqing zishe Chuan-Han tielu gongsi zhe gao" [Memorial sent by Sichuan Governor-general Xiliang about establishing the Chuan-Han Railway Company], July 11, 1903, in *Chuanlu yuebao* [Monthly report of the Sichuan railways] vol.1, (1911 May). In Xiaowei Zheng, *The Making of Modern Chinese Politics Political Culture, Protest Repertoires, and Nationalism in the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement* (PhD diss., UC San Diego, 2010), 172. Zheng Xiaowei notes that the original document was found in the Sichuan Provincial Archives.

¹¹ This railway is often referred to as the Chuan-Han railway.

Unlike loans in the United States or the other powers where loan bonds are floated in markets in order to create capital for construction, loans negotiated in China were delicate diplomatic affairs in addition to their economic implications. The Chinese people were increasingly hesitant to increase foreign control of China's interior.¹²

The Court's decision to nationalize the railway galvanized the provincial leadership into forming a protest movement. On September 7th, 1911, Viceroy¹³ Zhao Erfeng (1845–1911) ordered the arrest of Sichuan Rights Recovery Movement leader Pu Dianjun (1875-1934) and eight of his compatriots. Rebellion broke out throughout the province with local leaders eventually able force the resignation of the provincial government. Pu Dianjun formed a new government until it was overtaken by Nationalists forces, as had the rest of China.

The literature on the events in Sichuan has long been dominated by the uprising in Wuchang by elements of the New Army troops, traditionally considered the beginning of the 1911 Revolution.¹⁴ For many years the historical purview of these events focused on the discussion of whether the Rights Recovery Movement was a revolutionary movement. For many scholars, Sichuan remained on the sidelines because the 1911 Revolution for them began in Wuchang. Joseph Esherick, for example, in his pivotal work on the Revolution, focuses his narrative on the events in Hunan and Hubei because for him the story begins there. He wrote, “To focus on Hunan and Hubei was a relatively easy choice. The revolution erupted in Hubei and spread first to Hunan. These facts have

¹² Ching-Chun Wang, “Why the Chinese Oppose Foreign Railway Loans,” *The American Political Science Review* (1910): 365-366.

¹³ The title of Viceroy and Governor-general are the same, being translations from the same Chinese word - *zongdu*. Both of these terms will be used interchangeably throughout.

¹⁴ The New Army units were created as a modernized force instructed and equipped according to Western standards. They were created after China's disastrous defeat in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895.

enhanced both the intrinsic importance and the historical record of the revolution in Central China.”¹⁵ Etō Shinkichi, in his edited volume on the 1911 Revolution, stated that, “On October 10, 1911, an *anti*-Qing revolutionary uprising took place in Wuchang. This set off a chain of revolts in the cities and provinces south of the Yangzi (Yangtze) and within three months brought to an end two millennia of dynastic rule in China.”¹⁶

Edward J. M. Rhoades, one of a few who addressed the issue of Sichuan directly, stated that it was not revolutionary because it sought a “cancellation of the Hu-kuang loan agreement and restoration of the railroad to local management – and not a change in government itself.”¹⁷

In an effort to redeem Sichuan, other historians would argue as S.C. Yang did that Sichuan was as revolutionary as Wuchang. Charles Hedtke, one of the pivotal writers of the Sichuan Movement in English, notes:

The Sichuanese phase of the Revolution depended upon the gradual acceptance by the provincial leadership of a revolutionary solution for their political differences with the government. Although these leaders held to a constitutional monarchist philosophy until the last months of the Qing period, fundamental differences between themselves and the Court over the philosophy of politics led them ultimately to accept the revolutionary movement as a means of implementing their own political ideals.¹⁸

Chinese historian Li Zongyi strengthened Hedtke’s argument by writing that “the struggle in Sichuan was not isolated but rather was linked closely with the revolutionary situation throughout China.” The Sichuan uprising “gave a strong impetus to revolutionary activities in other parts of the country” while benefiting from the massive

¹⁵ Joseph Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 2.

¹⁶ Shinkichi Etō, “Introduction.” in *The 1911 Revolution in China: Interpretive Essays*, ed. Shinkichi Etō and Harold Z. Schiffrin. (Tokyo: Univ of Tokyo Press, 1984), xi.

¹⁷ Edward J. M. Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case for Kwangtung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 273.

¹⁸ Charles H. Hedtke, *Reluctant Revolutionaries: Szechwan and the Ch'ing Collapse, 1898-1911* (PhD Diss. UC Berkeley, 1968), 9.

support from those same revolutionary groups.¹⁹ Nishikawa Masao, in his work on Sichuan, states that, “This armed struggle, looked on as the 1911 Revolution’s direct cause, toppled a more than 2000 year old dynasty’s autocratic rule, establishing Asia’s oldest republic. Moreover, this armed struggle not was only the fuse for the 1911 Revolution, it was two months before Wuchang.”²⁰

On the revolutionary nature of the Sichuan rebellion, the matter was finally laid to rest by Zheng Xiaowei's brilliant dissertation which provides the most up-to-date review of the Sichuan Railway Rights Movement. She has disputed the traditional rendering of the 1911 Revolution as “a failure despite the fact that it overthrew the longest-lasting imperial system in human history, established a republic, and introduced to a wider group of Chinese people the vital conceptions of rights, republicanism, and democracy.”²¹ She argues that the revolutionary movement in Sichuan provides evidence that the arguments for its failure – the inability of the revolution to penetrate into China’s countryside, to effect change in the social and the cultural structure of China, and to finish the difficult task of fighting against imperialism and authoritarianism – did not apply to Sichuan. The central point of her dissertation is that wide-spread propaganda created a unified sense of economic rights (*minquan*) and national sovereignty (*guoquan*) that eroded the relationship between the ruler and the people. This erosion gave the people in Sichuan a firm concept of citizenship in the public sphere, underscoring the belief that the Qing were unfit for a modern China.

¹⁹ Zongyi Li, “Chinese Bourgeois Revolutionaries and the Movement to Regain Economic Rights Towards the End of the Qing Dynasty,” in *The 1911 Revolution – A Retrospective After 70 Years*, ed. Sheng Hu and Danian Liu (Beijing: New World Press, 1983), 164.

²⁰ Nishikawa, 109.

²¹ Zheng, 2.

The intent of this thesis is to build on the work of Zheng Xiaowei and delve deeper into how government policy created and aided the social forces that rebelled and overthrew it. I will focus on the economics of railway construction, the creation of local leadership, and the military nature of the rebellion. The segment on economics will look specifically into why the Sichuanese opposed foreign loans. In addition, it will argue that the unique method Sichuan used to raise railway revenue, while effective, provided a partial reason for the railway nationalization. The second section will center on the creation of local leadership. It will also examine how this newly formed leadership merged with secret societies to form a revolutionary movement. Finally, the last section will highlight why the Rebellion achieved success despite its inability to decisively threaten the provincial government militarily. Rebellion leaders obtained victory in Sichuan through weaknesses in Qing strategic calculations over Sichuan's frontier and the infighting of government leaders. In sum, Sichuan's revolutionary movement was the creation of government incompetence or negligence in not taking Sichuan's concerns seriously.

THE ROLE OF ECONOMIC POLICY IN CREATING DISCONTENT

In May 1911, the central government, citing corruption at the provincial level, issued an imperial memorial nationalizing regional railways. The Manchu general Duanfang was sent to Hankou to take over the management of both the Canton-Hankou line as well as the Sichuan-Hankou line.²² When provincial leaders asked for a delay on the seizure of the railway line, the Emperor expressed surprise that Sichuan was not grateful for the nationalization program. The response to the provincial memorial states:

Upon perusing the memorial We are very much surprised. The conversion of the railway ownership to the State was decided upon owing to the difficulty in raising the necessary capital by the commercial class and the hopelessness of ever accomplishing the construction of their lines, in respect of which Szechuan is still much worse than Hunan. Moreover, the fact that large sums of its money have been involved in bankruptcies, the pocketing of the people's fat through "squeeze" and extortion by the intermediaries, hurtful to the people and calamitous to the nation, are all common knowledge. The Throne has, therefore, authorized the taking over by the State, and the cessation of the "capital per rental," to release the people from their burden.²³

Sichuan's method of rent taxation (called *zugu*) in raising railway revenue was central to this criticism. The government believed that railway officials inappropriately raised these taxes and that their corruption had wasted revenue. Furthermore, these taxes were onerous as the coffers of the railway company had been accumulated by a levee on

²² *North-China Herald*, May 27, 1911, 555. Despite the response of Sichuan, Duanfang was a very good choice in that he had been an accomplished official in Liaoning Province. His achievements there included the founding of two universities.

²³ *Ibid*, June 10, 1911, 694. While the phrase "capital per rental" is not exactly defined in the newspaper's printing of the Imperial edict, it can be deduced that it must refer to the *zugu* system as the edict suggests that other methods of raising capital must be found. By this time in 1911, the *zugu* was the only real source for capital the province had with declining donations and the eradication of opium.

every level of Sichuan society, or “squeeze” as the central government called it. The province's inability to conduct any significant construction of the railway underscored the central government's point. By 1911, the railway company had with the effort of 50,000 laborers, only been able to build about 160 of a proposed 1,980 kilometers of line.²⁴

The protestors who enflamed the entire province of Sichuan had an entirely different view of these funds. Originally, the *zugu* started out as an extra tax on landowners, yet later became a three percent tax on every household, including tenants and debtors, which produced over ten *dan*, or twenty-five bushels, of grain for railway stock. Those that produced less than ten *dan* were not obligated to pay any tax.²⁵ By the time of the 1909 shareholders meeting, voluntary efforts had only gathered 28% of the 15 million taels with the rest appropriated by shares derived from the *zugu*.²⁶ It was not just those who rented lands or their wealthier patrons who paid the tax. In a study of Jiangjin County in Sichuan, Masao Nishikawa found that 78% of peasants contributed to the *zugu*.²⁷ There was a realization among some officials that the extra tax was very damaging to the poor people of the province. One Chengdu official wrote, “The capital of the railway is gathered from the people of Sichuan. That money is the sweat and blood of the little peasants....This is a huge burden for peasants: for the small household, it takes

²⁴ *Ibid*, April 22, 1911, 208.

²⁵ “Chuan-Han tielu zong gongsi jigu zhangcheng” [Regulations on levying railway taxes of the Chuan-Han Railway Company]. In Zhili Dai, *Sichuan bao lu yun dong shi liao hui zuan* [Collection of historical materials on the Sichuan Railway Protection Movement] (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiu yuan jindaishi yanjiusuo [Academia Sinica Modern History Research Institute], 1994), 272.

²⁶ Mongton Chi Hsu, *Railway Problems in China* (New York: Columbia University, 1915), 328.

²⁷ Nishikawa, 116.

them more than ten years to get one share. The profit is hard to see, while the burden is hard to get rid of and they suffer from this exploitation.”²⁸

Despite this burden, the people of Sichuan had pride in the fact that they had been able to raise funds and believed that they could raise more to complete the railway. They saw the intervention of the central government into their internal affairs as egregious. Li Jieren, a novelist and noted participant in these events, captured the anger that the ordinary people in particular were experiencing during this situation. In an interview with Han Suyin given later in life, he stated:

We had sweated eight years for it. More than any other province, we Sichuanese had sweated money for our "iron road." Money, money. How much money we had paid out nobody will ever know, but all of us, from the brothel courtesans to poorest peasant, had sweated money for it. The gentry, who did most of the protesting, had paid the least. As usual, from the poor, the already-ground-to-misery peasant of Sichuan, some millions of silver ounces had come, not only the land-rent of three per cent taxes, but the rice tax and salt tax of four copper coins per cattie, years and years of life sweat; and now would the iron road be taken from us? Even the sedan chair carriers' neck veins swelled when they pronounced the words: "Our iron road, sold to foreigners." And the craftsmen, the miners and the shopkeepers, and the boatmen and the peasants, all of them who did not know what a railway looked like, all were angry.²⁹

This disconnect between the government's perception of a benevolent takeover and the Sichuanese view of it as stripping them of their economic rights (*minquan*) forms the first part of Zheng Xiaowei's argument. As Zheng Xiaowei writes, “Sichuan's attempts to fund an entirely local railway enterprise through the use of an additional tax burden meant that every land-holding person in the province had a stake in the success of the railway.”³⁰

²⁸ “Gan Dazhang zou” [Gan Dazhang Memorial], in *Sheng Xuanhuai dang'an ziliao xuanji* [The Archival Documents on Sheng Xuanhuai], Vol. 1, 80-81. Quoted in Zheng, 190.

²⁹ Suyin Han, *The Crippled Tree: China, Biography, History, Autobiography* (New York: Putnam, 1965), 230.

³⁰ Zheng, 185.

Zheng Xiaowei, however, falls short in fully explaining how much the government played a part in this discord. She acknowledges that the government's decision to use foreign loans left it open to foreign dominance, but gives little detail about why Sichuan as well as other provinces were so resistant to these loans. In addition, while her analysis of the emerging discourse conflating these taxes with ideas of economic rights is excellent, she does not explain fully why Sichuan's form of raising revenue was so unique as to come to the attention of the imperial government. Also, she makes no mention of the policies that led to the fierce reliance on *zugu* as the only real means of revenue.

The Influence of Foreign Powers

The fear that Sichuan experienced over losing the railway to foreign control was not imaginary. Before the emergence of provincial railway projects, foreign loans had been the predominant method of financing railway construction in China. Railway concessions, or spheres of influence, were set aside for foreign owned and operated lines built with these loans, thus allowing the foreign powers to exert dominance without conquest. The pressure to secure railway loans was substantial as railways were exorbitantly expensive. In addition, the Chinese government was near bankruptcy because the nation was rebuilding from the Taiping Rebellion and the indemnities for the Opium Wars and Boxer Rebellion. By 1906, railway loans had supported the building of several lines successfully, including the line from Beijing to Hankou. The Four Powers—the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany—exerted pressure in applying for a loan for both the Sichuan to Hankou line as well as the Canton to Hankou line.

Due to their desires to secure railway concessions, foreign views of the Chinese building their own railways were very negative. The new British envoy, Sir John Jordan, upon arrival in 1906 exemplified this by stating that “capital investment made by provincial enterprises posed a real threat to British interests; and provincial enterprises, however promising, would fail in the end.” He also “believed that as yet it was a wasteful and time-wasting procedure for the Chinese to build their own railways.”³¹ On the Chuan-Han line in particular, a correspondent for the *North-China Herald*, in commenting on its corruption exposé in 1910, wrote, “If the people have learned wisdom by their experience, they will adopt the only plan that in existing circumstances can provide China with satisfactory railways and they will entrust the construction of the railway wholly to foreigners and its subsequent administration in large part to the same hands.”³²

Although the foreign powers were critical of corruption in Chinese politics, they employed it to their advantage. After China accepted the necessity of building railways for its modernization, foreign railway loans by 1905 would reach a staggering total of \$300 million.³³ This total was too much of an attraction for many to resist corruption. Backdoor deals between negotiators and foreign powers tainted the very concept of foreign loans. Wang Ching-Chun, writing on the loan situation, writes:

It is hard to tell how much corruption has actually existed among the officials in negotiating foreign loans; it is still more difficult to determine to what extent some of the foreign powers really have resorted to the practice of bribing in securing privileges; but it is an undeniable fact that the belief of the

³¹ Kit-Ching Chan Lau, *Anglo-Chinese Diplomacy in the Careers of Sir John Jordan and Yuän Shih-k'ai* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1978), 13.

³² *North-China Herald*, April 15, 1910, 122-123.

³³ Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844-1916) and the Mandarin Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958), 68.

existence of such corruption has been one of the most irritating causes [of resistance to foreign loans].³⁴

The unease felt over the corruption in particular and the idea of foreign loans in general may have stemmed from a knowledge of current European *modus operandi* in its colonial possessions, especially in areas of Africa and India controlled by the principal colonial power in China, Great Britain. In his work on comparing China's railways to those in British controlled Zimbabwe, James Zheng Gao writes that the African chiefs provided free labor for railway construction after receiving bribes of cheap European goods.³⁵

In India, corruption also had its place. While the British controlled most of the subcontinent directly, a few princely states did maintain limited sovereignty over large areas by swearing allegiance to the British. The largest of these, Hyderabad, provided an arena for railway negotiation comparable to China. Tara Sethia writes that in the state of Hyderabad, collaborators were distinguished between two types: "one guided by the desire to modernize the state through collaborating with the British; the other guided by the calculation of personal gain even at the cost of the state whose interest he represented."³⁶ The imperialist power used the corruption among elites for their own gain as Hyderabad as well as other princely states built railways using British money spent on British materials at the direction of British controllers.³⁷ Sethia summed up the nature of British railway imperialism when she wrote, "The introduction of railways in India was

³⁴ Ching-Chun Wang, "Why The Chinese Oppose Foreign Railway Loans," 367.

³⁵ James Zheng Gao, *Meeting Technologies Advance: Social Change in China and Zimbabwe in the Railway Age* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1997), 40.

³⁶ Tara Sethia, "Railways, Raj, and the Indian States: Policy of Collaboration and Coercion in Hyderabad," in *Railway Imperialism*, ed. Clarence B. Davis (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 105.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 106.

not a response to the local politics or need but originated from the needs and interests of several groups in England favoring railway construction in India.”³⁸ Imperial precedent had thus been set in other colonial possessions of the European powers.

This style of corruption would also play a dominant part in China's railway history. The first railway scheme in China, the Wusong Railway, was a British effort capitalizing on the corruption of local officials who then attempted to hide its construction from their superiors in Beijing. When it was discovered, the government destroyed the railway and severely punished these local officials.³⁹ By the 1900s this process had reversed itself. Foreign investors were using the corruption of the Court to their advantage, as the railway rights movements had almost cut off their access to provincial and local elites. James Zheng Gao writes, “The Chinese provincial authorities, possessing more local interests and allegiances, often sided with the gentry-merchants in their conflicts with foreign investors and the central government on railway issues.”⁴⁰

Another aspect of railways loans, perhaps of more concern than corruption, was the use of railways in limiting the transfer of technology and as a means of division. A lack of standardization brought chaos to the railway system as each foreign power invested in China. Each country that participated used different equipment installations as well as operational regulations, telegraph systems, and even nomenclature.⁴¹ Competent engineers remained another problem. Although Chinese students had been sent abroad to study railways, they were too few in number to replace foreign engineers completely.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 105.

³⁹ David Pong, “Confucian Patriotism and the Destruction of the Woosung Railway, 1877.” *Modern Asian Studies* 7.4 (1973): 649-651

⁴⁰ Gao, 61.

⁴¹ Jui-te Chang, “Technology Transfer in Modern China: The Case of the Railway Enterprise (1876-1937),” *Modern Asian Studies* 27.2 (1993): 284.

Due to this shortage, foreign loan negotiations continued to be the primary means of hiring foreign engineers. While China gained experienced workmen, many of these conditions gave these foreign enterprises control over engineering, dispatching, mechanics, and even accounting.⁴² Echoing Tara Sethia's view of Britain's railway imperialism, Wang Ching-Chun, in writing about the opposition of the Chinese to railway loans in 1910, stated that the foreign powers went too far by insisting that "in nearly every railway loan that the engineers, accountants, and comptrollers must be their subjects, that the power to judge and receive material must rest in their hands, and that the material itself must also be bought from their merchants."⁴³

Years later when the insolvency of local efforts in railway construction made a railway loan necessary, local elites saw the realization of their fears when the negotiations split the length of the line in three parts. The Germans ceded the section from Hankou to Yichang, the British from Yicheng to Chengdu, and the French gained possession of any line past Chengdu.⁴⁴ In addressing Sichuan's reaction to the necessity of a foreign loan, Wang Ching-Chun notes, "the people are not opposed to foreign loans in principle, but are opposed to this particular loan and the conditions under which it was concluded. They wish to see railways built, but not to see their building materialize the motives of certain Powers of whom China had grounds for suspicion."⁴⁵ Thus, Sichuan objected to foreign loans because of the power they gave foreign nations within China and the corruption that it represented among the Qing court.

⁴² *Ibid*, 283.

⁴³ Ching-Chun Wang, "Why The Chinese Oppose Foreign Railway Loans," 370.

⁴⁴ *North-China Herald*, December 18, 1919, 648.

⁴⁵ Ching-Chun Wang, "The Hankow-Szechuan Railway Loan," *American Journal of International Law* 5.3 (1911): 663.

The Struggles for Railway Capital

It was for this very reason that Xiliang had endeavored to construct a provincial railway. Two years after his 1905 memorial to the Emperor, local elites in Sichuan and Hubei met together in an effort to gather funds for the building of the new railway. There, they raised an initial \$600,000 in Mexican silver.⁴⁶ Mongton Hsu notes that later, “at a meeting of shareholders held in November, 1909, the accounts submitted showed that a sum of Tls. 15,405,902 had been collected in shares.”⁴⁷ This dramatic raising of capital separated Sichuan from every other provincial railway project except its sister railway, the Canton-Hankou line.

Other local provincial railway companies also had difficulties in securing enough funding. For example, remittances from Chinese immigrants in America financed the Sunning Railway. As a great many of these immigrants were from Taishan, Guangdong, these donations reflected provincial pride in building a local railway. After securing 4.8 million dollars in contributions, it still required 14 years to build a line extending only 85 miles.⁴⁸ Another company building a short line connecting Nanchang to Jiujiang in Jiangxi province was only able to complete half of its 87-mile length with local bank loans before requiring additional funds secured from a Japanese syndicate.⁴⁹ The Fujian

⁴⁶ Hsu, 327. The conversion from Mexican silver dollars to Chinese taels is provided in a *New York Times* article dated January 5, 1902 by L.S. Wilcox, United States Consul at Hankow, China. p. 23. He writes that Mexican Dollar was worth 72 tael cents and that the working class wage was from three to five Mexican dollars per month.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 328.

⁴⁸ Lucie Cheng, Yuzun Liu, and Dehua Zheng, "Chinese Emigration, the Sunning Railway and the Development of Toisan," *Amerasia Journal* 9.1 (1982): 62-66. The writers note the influence that Taishan County had among immigrants in that 75,000 Chinese immigrants, or over half of the Chinese in the U.S. in 1876, were from this county. *Ibid*, 62.

⁴⁹ Hsu, 322.

railway line used a mixed approach by raising funds from both overseas Chinese and local merchants. They raised “shares” by pledging provincial taxes upon salt and grain as security. A mere year after construction the financially depleted enterprise had to borrow more money.⁵⁰

Only the largest of the local railway enterprises, the Canton-Hankou Railway, easily secured sufficient funds. It gathered 44 million taels by selling subscriptions for a mere one tael each. The *North-China Herald* reported, “Not only are the monied [sic] classes rushing to buy shares, but the poorest of the poor and even those who are supposed of no cash to spare and hardly enough to keep body and soul together are buying up one or more shares.”⁵¹ Despite this initially successful beginning, mismanagement plagued the company and by 1911 not one rail had been laid in its construction.

Sichuan students abroad in other countries, upon noting the difficulties Xiliang also had in securing funds, proposed three methods in raising revenue. The first two methods were to “impose a tax on opium, salt, tea, and wine merchants...[and]...gather funds from various levels of copper coin bureaus throughout Sichuan and from local *yamens*.” The third way that they proposed was using the previously discussed system of taxation - *zugu*, which was a surcharge on grain output.⁵² The students studying abroad in Japan went beyond just suggesting proposals to raise capital. Although many were living in poor conditions, these overseas students among themselves had collected around sixty

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 328.

⁵¹ *North-China Herald*, March 16, 1906, 582.

⁵² Zheng, 176. A *Yamen* was the office and official residence of any level of bureaucrat, or *mandarin*, in the Qing Dynasty.

thousand taels.⁵³ While this was small percentage of the total needed for the railway, the students understood that if the capital raised for the Chuan-Han Railway was insufficient, then “it would surely be lost to foreign bankers.”⁵⁴

The efforts of these students in trying to shore up the self-strengthening movement would become a powerful force in the waning days of the Qing. They provided leadership in Sichuan politics, becoming the voice of a newly awakened citizenry. The lower classes, vested by the ubiquitous tax burden, began to pay more attention to what was occurring in local and national politics. People from every level of society were beginning to interact in a newly formed public sphere that provided discourse over the problems inherent in the provincial system as well as the situation over the railroad. While many authors, such as Rankin and Rowe, have described the creation of this public sphere in the Jiangnan region, Zheng Xiaowei’s dissertation remains the most in-depth study of this process in Sichuan.

As a province-wide dialogue about the railway was emerging, the central government was already taking steps to close one of the three sources for Sichuan’s railway capital – the eradication of opium. Sichuan had been “by far the largest producer and consumer of domestic opium in China by the turn of the twentieth century. In 1906, Sichuan produced 40 percent of China’s opium.”⁵⁵ The initial attempts at eradication stemmed mainly from the community of foreign missionaries. In a national survey,

⁵³ Cheng, Changqi, *Jingguanzhai riji* [Diary of Jingguan Hall], vol. 9.4. October 2, 1904. In Dai, 289. These students were quite numerous. In *West China Missionary News*, August 1905, 217, it states that several hundred students were going to Japan per month and that the total had so far reached 13,000.

⁵⁴ Zheng, 175.

⁵⁵ Judith Wyman, “Opium and the State in Late-Qing Sichuan,” in *Opium Regimes: China, Britain, and Japan, 1839-1952*, ed. Timothy Brook and Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 212-213.

“respondents reported that support came from the upper classes, who recognized that opium suppression was for the public good, and from the merchants and farmers, who saw it as a means of national reform.”⁵⁶ For many missionaries, the lack of success in finding converts could be mitigated by efforts to clean up what was considered a pernicious habit. As one missionary wrote, “With the success of the anti-opium crusade in China, the missionaries could point to at least one area where years of work had paid off.”⁵⁷

The opinion within Sichuan, however, did not reflect the national sentiment. Local elites as well as the common man were not in favor of the eradication movement. Their focus was on the success of the provincial railway movement and taxation on opium production as means to achieve this goal. Despite Sichuan's attitude toward eradication, the movement gained strength when the Qing government embraced the cause. The Emperor issued an edict in 1906 calling for the eradication of opium within ten years. This edict called for the closure of opium dens, the prohibition of smoking among officials, the end of the importation of opium and opiate byproducts by foreign powers, the limitation of opium planting until its cessation and the issuing of special licenses for opium smoking.⁵⁸ With the selection of Zhao Erxun (1844–1927) as Governor-general of Sichuan from 1908-1911, the anti-opium movement in the province

⁵⁶ Kathleen L. Lodwick, *Crusaders Against Opium: Protestant Missionaries in China, 1874-1917* (Lexington, KY: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 127-128.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Col. C.G.E. Mannerheim (transl. Eric Walberg and Anatoli Koroteyev and ed. Eric Enno Tamm) “Preliminary Report on the Trip Undertaken by Imperial Order Across Chinese Turkestan and the Northern Provinces of China to Peking in 1906–07 and 1908.” In *Collection of Geographical, Topographical and Statistical Materials for Asia 81* (St. Petersburg: Military Publishing House, 1909), 145. Quoted in Eric Enno Tamm. *The Horse that Leaps Through Clouds: A Tale of Espionage, the Silk Road, and the Rise of Modern China* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint Press, 2011), 352.

led by missionaries became further allied with the provincial government. The stringent program he enacted achieved phenomenal success with an almost total eradication of poppy production in Sichuan province by 1910.⁵⁹ The *North-China Herald* noted the unintended effect that this had on the railway effort by stating that although this tax was a significant portion of the railway fund at the early stages of gathering funds, by 1908 the eradication program meant that no taxes were available from opium. This placed a greater burden on the forced contributions gained from *zugu* land taxes as well as private donations to the railway fund.⁶⁰

As big a blow as the loss of opium represented, corruption was a more serious problem for Sichuan's railway construction. It would signal the death of the railway project as it gave the central government reason for the seizure. The plague of corruption was not limited only to Sichuan, but pervaded the entire nation. As we have already seen, national leaders were susceptible to bribes and local leadership imitated them. Worse, corruption was an endemic part of the very bones of the imperial system. The next section will focus on the loss of railway funds and the corruption that existed within Sichuan.

⁵⁹ Wyman, "Opium and the State in Late-Qing Sichuan," 213.

⁶⁰ *North-China Herald*, April 8, 1910, 72. The success of eradication was very temporary and fell by the wayside during the Warlord and Guomindang periods. Opium gained a temporary resurgence especially under the Guomindang, although this was due to illegal harvesting rather than as part of a governmental approval of opium production. In his work, *Opium, State, and Society: China's Narco-Economy and the Guomindang, 1924-1937* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2001), 151, Edward R. Slack notes that in 1937, Sichuan accounted for an estimated 3,000 of China's 12,000 to 18,000 tons, which was about 90% of world production.

Corruption and the Fight to Curtail It

In 1910, the *North China Herald* procured a report on the capital collected for the Chuan-Han Railway. They reported that after six years of soliciting funds and levying taxes, the total amount collected was 15 million *taels*. The paper reported, however, that work on the construction of the railway had not even begun, yet the fund had already expended one-third of the collected amount. The paper reports, “It is to be remembered that the expenditure covers a period when no work was being done on the proposed line, and when the only legitimate outlay would have been a few thousand taels for a preliminary survey.”⁶¹ The majority of this waste was through corruption from government and railway officials.

Corruption was not a factor unique to Sichuan as it had spread to every Qing governmental layer on both the provincial and national level. In Sichuan's case, the Qing political infrastructure, which encouraged corruption, remained the primary cause for the mismanagement of funds. First, the Qing bureaucracy “remained extremely stable in numbers throughout most of the dynasty. Population numbers exploded, however, leading to an exponential increase of the ratio of the public per official.”⁶² Local officials were simply too overworked to oversee the system efficiently. Second, local administrative units under the Qing remained vastly underfunded. Madeleine Zelin, in her work on Qing administration, notes that local units were starved for funds. Even though

⁶¹ *North-China Herald*, April 15, 1910, 122.

⁶² Mary Backus Rankin, “The Origins of a Chinese Public Sphere: Local Elites and Community Affairs in the Late Impérial Period,” *Etudes Chinoises* 9.2 (Autumn 1990): 23.

these local units collected revenue from taxes, the largest portion was sent to the central government.⁶³

Officials were left to collect funds from the populace, usually in the form of fees for governmental services. Many of these fees included outright extortion.⁶⁴ Paul H. Hickey, in his work on these fees in late Qing China, writes:

The inadequacy of salaries for government officials was one of the defining characteristics of the bureaucratic system of late imperial times. Because salaries failed to cover the real costs of obtaining and holding office, officials, as a matter of course, resorted to collecting fees (*guifei* or *lougui*) from their subordinates or the people in their jurisdiction.⁶⁵

These administration difficulties were not limited to the upper administration by any means, as local clerks were even more rapacious than the higher level bosses. While magistrates and other high officials rotated to different provinces, the locally recruited clerks were very difficult to remove from office. These clerks had families, relatives, and friends who had lived in the same locality generation after generation. Their personal interests in matters concerning their relatives and friends inevitably led to favoritism and irregularities in taxation, labor service, and lawsuits.⁶⁶ The magistrate, in contrast, had no

⁶³ Madeleine Zelin, *Magistrates Tael: Rationalizing Fiscal Reform in Eighteenth-Century Ch'ing China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 29. For example, she writes that around 80% of those funds even allocated to local units were used for expenditures required by the central government.

⁶⁴ *North-China Herald*, December 19, 1908, 707.

⁶⁵ Paul C. Hickey, "Fee-Taking, Salary Reform, and the Structure of State Power in Late Qing China, 1909-1911," *Modern China* 17.3 (1991): 389.

⁶⁶ There was pushback against this. In Bradley W. Reed, "Gentry Activism in Nineteenth-Century Sichuan: The Three-Fees Bureau," *Late Imperial China* 20.2 (1999), 99, he notes the local gentry offered to assist the magistrate in "the elimination of judicial corruption among the clerks and runners of the county yamen." The intent was to relieve local residents of an egregious hardship and bring the extortionate activities of clerks and runners under control.

personal relations with the local people except possibly with some members of the gentry.⁶⁷

H.B. Morse, an American who had intimate knowledge of the Chinese governmental structure during his service in the Chinese Imperial Maritime Customs Service from 1874-1908, wrote that "it is a matter of common knowledge that the income of the Chinese official is not any degree measured by his official salary, that the annual profit of his office may be Tls. 100,000, with an official salary not exceeding Tls. 1,000." This system easily allowed for the creation of an official that "exists solely for his own maintenance and that of his fellow-officials, his superiors and subordinates."⁶⁸ In Sichuan, this same atmosphere fostered corruption, no doubt aided by the massive amounts of money collected from donations, opium, and the *zugu*. According to a poster quoted by Zheng Xiaowei, "the majority was appropriated and wasted by the official elites in the Chuan-Han Railway Company: for example, more than 3,000 taels were utilized just for one entertainment banquet by the officials." Entertainment was not the only reason for the mismanagement of the railroad funds. Other bureaus of the government used railroad capital to help start up their own activities. Pu Dianjun, student leader and future revolutionary, led the fight to educate the public that two million taels of the estimated five million gathered in 1906 had been appropriated by the Copper

⁶⁷ Tung-tsu Ch'u, *Local Government in China under the Ch'ing* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 36.

⁶⁸ Hosea Ballou (H.B.) Morse, *Trade and Administration of the Chinese Empire* (New York: Kelly and Walsh, 1908), 81. While Morse correctly hinted that this system existed in Europe and the Americas, he was careful to describe it as being in the past or of a less universal nature than the Chinese system.

Bureau. This was despite the fact that the Copper Bureau was entirely new and was at the time unable to produce any copper.⁶⁹

In the previously mentioned 1910 report, the *North China Herald* laid out an in-depth exposé of these expenditures looking into how the mismanaged funds were allocated. One-third of the amount was paid out as interest, which the writer commented was an interesting fact for a people “alleged to be so anxious to prevent the construction of the line by foreign capital.” More than 250,000 taels were labeled “miscellaneous” with an equal amount spent on students, something noted as strange in railway accounts. The newspaper also noted that “a large staff of engineers has been maintained, although there can be little to show for their salaries.” China's most famous railroad engineer, Zhan Tianyou, was rumored to be receiving pay as well. However, the *Herald* states, “It would be interesting to learn how much time China's most prominent engineer has given to the line, or whether he has even been able to visit the province of Szechuan.”⁷⁰ For the writer of the *Herald*, the expenditure of 86,820 taels on printing seemed to be the most flagrant example of mismanagement. He wrote that “such a sum, it might be said in picturesque language, would almost suffice to cover the whole province with the printed page.”⁷¹

There were efforts to clean up this situation. The foreign students, in particular, clamored for fact-finding missions that brought to light the corruption of the Railway Company. Their solution to mismanagement was to open the management beyond just government officials, intending to bring transparency by allowing greater oversight of the

⁶⁹ “Jianshe Chuan-Han tielu shangban gongsi quangao shu” [Proposing a Private Chuan-Han Railway Company]. In Zheng, 197. Zheng notes that she found the original in the Sichuan Provincial Library, unnumbered.

⁷⁰ *North-China Herald*, April 15, 1910, 122.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

company and at the same time increasing public support. If this was not done, they argued the railway would be susceptible to foreign takeover through the implementation of a railway loan. In February 1907, Governor-general Xiliang transferred the railway from an officially provincial-owned company to one that was supervised by the officials and managed by merchants. They formed a board of councilors, with every county represented by “a gentry member in the council on the grounds that the county had contributed funds to the project.”⁷²

The students and local gentry led by Pu Dianjun continued pressure on Xiliang until he allowed the Chuan-Han Railway Company in March 1907 to become “commercially managed, with the shareholders having ultimate power.”⁷³ This meant that “all provincial officials were withdrawn from the company and the company's management was thus transferred to the control of local gentry leaders.” The *zugu* system, however, continued to remain a centerpiece of this new company.⁷⁴ Shareholders were now created in two ways. Private donors were shareholders with both “rights (*quanli*) and responsibilities (*yiwu*) as shareholders,” including a right to a five percent dividend for investing. The second concept of shareholding was through the *zugu*. These taxes to the railway companies were stock held in common by the prefectures and counties, with dividends recycled back into the system.⁷⁵ Although this system was certainly not democratic in the most popular sense, it still retained considerable power at the local level. In contrast, appointed officials on the Canton-Hankou line managed the

⁷² En-han Lee, *China's Quest for Railway Autonomy, 1904-1911: A Study of the Chinese Railway-Rights Recovery Movement* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1977), 128.

⁷³ Zheng, 198-204.

⁷⁴ Lee, 129.

⁷⁵ Zheng, 180-181.

railway for its entire lifespan, with the shareholders having no say in the provincial company.⁷⁶

As evidence of their new power, the student association in Japan in 1908 laid embezzlement charges against the *Daotai* of Chengdu, Chen Binguan.⁷⁷ In his official capacity, he would have been in charge of the railway company and considered the center of corruption. In the middle of the investigation, however, the government ordered the official inquiry closed, ruling that no embezzlement occurred and charges against the directors (whom Chen represented in this case) were nonexistent. The *North-China Herald* noted that the government's opinion of the accusation over the “Tls. 3,000 spent on feasting and merry-making, was simply calumny.”⁷⁸

Despite reform and investigations into corruption, public confidence was shattered. Purchased shares, which was a real indicator of public support, “declined from Tls. 2,535,697 in the first year to Tls. 136,890 in the 2nd and finally Tls. 87,863 in the 3rd year.” By 1910, it had practically ceased and with the closure of the opium tax due to opium eradication enforcement, the funding for the railway relied solely on the income from the *zugu* land tax. One official noted that in his opinion “they would never build the line and that in three years or five at the most the last step would have been taken when

⁷⁶ Lee, 99.

⁷⁷ *North-China Herald*, February 7, 1908, 293. A *Daotai* was an official at the head of the civil and military affairs of a circuit, which consists of two or more territorial departments.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 314. In the same issue on 313, a feeble response to student agitation was given in a letter from an anonymous Sichuan gentry and railway director. It states that Chen Binguan did not use railway funds for personal banquets and that he brought in his own lunch every day.

the aid of foreigners would have to be requisitioned.”⁷⁹ Adding to this pessimism, railway funds endured a coup d’état with the collapse of several banks during the Shanghai rubber speculation bubble of 1910. It was enough to finish off what was left of the funds after the corruption scandals.⁸⁰ The belief existed among some, of course, that the money was actually embezzled by the manager of the railway company.⁸¹

Railway Nationalization and Response

All of these issues would come to a head with the issuing of the imperial memorial. The *zugu*, as onerous as it had been, was the central feature of the railway fund. Despite the protestations of Sichuan leaders and the wide disapproval the program faced within the province, eradication almost completely eliminated opium. Corruption, a feature of the Qing local government rather than just a mere symptom, not only ate away the amount already raised but also cut into the funds raised by other departments. In addition, it destroyed donations which, although not a large percentage of the whole, represented the true confidence in the strength of the railway project. Each of these represented government interference into local affairs, creating anger directed at the central government.

The final straw for Sichuan was rumors of corruption tainting the railway seizure itself. Sheng Xuanhuai, national Minister of Posts and Communications as well as Director-General of Mines and Railroads, was widely condemned as the author of this

⁷⁹ *North-China Herald*, April 8, 1910, 72. While officials may have become privately disillusioned with the railway effort, the North-China Herald was a foreign owned and operated enterprise with noted support for foreign built railways, so it is interesting that this was an “unnamed official.”

⁸⁰ Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China*, 91.

⁸¹ Han, 225.

nationwide action. In attempting to pacify the outraged response that erupted from the seizure, the government had “proposed to exchange its railway shares for interest-earning government bonds, for the people in Hubei and Hunan provinces. For the Sichuanese, however, it offered to redeem the sums spent solely for railway purposes rather than the sums subscribed.”⁸² Although progress in the construction of the Sichuan-Hankou line remained limited, in contrast the Canton-Hankou line had squandered greater amounts of money with no results toward construction. As previously mentioned, that line had used the sale of stock as a primary source of funding while government officials retained power over the railway company. In contrast, Sichuan stockholders aided the new railway management, now lead by returned students, in efforts to end corruption. Perhaps worst of all, Sheng Xuanhuai, the minister who proposed this new plan, had invested “significantly in bonds in Hubei and Hunan provinces but none in Sichuan province. The outraged Sichuanese groups protested that the government intended to sell Sichuan to the foreigners.”⁸³

Sheng Xuanhuai already had a reputation of being a “sell out” since 1905, when he negotiated a foreign loan for a railroad in his native Jiangsu. Provincial officials had petitioned the Court to have Sheng removed from office for negotiating a much larger sum than necessary for a short, local railway.⁸⁴ He survived this and continued at his post. Despite Sheng's reputation, S.C. Yang naïvely argued that he really wanted to redeem the shareholders of the Chuan-Han railway as well as the shareholders in Hubei and Hunan,

⁸² Eiko Woodhouse, *The Chinese Hsinhai Revolution: GE Morrison and Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1897-1920* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003), 41.

⁸³ *Ibid*, 42.

⁸⁴ Lee, 157.

but that the Imperial Court decided otherwise.⁸⁵ As head of the Railway Bureau and the one who suggested the railway nationalization program, Sheng Xuanhuai fulfilled both of Tara Sethia definitions of collaborator. This situation reinforces Wang Ching-Chun's statement that the belief that corruption existed outweighed any truth that corruption occurred.

The national government, under pressure from foreign powers, caved to demands to nationalize the railway. While corruption at the provincial level undermined efforts at the railway effort, corruption at the national level on the railway issue proved to be the last instance in a long history of the Qing's inability to maintain its sovereignty against foreign intrusion. In addition, by refusing to refund the revenue already spent while at the same time recognizing what a burden it had been on the people, the Qing government showed how unimportant provincial concerns figured into making policy that affected the province. Even worse, it seemed that there was no peaceful method for redress with the highest authority arrayed against local interests.

⁸⁵ Yang, 70.

THE CREATION OF A UNIFIED POLITICAL MOVEMENT

The issue of national sovereignty (*guoquan*) was of equal importance to the Sichuan people as that of economic rights. In her study of the Recovery Movement's propaganda, Zheng Xiaowei writes that the intent of the rhetoric was to "defend the rights of the people (*minquan*) and to stand up for the sovereignty of the nation (*guoquan*)."⁸⁶ The anger at foreign intrusion over the railway became bound up with anger against the Qing state's inability to deal with them. Although this was not a new occurrence, racial undertones became more prevalent after the weakness displayed during the Taiping Rebellion. For example, in 1903 Zou Rong, a former Sichuanese student in Japan, harangued the Manchus for 260 years of oppression, sorrow, cruelty, and tyranny and called for their extermination. This would come about by turning the sons and grandsons of the Yellow Emperor into [George] Washingtons.⁸⁷ A writer commenting on the similar protest in Jiangsu and Zhejiang summed it up succinctly when he stated, "The Chinese, who were already slaves of the Manchus, would become slaves of slaves as the Qing became subservient to foreigners."⁸⁸

⁸⁶ Zheng, 268.

⁸⁷ Rang Zou, "Revolutionary Army: A Chinese Nationalist Tract of 1903," in *Matériaux pour l'étude de l'extrême-orient moderne et contemporain, textes*, Vol. 6 (Paris: Mouton, 1968), 58.

⁸⁸ Mo Bei, *Jiang-Zhe Tielu Fengchao* [The Jiangsu Zhejiang Railway Unrest]. Quoted in Mary B. Rankin, "National Contestation and Mobilization Politics," *Modern China* 28.3 (2002): 340.

This growth in the idea of political rights were not just a Sichuan phenomenon but was the result of a national debate on state responsibility and the new citizen. This debate was led primarily by Liang Qichao (1873-1929). Newspapers, either published clandestinely in Shanghai or carried in from abroad, carried his rhetoric throughout China. Liang, a follower of Kang Youwei (1858-1927) in the constitutional monarchy movement as well as the 1898 Hundred Days' Reform,⁸⁹ fled abroad after it was defeated and settled in Japan. In 1902, Liang set up the *Xinmin Congbao*, or New Citizen. Li Jieren, commenting in his novel *Baofengyu qian* [After the Storm], wrote that the two most important newspapers in Sichuan were Liang Qichao's *New Citizen* and the *Minbao* (People's News), which was the political organ of Sun Yatsen's *Tongmenghui*, or Chinese Revolutionary Alliance.⁹⁰ In addition to these papers, there was also a circulation of the *Shibao* (Eastern Times), *Zhongwai Ribao* (Sino-Foreign Daily), *Shenzhou Ribao* (China Daily), and other regional papers.⁹¹

The views that formed the core of Liang Qichao's editorials were ideas of citizenship based on Western liberalism. In the *Xinmin Congbao*, "he advocated the ideas of free thinking and equality of all citizens by introducing Rousseau's theory of 'social contract' and Montesquieu's ideas of the division of power to a Chinese readership."⁹² He

⁸⁹ The Hundred Days' Reform was an attempt at political and cultural reforms by the liberal minded Emperor Guangxu. It was repressed by conservatives under the Dowager Empress Cixi after minimal gains.

⁹⁰ Li, Jieren, *Baofengyu qian* [After the Storm] (Beijing: Remin wenxue chubanshe [People's Cultural Press], 1997), 285.

⁹¹ Fu, Chongju, *Chengdu Tonglan* [Guide to Chengdu] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe [Sichuan Press], 1987, 178-180.

⁹² Xiantao Zhang, *The Origins of the Modern Chinese Press: The Influence of the Protestant Missionary Press in Late Qing China* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 149.

wrote in one of his essays about the nature of this new citizenry and its relationship to the nation:

The citizenry is an assemblage of individual persons. The rights of the state are composed of the rights of individuals. Therefore, the thoughts, feelings, and actions of a citizenry will never be obtainable without the thoughts, feelings, and actions of each individual member. That the people is strong means that the state is strong; that the people is weak means that the state is weak; that the people is rich means that the state is rich; that the people is poor means that the state is poor; that the people possess rights means that the state possesses rights; and that the people is without shame means that the state is without shame.⁹³

The concept of a rich people forming a rich state harkens back to Li Jieren's commentary on the anger of the national railway seizure. For the people of Sichuan, money for the railway for which they had sweated and bled was the uniting factor among every level of society. The state, in the supposed name of self-strengthening, had seized a private concern with intentions, in the minds of the people, of delivering it into the hands of foreign powers. It did not matter that the railway company was bankrupt and that provincial resources alone were insufficient to build the railway. They saw the railway seizure not just as a loss of their economic rights and their future, but as a final failure of the Qing political order.

Liang Qichao's writings in the 1900s promoted this very concept that “sovereignty lies with the people.” This notion was disseminated to the Sichuan elite in important pamphlets and writings and numerous newspapers.⁹⁴ From there it was distributed throughout the province. The shared language of the Recovery Movement was of a common struggle, which comes through when Mary Rankin comments that “despite

⁹³ Qichao Liang, “On Progress.” in *Sources of Chinese Tradition, Vol. 2*, ed. William de Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 294.

⁹⁴ Zheng, 154.

the provincial settings of the rights-recovery movements, the participants had a holistic vision of a unified China. The terms compatriots (*tongbao*) or comrades (*tongzhi*) conjured up ideals of solidarity and common identity.”⁹⁵

Despite this egalitarian strain, Zheng Xiaowei notes that this movement within Sichuan was a creation of elite, nationalistic leaders. She wrote, “Notably, not all Sichuanese were against the foreign loan or the nationalization policy; on the contrary, it was only a faction.... Yet, this small faction exerted great energy and launched an enormously successful campaign.”⁹⁶ Zheng Xiaowei does not, however, address the process by which these elites came together or how they merged with the lower classes into a unified movement. This section will look into the creation of local leadership by focusing on two divergent processes. The first process is through the new reforms introduced by both national leaders and Sichuan viceroys that sent students abroad to learn Western techniques as part of the self-strengthening movement. The second process is the effort by local elites to negate Western intrusion through the use of secret societies. Evidence will show that both of these process stemmed from government policies, whether intentionally or unintentionally. They became the mechanisms for resistance to central government authority when the state refused to acknowledge local concerns over the railway seizure issue.

Elite Activism, Students, and the Provincial Assembly

In the rest of China, local elites were a product of a transforming Chinese society. The Taiping Rebellion had devastated the *Jiangnan* region of China. The local elites in

⁹⁵ Mary B. Rankin. “Nationalistic Contestation and Mobilization Politics,” 340.

⁹⁶ Zheng, 268.

these regions had experienced the contractions of the Qing dynasty's practical sovereignty and social control. Local elites had to step in to fulfill the roles that had traditionally been the purview of government officials. Even during the Taiping Rebellion, the government found that its reliance on limited numbers of Manchu and Chinese Bannermen proved unsuccessful in stemming the tide of rebel victories. The Court called on a local Hunanese scholar, Zeng Guofan, who worked with and expanded local militia organizations (called *tuanlian*) in his home area.⁹⁷ His radical new approach of linking fortified villages and raising an independent militia able to contend with Taiping forces was particularly effective. This ad-hoc force defeated the Taipings, further undercutting the legitimacy of the Qing.

In addition to their military activities, elites expanded their influence by joining new projects in their home areas. Elites in collusion with local government “enthusiastically participated in reforms that expanded their influence over ordinary people and built their social reputation.”⁹⁸ In his work on the city of Hankou, William Rowe explains this phenomenon: “The nineteenth century, in Hankou as throughout urban China, was a period of profound innovation and dramatic expansion of collective action in the provision of social services.” These services were almost entirely homegrown and in their development “the bureaucratic administration played a real but decidedly secondary role in the process.”⁹⁹ This included a real role in disaster relief, the maintenance of granaries, and the establishment of benevolence halls.

⁹⁷ Philip A. Kuhn, *Rebellion and Its Enemies in Late Imperial China: Militarization and Social Structure, 1796-1864* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 10.

⁹⁸ Di Wang, *The Teahouse* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), 227.

⁹⁹ William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 91.

Mary Rankin, in her work on elite activism in the *Jiangnan* region, states that many scholars previously “assumed that an autonomous public sector did not develop in China until the end of the nineteenth century and this development involved the importation of Western institutions.” As Chinese elites implemented Western institutions as early as midcentury, the rebuilding from the Taiping Rebellion had already spread out managerial responsibilities among a greater number of elites. This led to a “growth of independently financed institutional complexes, the rise of managerial activism, and the development of rationales justifying autonomous initiative to benefit one's home area and recreate community solidarity in a perilous age.” Rankin notes the impact that this had on the stability of elite dominance in that “the very success of local reconstruction contributed to the proliferation of social organization beyond government control—ultimately undermining the political system the elites still sought to preserve.”¹⁰⁰ Thus, Western style reforms were added to a foundation already in place, instead of working as a catalyst for elite involvement.

In Sichuan, the situation was opposite as the province developed in isolation and escaped the devastation of the Taiping Rebellion. There, government and society coexisted symbiotically. In discussing the dual nature of Sichuan's government, S.A.M. Adshead wrote:

One the one hand, there was a formal hierarchy: governor-general, top provincial officials, daotais, prefects, local magistrates, military commanders; all non-Sichuanese, all designed by Beijing or by people themselves appointed by Beijing; a hierarchy which held a monopoly of legal authority. On the other hand, there was the informal hierarchy: a group of local notables, a provincial establishment; mainly but not wholly Sichuanese, mainly but not wholly resident in the province; a hierarchy with few legally defined rights but considerable extra-legal powers. Sichuan government was a mixture of collaboration, conflict and compromise between the two elements. Both

¹⁰⁰ Mary B. Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1986), 92.

elements were weak in absolute terms: in their degree of organization and in the amount of money and men they controlled. However weak it might be in absolute terms, its resources were concentrated, nucleated so to speak, in the governor-general, while those of the informal hierarchy were not only diffused, atomized among the individual members of the provincial ruling class, but also fundamentally dependent on the imperial system of which the governor-general was representative. It was a situation of court with country, bureaucratic power without countervailing social power.¹⁰¹

It was the creation of provincial institutions, mainly by governor-generals, that crafted a politically awakened elite class. These included reforms under Xiliang, who first argued for the railway and in particular for sending students abroad, and the creation of the provincial assembly under Governor-general Zhao Erxun.

Xiliang, during his time in Sichuan, was very instrumental in enacting reforms. He initialized the reformation of the military—dismissing corrupt and incompetent officers as well as training new troops. He did not ignore commercial activities or agricultural improvements, either. He promoted new methods of agriculture and set up a buffer zone of colonists to spare the Sichuan heartland from incursions by non-Han peoples on the border. He was also involved in the parallel Rights Recovery Movement to protect Sichuan's mines from foreign domination. He instituted education reforms and founded newspapers and magazines, so that the concepts of reform could be spread among the populace.¹⁰² It was in the area of education, particularly sending students abroad, that Xiliang would have the most impact. He recognized that dependency on “foreign experts and foreign-bought equipment ultimately relegate the Chinese to the position of followers who are seldom seen running their own factories. While this may have been excused in

¹⁰¹ Adshead, 9-10.

¹⁰² Yimen He, “Sichuan Province Reforms under Governor-General Xiliang, 1903-1907,” in *China, 1895-1912: State Sponsored Reforms and China's Late Qing Revolution*. ed. Douglas R. Reynolds (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 137-148.

the past, today we must push ahead without delay.”¹⁰³ With this in mind, Xiliang sent several students to the West and Japan to learn modern techniques, especially in industrial related fields.

This educational reform was definitely not unique to Sichuan. The first concerted effort to send students abroad was led by Zeng Guofan, the victor over the Taipings. He understood the problem of merely adopting Western technology without understanding it. He wrote about restructuring the educational system for this reason, addressing the superiority of the Western model when he wrote:

Whether they [Westerners] be scholars, artisans, or soldiers, they all go to school to study and understand the principles, to practice on the machines, and to participate in the work. They all exert themselves to the utmost of their ingenuity, and learn from one another, in the hope that there will be monthly progress and yearly improvement. If we Chinese wish to adopt their superior techniques and suddenly try to buy all their machines, not only will our resources be insufficient to do so, but we will be unable to master the fundamental principles or to understand the complicated details of the techniques, unless we have actually seen and practiced with them for a long time.¹⁰⁴

When these students returned from abroad, they were not immediately accepted and had to prove their abilities.¹⁰⁵ When their contributions became recognized, the Qing government set up a system that rewarded high level official ranks to returning students. Dong Shaohui, in his article on students studying abroad, articulates this new method of professional success when he writes:

For well over a thousand years, the sole ladder of success for most young students was to take the civil service examination and become an official (*keju zuoguan*). Now, just as the old style *keju* system was dying its natural death, the Qing government opened up a new pathway to success: study abroad to become an official (*liuxue zuoguan*). This provided great enticements, not just

¹⁰³ *Xiliang yigao (zougao)* [The posthumous manuscripts and draft memorials of Xiliang], Vol. 1, 404. Quoted in Yimen He, 144.

¹⁰⁴ Guofan Zeng, “On Sending Young Men to Study Abroad.” Quoted in de Bary, 241.

¹⁰⁵ Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1895-1912: State Sponsored Reforms and China's Late Qing Revolution* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 35.

in terms of encouraging young students to go abroad but in absorbing them after their return.¹⁰⁶

By the time of the 1911 Revolution, many officials at both a national and provincial level originated as returned students. Thus, the student reformers in Sichuan had a foundation of political activity inspired by widespread allegiance to Liang Qichao's concept of a different relationship between crown and subject.

The advancement of this new political relationship, as intended by Liang, was intended to occur through the emergence of provincial assemblies. In 1909, the government held elections in all twenty-one provinces to form these assemblies. William Rowe writes that "despite stringent educational and property-holding requirements that narrowed the (all-male) electorate to less than 0.5 percent of the population, an estimated two million Qing subjects went to the polls and got a taste of political participation undreamt of up to that time."¹⁰⁷ Despite the selection of mostly gentry with national or provincial level degrees, the majority of the assemblymen in each province were in the reformer camp.¹⁰⁸ Throughout the nation, these provincial assemblies were "forging lateral ties of solidarity and group unity, and there emerged a rivalry between them and the provincial governors, the local officials."¹⁰⁹

In Sichuan, the situation was particularly acrimonious. Pu Dianjun, the student activist leader, became the first elected assembly president. This shows the power of the student movement in Sichuan. In other provinces, the presidents elected were men of

¹⁰⁶ Shaohui Deng, "Government Awards to Students Trained Abroad, 1871-1911," in *China, 1895-1912: State Sponsored Reforms and China's Late Qing Revolution*, ed. Douglas R. Reynolds (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 41-42.

¹⁰⁷ William T. Rowe, *China's Last Empire: The Great Qing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), 278.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Joshua Fogel and Peter Gue Zarrow, *Imaging the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997), 131.

learning or held economic status in the community. In Jonathan Spence's discussion of the expertise of assembly presidents, he noted that those of Guangdong, Hunan, and Zhejiang were holders of the *jinshi* degree and thus were products of the traditional civil service system.¹¹⁰ In addition, Pu Dianjun was a mere thirty-four years old at this time when the age of provincial assembly presidents averaged at forty-one.¹¹¹ As previously discussed, his age did not deter him from butting heads with Xiliang as student leader over the governance of the railway company or leading the fight against corruption by local officials. Lancelot Lawton, a British journalist, notes that Pu kept up the pressure after his election on these same issues. He wrote:

As time passed, the Assembly, which was extremely popular throughout the province, adopted an almost aggressive attitude toward the authorities. It condemned in no small measured terms the corruption of the local officials, demanded to have a voice in the matter of financial control, and endeavored to bring about a reduction in the salaries paid to the Viceroy and his immediate subordinates.¹¹²

This came about despite Zhao Erxun's effort to check the power of the assembly by narrowly confining it to the 'power of petition' and warning it that the principal goal of the assembly should be the continued dominance of the Qing court.¹¹³

The irony of Sichuan was that the main instigator of reforms there, Xiliang, was a Manchu loyalist to the Empire. His railway proposal, intended to strengthen

¹¹⁰ Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China* (New York: Norton & Company, 1990), 249.

¹¹¹ Pengyuan Zhang, *Lixian pai yu Xinhai geming* [Constitutionalists and the 1911 Revolution]. 2nd ed. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindaishi yanjiusuo, 1983), 39. Quoted in Keith R. Schoppa, *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 242.

¹¹² Lancelot Lawton, *Empires of the Far East* (Boston: Small, Maynard, 1912), 1425. Although he published two works about the Far East, Lawton is far better known for his journalism in the Soviet Union during the 1930s.

¹¹³ Fogel and Zarrow, 132.

the state in one of its remotest provinces, became the reason for tension between capital and province. His educational reforms allowed the formation of a political leadership made up of former students sent abroad. They, in turn, helped push for the new provincial assemblies that would contribute in overthrowing the dynasty. The journalist Lancelot Lawton provided an excellent summary of these events leading to 1911 when he wrote:

From Sichuan, as from the rest of China, young men were chosen to be sent abroad to the universities of Japan and of the West, who, with their return, did not hesitate to preach the doctrine of individual and constitutional liberty. It is not surprising, therefore, that the inauguration of Provincial Assemblies in 1910 found among the Sichuanese a newly awakened public opinion, a public opinion determined and candid in its condemnation of past misrule, and fierce in its hatred of the Manchu oligarchy. In a people who, by the very nature of their geographical isolation, had inherited a spirit of sturdy independence, the factors I have enumerated tended to mold a strong, if somewhat bigoted, patriotism. With the spread of education had come with it for the first time the knowledge of China's foreign intercourse, a history which was interpreted as nothing but a sinister plot on the part of the Great Powers to rob China of her territories. Consequently, on the inauguration of a Provincial Assembly, more or less representative of public opinion, side by side with the demand for popular liberties went up the insistent cry of "China for the Chinese."¹¹⁴

The *Gelaohui*: Mixing Elite and Commoner in Secret

With elites forming the top leadership of the Rights Recovery Movement, they still needed the strength of the common people, either for protest participation or revolt. Sichuan's potential military assets were also remarkably different from that of the *Jiangnan* region or the other eastern provinces. S.A.M. Adshead describes the situation thus:

Although *tuanlian* militia units were raised in the Jiaqing period against the White Lotus Rebellion and in the Xianfeng period against the Taipings, no major gentry army such as those of Hunan or Anhui were based in Sichuan. *Guandu shangban* (official supervision and merchant operation) industry, which raised the level of social organization in Jiangsu and Zhili, was slow to reach Sichuan, and the province never had the powerful clan networks of

¹¹⁴ Lawton, 1424-1425.

Fujian and Guangdong. Between the family or partnership and the state, there was only the secret society: the *Guolaohui* (Elder Brother Society), the *mafia* of the teahouses and market towns, whose development in the second half of the nineteenth century was only a surrogate for the social growth of other provinces.¹¹⁵

The *Gelaohui* in general were an anti-Manchu secret society that dedicated itself to the overthrow of the Qing Court and Han resurgence. In Sichuan, the main branch of the *Gelaohui* was the *Paoge*, or Gowned Brotherhood. The extent of the *Paoge* in Sichuan was very widespread, with elements in almost every town although their power base was centered in the southwest and northeast of the province.¹¹⁶ The *Paoge* became so powerful that one local chronicler in Longshuizhen bluntly noted that in that town, power was “ranked one for *shen*; two for *liang*; and three for *Paoge*.”¹¹⁷

The Taiping Rebellion facilitated the spread of the *Gelaohui* in Sichuan and other provinces.¹¹⁸ Members had joined the Hunan Army for the suppression of the Taipings,

¹¹⁵ Adshead, 15. *Tuanlian* were militia raised by private citizens, such as the previously mentioned Zeng Guofan. The Jiaqing period was the reign of the Emperor Jiaqing (1760-1821). The Xianfeng period was the reign of the Emperor Xianfeng (1850-1861). *Guandu shangban* was a system where merchants invested and managed a company while it still remained a government enterprise. Zhili province is a defunct administrative unit including today's Beijing, Tianjin and the province of Hebei with parts of Liaoning, Henan and Inner Mongolia.

¹¹⁶ Chaoyue Wang, “Wang Chaoyue bing” [Memorial by Wang Chaoyue], in *Xinhai geming qian shinian minbian dang'an shiliao* [Archival Materials on the History of Popular Uprisings in the Ten Years Before the 1911 Revolution] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju) [Beijing: China Publishing House], 1984. vol. 2, 792.

¹¹⁷ Qiwei Hu, “Dazu renmin fan yangjiao douzheng” [Dazu people's struggle against foreign religion]. In *Dazu wenshi zhiliao xuanji* [Select Materials from the Literature and History of Dazu]. Ed. Qiwei Hu. (Dazu: Dazuxian zhengxie wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui) [Dazu: Dazu County CCCP Literature and History Research Committee], 1986, Vol. 2, 56. Quoted in Di Wang, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie: Changjiang shangyou quyue shehui yanjiu, 1644–1911* [Striding out of a Closed World: Social Transformation of the Upper Yangzi Region, 1644-1911]. Beijing: Zhonghua shuju [Beijing: China Publishing House], 1993, 546. *Shenliang* was used as a contracted name for local elites with the meanings of *shenshi*, or officials, and *lianghu*, or landlords.

¹¹⁸ Chunwu Wang, *Paoge tanmi* [Exploring the Secrets of the Gowned Brothers] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe) [Sichuan Press], 1993, 17. Wang states that the spread of the

even though the inclusion of secret societies was strictly forbidden by its leader, Zeng Guofan. With the Taipings defeated, these armies disbanded and *Gelaohui* members were spread out across the country. Men who no longer had a desire to farm banded together to form groups of sworn brothers, vagrants, and thieves. On assessing the early leadership of the society in the days after the Taiping, it was found that at one point almost all of them had been in the army.¹¹⁹

With the *Paoge* steadily gaining power, it became obvious that even the social elites had to join to maintain their influence. Wang Di notes that “the *Gelaohui* had no lack of gentry or landlords.”¹²⁰ This mixing was facilitated by the ubiquity of the *Paoge* in Sichuan’s famed teahouses, which the secret society used for its headquarters.¹²¹ Wang Di notes that every level of male society entered the Sichuan teahouse, from elites to peddlers. It was a place to conduct business, hold meetings for the *Paoge* and other associations, and simply socialize.¹²² While a complete knowledge of *Paoge* numbers is nearly impossible, there can be no doubt that it pervaded all levels of Sichuan society. As a popular Sichuanese saying at this time hinted, “The Ming lacked illiterates; the Qing lacked those who did not join the *Paoge*.”¹²³

Local elites turned to the *Gelaohui* as an alternative power structure because of the threat they faced from foreign missionaries. Missionaries had long been seen as

secret society was directly tied to the Taiping Rebellion, causing “*Gelaohui* numbers to rapidly expand.”

¹¹⁹ Shaoqing Cai, “On the Origins of the *Gelaohui*,” *Modern China* 10.4 (1984): 498-499.

¹²⁰ Di Wang, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie: Changjiang shangyou quyu shehui yanjiu, 1644–1911*, 546.

¹²¹ Di Wang, *The Teahouse*, 178-179.

¹²² *Ibid*, 168-169.

¹²³ Shiliang Liu, *Hanliu shi* [History of *Paoge*], (Chengdu: Liu Shiliang yizuo chubanshe) [Chengdu: Posthumous work of Liu Shiliang Publishing House], 1949, 10. Quoted in Chunwu Wang, 19.

agents of foreign powers, but especially so after the end of the Taiping Rebellion when they were no longer restricted to the coastal treaty ports. As further treaty ports opened up within China's interior, local elites stirred up the people based on the view that the missionaries were a vanguard for Western invasion.¹²⁴ A look at Western actions at the time shows why the local elites may have had this opinion. A treaty in 1858 forced Hankou to open to foreign trade. Further up the Yangzi, Jingzhou opened in 1876 and Yichang in 1877. One term negotiated in the Unequal Treaties that opened these ports to Westerners was the right of missionaries to establish themselves there, further driving home the belief that missionary activity was merely a branch of foreign imperialism. Chongqing, the gateway to Sichuan, opened up as a treaty port in 1890.

Resistance to missionaries was consistent throughout much of the country. Daniel Bay, in summing up the contentious position of missionaries states, “The elite held economic, social, ideological, and political hegemony in local society, and the missionary presence was an affront to their dignity and a threat to their society.”¹²⁵ The threat of missionaries was that they operated a separate power structure excluding local elites and abrogating traditional elite societal roles. The unequal treaties gave missionaries extra-territorial privileges that made them exempt from Chinese law, yet provided “better access to the nearest government official than did the local elites” by way of their relationship with the foreign powers. When incidents against missionaries began to increase, “foreign diplomatic complaints and demands from these events eventually filled up many storage cabinets in the archives of the *Zongli Yamen*, the equivalent of the

¹²⁴ Judith Wyman, *Social Change, Anti-foreignism and Revolution in China* (PhD Diss. University of Michigan, 1993), 159.

¹²⁵ Daniel Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012), 75.

foreign office of the dynasty.”¹²⁶ Missionaries were thus able to gain access even to the imperial court through diplomatic pressure, bypassing the traditional hierarchical power structure than was the backbone of Chinese politics.

The *Paoge* resisted the efforts of the missionaries in what came to be known as *jiao'an*, or antimissionary incidents. The two largest pre-1911 antimissionary incidents, or *jiao'an*, were the Chongqing Anti-missionary Riots of 1886 and the Yu Dongchen uprising. The riots in Chongqing lasted from June to September 1886. Chinese attacks escalated, first against missionaries and foreign controlled interests and then spreading to converts. Judith Wyman states that the main reason for this incident may have been that eastern Sichuan had been experiencing a famine for the first part of the decade.¹²⁷ While the rioters targeted both Christians and foreigners, the main purpose of the riots happened to be a Christian grain merchant who was known to be terribly callous.

Later, Yu Dongchen's Rebellion became the second major mass incident targeting missionaries. Wu Yangzhang, in his *Recollections of the Revolution of 1911*, wrote that Yu Dongchen was a peasant who abhorred injustice. When local Christian leaders seized some people with whom they were in dispute, Yu rebelled. Numerous local elites welcomed him as his rebellion spread from his home county of Dazu County in Sichuan to Hubei until he was eventually captured by Qing troops in 1898. In Wu Yuzhang's opinion, it was “the lack of correct ideological guidance” that allowed the leadership of the *Gelaohui* as well as Yu Dongchen to become corrupt. They became “alienated from

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 75-76.

¹²⁷ Wyman, *Social Change, Anti-foreignism and Revolution in China*, 145-146.

the peasant masses and handicraftsmen,” the lower classes which represented the origins of the *Gelaohui*.¹²⁸

Whatever the reason for Yu's defeat, both his rebellion and the Chongqing riots emphasize the dissolving relationship between Sichuan elites and the Qing government prior to 1911. Both incidents and an equally costly riot in Chengdu in 1895 were put down with the help of government troops, showing that the foreign powers held complete sway over the Qing court in the minds of many of the provincial elite. The Chongqing Riot cost the province 230,000 *taels*.¹²⁹ The Sichuan government levied 943,597 *taels* for the Chengdu Riot and more than 1 million for the Yu Dongchen uprising.¹³⁰ This was a staggering total for a province whose entire tax figure for 1900 was 8,722,937.¹³¹ The Chongqing Riot was particularly notable in this aspect as “much to the consternation both of the Chinese and French officials, Bishop Coupat [of Chongqing] succeeded in obtaining indemnity payments specifically allocated for nearly two thousand Chinese Christians left homeless.”¹³² The Chinese had argued that the converts were Chinese and did not fall under the indemnity agreement for the loss of foreign property and loss of life. The French ministers in both Hankou and Beijing agreed with the Qing court. Coupat, however, secured payment through careful negotiation.¹³³ This showed the power that the missionaries and Christian churches were capable of without the direct intervention of their usual protectors, the Western diplomatic corps.

¹²⁸ Yuzhang Wu, *Recollections of the 1911 Revolution* (Honolulu, HI: University Press of the Pacific, 2001), 46-47.

¹²⁹ Wyman, *Social Change, Anti-foreignism and Revolution in China*, 138.

¹³⁰ Zheng, 250.

¹³¹ Adshead, 11

¹³² Wyman, *Social Change, Anti-foreignism and Revolution in China*, 138.

¹³³ *Ibid*.

By 1904, however, Sichuan had experienced more *jiao'an* than any other province in the empire. Judith Wyman writes that “over one hundred major and many more minor attacks had been launched against Westerners and Chinese Christians in Sichuan, thirty in the Chongqing region.”¹³⁴ While Sichuan experienced a frequency of such interactions between local secret societies and missionaries, other areas of the country shared similar experiences. While the Boxers were the most predominant in the Western imagination, the prevalence of secret societies in Chinese society was not limited to them or their homeland in China's northeast. The spread of antforeign movements and sentiment was nation-wide, ironically facilitated by the spread of transportation.

Despite the number and frequency of the attacks, the *Paoge* seemed to realize that outright acts of mass violence were counterproductive. The *Paoge* began to take another approach as described by *The Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*. In their view, the *Paoge* now began to act against foreign missionaries by trying to infiltrate Christian churches and subvert them for their own gain. They began to play off the Roman Catholics against the Protestants and vice versa. For example, in Yuqihe in 1903, agitators threatening a Protestant congregation joined the Roman Catholic Church as a counterbalance. *The Chinese Recorder* wrote, “This time these leaders...[of the secret society]..., knowing that in the present attitude of the officials to the foreigner they couldn't carry out their plan as ordinary citizens, formed the plan of using the Roman Catholic Church as protection.”¹³⁵ The tension created by minor acts of violence and religious subterfuge would last all the way to the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution.

¹³⁴ Judith Wyman, "The Ambiguities of Chinese Anti-foreignism: Chongqing, 1870-1900," *Late Imperial China* 18.2 (1997): 92.

¹³⁵ *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, May 1903, 236.

It was these minor acts that created many of the problems in the first place. Although the indemnities were economically devastating, the root of the problem was that Christians in Sichuan were not merely passive actors for anti-Christian activity. They themselves created many of the problems.¹³⁶ As early as 1878, in a circular to China's ministers abroad, it was noted that one of the chief problems was “the arrogation of official status to themselves by some missionaries and their interference in local government, and the refusal of Chinese converts to abide by the laws of China.”¹³⁷

Converts were not shy in using foreign power to fulfill their demands or as an umbrella of protection in local disputes. For example, Christian converts in Fucheng in 1908 refused to pay dues to their professional societies because of the use of idols in union religious functions. They refused alternative suggestions from community leaders such as using these dues for road repair or charitable donations, as these would not placate the guilds. Converts were satisfied only when the foreign missionaries were able to guarantee protection against the trade unions.¹³⁸ At Wanxian in 1904, profiteers sought baptism in the local Protestant church to procure a “foreign” head for their scheme to collect bad debts using church influence.¹³⁹ At Shizuan Xian, Roman Catholics beat a local secret society leader to death. While reputed to be a bad man responsible for the burning of a chapel, the *West China Missionary News* states that the real reason was that the man married a Christian widow without the consent of the local Roman Catholic congregation. The paper wrote, “It is a dreadful act of lawlessness on the part of the R.Cs.

¹³⁶ Robert H. Felsing, *The Heritage of the Han: The Gelaohui and The 1911 Revolution in Sichuan* (PhD diss., University of Iowa, 1979), 110.

¹³⁷ Pei-kai Cheng, Michael Lestz and Jonathan Spence. *The Search for Modern China: A Documentary Collection* (New York: Norton, 1999), 157-159.

¹³⁸ *West China Missionary News*, August 1908, 13.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, September 1904, 200

and they are defying the mandarin who seems powerless. It's a wonder there are not more riots than have already occurred.”¹⁴⁰

The most egregious misuse of missionary power was that of converts using missionaries as powerful agents in lawsuits. Small percentages of believers used foreigners as bludgeons in lawsuits, allowing a small minority to gain a substantial amount of power in local communities. This had been a significant cause for anti-Christian activity during the Boxer Rebellion in China's northeastern provinces in 1900.¹⁴¹ Recognizing the dangers inherent in this practice, missionaries strove to limit their interaction with converts on legal issues. In Sichuan, missionary A.E. Evans wrote in 1907 that, “we have aimed at separating the Church from all private concerns, and trust have been as successful as most of our equally zealous fellow-workers.”¹⁴²

Despite of this intention, the power of the *Paoge* expanded under elite leadership. While the *Gelaohui* began to encapsulate every strata of society, Robert Felsing commented that class struggle within the *Gelaohui* was never a part of its purpose. Felsing argued that the *Gelaohui* exhibited two components, a lower class stratum capable of and inured to violence and an upper class level that was crafting a new rhetoric of nationalism based on retaining Chinese sovereignty against foreign encroachment. This is not to say that the concepts and attitudes that the *Gelaohui* embodied were strictly along class lines, as elites would come to exhibit violence and lower class members took up the cause of nationalism. While many of the lower class society members could not escape their criminal or antisocial beginnings, the

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, December 1904, 17.

¹⁴¹ Joseph W. Esherick, *Origins of the Boxer Rebellion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 83.

¹⁴² *West China Missionary News*, August 1907, 14.

later introduction of nationalism and integration of social elites posed a threat to the Qing political order. Because of this blending, “the *Gelaohui* exposed tens of thousands of ordinary Chinese folk to the concepts of brotherhood and nationalism, and it rejected passivity and ‘natural’ subservience to authority.”¹⁴³

The Outbreak of Protest

By creating provincial leadership and then ignoring them, the central government set the conditions for wide-spread protests over the railway issue. The government’s inability to deal with the foreign missionaries’ presence enflamed Anti-Qing fervor. Its efforts to maintain stability over the protestations and frustrations of local elites by providing the troops that put down *jiao’an* underscored who was important in this equation. The memorial to nationalize the railway provided the final insult and consolidated a pre-existing resistance to central authority. In fact, a contemporary British journalist wrote that the “Railway League was formed with the sole object of carrying out a systematic opposition to the policy of the Government.”¹⁴⁴ This League was allied with and led by the provincial assembly, even supported by acting-Viceroy Wang Renwen (1863-1939).¹⁴⁵ In fact, the principal organizer of the League was Pu Dianjun, the provincial assembly president.

Efforts by the League to negotiate with the Qing government received two blows from the Court. The first of these, discussed previously, was the memorial to the Emperor for returning the railway to provincial control. This was rejected completely. Worse, the

¹⁴³ Felsing, 251.

¹⁴⁴ Lawton, 1426.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 1429.

imperial edict included a strong rebuke of the provincial assembly and Wang Renwen.

The edict stated:

Former Decrees have been issued, clearly setting forth the cessation of the “capital per rental,” and instructing that safe means be devised for the undertaking; how could they be misconstrued for “levying contributions.” Such illogical expressions and arbitrary conclusions only make their own abuses glaringly apparent. The said Acting Viceroy, notwithstanding his being an eyewitness of all these abusive circumstances, is really culpable for having so recklessly memorialized us on their behalf. A severe Imperial reprimand is hereby ordered to be transmitted to him. He is again ordered to print and publish the Yellow Proclamation at once far and wide, and to advise and induce all in earnest terms from time to time.¹⁴⁶

The response from the Sichuanese people was equally acidic. One local journal, as quoted by Lancelot Lawton, wrote:

Would it be brave to overcome and subdue the defenseless masses? We say the masses, because the Sichuan Provincial Assembly (as are all Provincial Assemblies) is composed of men duly chosen and elected by them. What it has deemed fit and necessary to request of the throne by means of a petition, must be deemed equally so by those whom it represents. The insinuations as to its intrigues, etc., are as mean and unjustifiable as other expressions in these Decrees are undignified. For a coercive measure may succeed for a while, but the heart of the people cannot be won in that way....The people, we fear, tremble and submit to whatsoever whim the Throne may indulge in, as they did in times going by, without a struggle.¹⁴⁷

The second blow came during the same month as the edict, when the Emperor refused calls for an immediate national assembly on the grounds that “the people's knowledge was insufficient and that it would be necessary to experiment over a term of nine years and gradually evolve a constitution.” Students in Sichuan and elsewhere went on strike and denounced the central government. In the opinion of S.C. Yang, this provided a secondary catalyst for the protests as the current political system allowed no veto over the Emperor's decision on railways.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ *North-China Herald*, June 10, 1911, 694. A Yellow Proclamation was an imperial proclamation written on yellow paper. Yellow was the color of the imperial dynasty.

¹⁴⁷ Lawton, 1429. Unfortunately, Lawton does not provide a source for this quote, an issue for many of the commentaries of this period.

¹⁴⁸ Yang, 64.

Despite the anger at the government and violent rhetoric throughout the province, Pu Dianjun, as elected president of the provincial assembly, along with his deputy, Luo Lun, tried to maintain order. They put out a notice “asking the people to limit their struggle to the question of railway rights, and not to oppose the government and especially not to stage revolts.”¹⁴⁹ Another means to control the populace was through the use of traveling lecturers. They traveled throughout the province giving lectures explaining the movement's causes and intentions. There were limitations on their effectiveness, however, as local magistrates were required for preapproval and lectures could be curtailed “if riotous or provocative statements were uttered.”¹⁵⁰ Despite this, Railway League branches were set up in every district in the province.¹⁵¹

In July, a shareholder's meeting tried to call on the central government to form a citizen's convention drawn from members throughout China. “Pressure could thus be applied to force government reforms and to check the unfettered use of power by individuals, dangerous to province and nation alike.”¹⁵² Although never implemented, the plan indicated the Movement's constitutionalist sentiments. By August, however, frustration ran high among the protestors with calls for a general boycott and strike, as the provincial assembly began to realize that calls for the return of the railway were not achieving much. This was not limited just to Chengdu either, as news began to spread out

¹⁴⁹ Wu, 109.

¹⁵⁰ Charles H. Hedtke, "The Szechwanese Railroad Protection Movement: Themes of Change and Conflict," *Journal of the Modern History Institute of the Academia Sinica* 6 (1977): 369.

¹⁵¹ Lawton, 1429.

¹⁵² Hedtke, "The Szechwanese Railroad Protection Movement: Themes of Change and Conflict," 372.

into the countryside.¹⁵³ Some reformers even called for the raising of a militia to secure the railway against both the government and foreigners.¹⁵⁴

All of this created a crisis for the Qing government, as news that the people in Sichuan were protesting the nationalization plan forced the recall of Zhao Erfeng from the Tibetan border. Zhao Erfeng's return to Chengdu placed him in a tenuous situation. He had succeeded his brother, Zhao Erxun, in the spring of 1911 while remaining as the provincial military commander.¹⁵⁵ Because Zhao Erfeng was rarely in Chengdu, a local scholar, the previously mentioned Ran Wenren, was delegated as deputy Governor-general. The real commanding power in the province, however, remained with Zhao Erfeng despite his frequent absenteeism in Tibet. When he arrived in Chengdu, Zhao tried to reach a middle ground, cautioning the protesters while memorializing the court for the return of the railway. The central government's response was to order Duanfang, having arrived in Hankou, to seize the railway equipment in Yichang. Zhao, in an effort to salvage the situation, "became angry and published large proclamations urging the people to stop the movement, otherwise, 'bad and good will be destroyed.'"¹⁵⁶

On September 7, 1911, Zhao Erfeng requested by phone that the nine gentry leaders of the resistance meet at his *yamen*. These included Luo Lun, as president of the Sichuan student's association, and Pu Dianjun, as president of the provincial assembly. After accusing them of stirring up the populace with rebellion, Zhao ordered them arrested as an attempt to appear decisive. Students and other agitators rushed the *yamen*

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 377.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 384.

¹⁵⁵ Yang, 71.

¹⁵⁶ Yang, 78.

office demanding their release until fired upon by the guards killing 26 people.¹⁵⁷ In an effort to free the hostages, some of the remaining leadership still free contacted the *Gelaohui* for support.¹⁵⁸ *Gelaohui* units began to converge on Chengdu in support of those who had formed in response to the massacre at the *yamen* office. Three days after the arrests, an estimated 100,000 *Paoge* arrived to besiege Chengdu.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *West China Missionary News*, October 1911, 9-10.

¹⁵⁸ Yang, 77.

¹⁵⁹ Hedtke, "The Szechwanese Railroad Protection Movement: Themes of Change and Conflict." 387.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE QING IN SICHUAN

Although the issues of economic rights and national sovereignty created the railway movement, its success was guaranteed by the government's military policy. For the central government, Sichuan was strategic in that it was the gateway to Tibet. Dominance in Tibet was necessary because of British encroachment from India, and the Chinese did not want to give them a clear path to one of their richest provinces. As foreign imperialist pressures mounted first along China's coast and then in the interior, China tried to maintain dominance over its previous colonized states in the west, Tibet and Xinjiang, as buffer zones against foreign expansion. The positioning of troops garrisoned in Sichuan shows this strategic view as of the 53,000 Banner and New Army troops¹⁶⁰ stationed in a province with a population of 45 million people,¹⁶¹ almost the entire number were either stationed on the border or in eastern Tibet.

As Qing foreign policy superseded local Sichuan concerns, Zhao Erfeng's selection as Governor-general exacerbated the intense emotions of the railway protests. One reason for this was Sichuan's unique political situation. In most provinces, a

¹⁶⁰ Robert A. Kapp, *Szechwan and the Chinese Republic: Provincial Militarism and Central Power, 1911-1938* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1973), 10. New Army units were created after the Sino-Japanese War to integrate modern technology and training to certain troops before full implementation.

¹⁶¹ Di Wang, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 81. In an interesting note in the calculation of this number, Wang Di made an interesting find. On p. 80, he writes that "We can see that in a 98 year period, from the 17th year of the Emperor Jiaqing to the 2nd year of Xuantong (1812-1910), the annual average rate of population increase was 7.75%." He goes on further to state that this rate of increase matches that of modern Sichuan.

provincial governor (*xunfu*) was in charge of civil administration while a governor-general (*zongdu*) was in charge of military affairs over a unit made up of two provinces. Sichuan, because of the uneven number of provinces, combined these two functions into one office. By the time of the Right's Recovery Movement, Zhao had been heavily involved in Tibet for years, where he had been appointed *Amban*, or Imperial Resident in Tibet, in 1908. In his own words, Zhao indicated that his position in Tibet limited his understanding of both conditions in Sichuan as well as the world at large.¹⁶²

In addition, the Sichuan elite considered Zhao Erfeng tainted. Although Han and not Manchu, he was a member of the Plain Blue Banner.¹⁶³ This signified his loyalty to the regime. In addition, during his brief stint as director of the Railway Company in 1904, Zhao spent 2 million taels of railway money on border concerns, including a road into Eastern Tibet as well as other military expenditures.¹⁶⁴ Worse, Sheng Xuanhai personally chose him, wanting a tough administrator for his nationalization program. Adshead writes that while “he tried unsuccessfully to avoid the appointment ... Sheng Xuanhai, himself no politician but a technocrat, felt he needed a strong man and insisted.”¹⁶⁵ Zhao still believed himself unequal to the task, so he tried to remain his previous station on the Tibetan border for as long as possible. As discussed before, he finally arrived in August, two months after the protests started.

¹⁶² Yang, 78

¹⁶³ In the Qing military system, banners were hereditary units composed of Manchus and Mongols. Han Chinese comprised an additional, larger banner called the Green Banner. While at the beginning of the dynasty banners were entirely homogeneous, Chinese would later be able to join the elite Manchu banners of which one was the Plain Blue.

¹⁶⁴ Lee, 129.

¹⁶⁵ Adshead, 99.

In order to understand Zhao Erfeng's actions on September 7th and how this played into his subsequent defeat, the military situation in Sichuan must receive a deeper analysis. First, I will examine the situation in Tibet, as this was the key to the Qing regime's use of Sichuan in foreign policy. It was also central to their defeat in the province. Second, I will analyze the significance of Zhao Erfeng's indecisiveness which kept him from re-establishing control of the situation after the outbreak of rebellion. His tenuous relationship with Duanfang is also important in this equation. Finally, the end of the rebellion needs discussion in light of Sichuan's reintegration into China's political union.

Sichuan as Imperial Staging Point

For most of the Qing dynasty, the state maintained a very hands off attitude toward Tibet. Wang Xiuyu wrote that "since the 1720's, Tibetan regions had little interaction with the Qing state power aside from a few campaigns and a small *ambanate*. Among all of the imperial frontiers, Tibet was unique in that Qing territorial administration never reached the extent of its vast regions with the exception of Kham at the dynastic end."¹⁶⁶ Militarily, the responsibility over Tibet fell to the Chengdu garrison in Sichuan. Lhasa held a few garrisoned troops and depots were set up in Kham. Wang reiterates the importance of the garrison when he states that:

In a sense, the Chengdu garrison - apart from the Guangdong garrison - marked the farthest extent of permanent Qing banner presence in southwestern and southern China. This unique position endowed Sichuan

¹⁶⁶ Xiuyu Wang, *China's Last Imperial Frontier: Late Qing Expansion in Sichuan's Tibetan Borderlands* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2011), 20. Kham was a historically Tibetan area in what is today eastern Tibet and western parts of Sichuan. It sat between Sichuan proper and Lhasa.

with a singular strategic significance. And that significance, in turn based on the contributions of Kham and Lhasa to the Qing formation at the central Eurasian front, underscores the importance of the Chengdu-Lhasa belt in Qing geopolitics.¹⁶⁷

Despite the importance that Tibet had for China, the Tibetan government was becoming increasingly independent. Melvyn C. Goldstein noted that "in 1897, two years after the thirteenth Dalai Lama assumed political control, he stopped consulting the *amban* in the selection of top officials...and began appointing them directly."¹⁶⁸

This situation would change radically between the years of 1904 and 1910. Those military forces in Sichuan, situated as they were on the Tibetan borderlands, used the province as a springboard in Tibet. In 1904, British forces invaded Tibet from British controlled India under Lieutenant Colonel Sir Francis Edward Younghusband (1863-1942). Although he eventually retreated, the Dalai Lama had already fled to Mongolia where he appealed for help from the Russian ambassador. This "prompted the Chinese government to issue a decree stripping him of his titles and removing him from the office of Dalai Lama." The *Amban* previous to Zhao tried to take over governmental control, but was ignored by the local officials, or *lamas*, as he lacked sufficient troops.¹⁶⁹

By 1908, Beijing "invited" the Dalai Lama for a meeting on ending Western influence in the region. Intended to discuss the reintegration of Tibet back into Chinese suzerainty, these talks accomplished little during that visit.¹⁷⁰ When he was finally able to return to Lhasa in 1910, he immediately had to flee in the face of a Chinese invasion

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁶⁸ Melvyn C. Goldstein, *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1999), 21-22.

¹⁶⁹ John Powers, *History as Propaganda: Tibetan Exiles Versus the People's Republic of China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 80-82.

¹⁷⁰ *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, April 1908, 234.

commanded by Zhao Erfeng. Three hundred cavalry pursued him as he made his way to sanctuary in British India.¹⁷¹ “The standard interpretation of the 1910 invasion of Lhasa is that it was part and parcel of a consistent forward policy in the last decade of the Qing dynasty.”¹⁷² In her work on the first stages of the Revolution, Mary Wright states, “Chinese troops moved by degrees to occupy the rest of Tibet, including Lhasa. This expedition was clearly intended not as an isolated thrust but as a reorganization of Tibet under Chinese sovereignty.”¹⁷³

Now able to complete their reorganization of Tibet as a suzerainty of the Empire, the Chinese selected a new Dalai Lama, isolated the Panchen Lama, and created a separation of church and state. As a result of this, the *lamas* saw this as foreign intrusions threatening their power in the region. Qing activity therefore had the opposite effect, as the militant *lamas* increased attacks along the border. Zhao Erfeng was the one tasked with pacifying this area, which included all of eastern Tibet.¹⁷⁴ This was the same situation that was ongoing in 1911, when the railway protests forced Zhao Erfeng to return to Chengdu.

The Outbreak of Fighting

Even to arrest the Movement leadership, Zhao had to call up “1500 to 3000 veteran soldiers from the Tibetan marches at the end of August with reinforcements on

¹⁷¹ David Dahpon Ho, "The Men Who Would Not Be Amban and the One Who Would: Four Frontline Officials and Qing Tibet Policy, 1905—1911," *Modern China* 34.2 (2008): 211.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ Mary C. Wright, *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1911* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1968), 5.

¹⁷⁴ *North-China Herald*, May 20, 1910, 454.

the way.”¹⁷⁵ The *Gelaohui* had called up around 100,000, although this did not prove to be immediately successful. In coordination with former Boxers, these units conducted a failed joint attack on the capital on September 18-19.¹⁷⁶ The arrest of the leadership seems to have caught the Protection Movement off guard, despite their successful calls in raising the militia. Robert Kapp argues this led to a network of disunified military units that were difficult to control and proved more detrimental than helpful.¹⁷⁷ As the *West China Missionary News* reported, the fighting was intense, and chaotic, stating:

It is a story of the raising of the local militia to the aid of the League and their gradual massing in four motley armies north, south, east and west and their struggle with the regular soldiers; a story of paying off old feuds, of robbing homes, kidnapping, ill-treatment of women, the aged and children, of burning villages, and suburbs of cities, of looting, rapine, murder, slaughter. The ring of cities fell into the hands of the militia and then started with capture of Xijia fell into the hands of the government troops again.¹⁷⁸

In this situation, Zhao Erfeng had difficulty controlling events, even thinking of executing the prisoners. He asked his subordinate, a Manchu general, who advised against it, stating that the rebels were achieving considerable success and might want to retaliate.¹⁷⁹ By November, rumors were beginning to fly: “The foreigners in Chengdu are holding meetings and urging the Viceroy to pay them (sic) back the railway loans; the Manchus are coming out to slay all Chinese; [and] the Viceroy wants the League leaders

¹⁷⁵ Hedtke, "The Szechwanese Railroad Protection Movement: Themes of Change and Conflict." 369.

¹⁷⁶ Felsing, 131-132. Felsing notes that a great many Boxers were brought into the Sichuan army sent to protect the Court as they fled to Shanxi province at the time of the Boxer Rebellion. After a decimating epidemic, “the Sichuan commander—according to official charges—filled his depleted ranks with Boxers who had accompanied the Court in its flight from Beijing.”

¹⁷⁷ Kapp, 13-14.

¹⁷⁸ *West China Missionary News*, January 1912, 13.

¹⁷⁹ Yang, 78-81.

arrested September 7th to leave his *Yamen* and they refuse.”¹⁸⁰ These different rumors indicate the situation’s uncertainty.

Protest leaders had also had difficulty in securing victory. With just a tiny force of around 3,000, Zhao Erfeng held Chengdu against large numbers of *Gelaohui*. Lawton, using reports from eyewitnesses, described these extremely disorganized ad-hoc troops. He wrote that in a five division contingent of rebel troops “the first carried banners, the second bird-guns, the third big cannon taken from cities or newly molded from the iron bells and incense urns of the temples, and fourth, clad in armor made from kerosene tins, carried ancient spears and swords, while the last consisted of a body of khaki uniformed officers.”¹⁸¹ As expected from such a ramshackle force, defeat was constant. Yet, Lawton stated that “for some weeks the fortunes of war, in actual engagements, went against the rebels; but defeat so far from scattering their forces and destroying their morale, merely had the effect of strengthening and consolidating their cause, and spreading the agitation.”¹⁸²

While the perception of undisciplined *Gelaohui* units was entirely true in many cases, one aspect in which they showed considerable restraint was in their relations with foreigners, especially given the historic bad blood that existed between both them and the Boxers in their dealings with foreigners. Attacks against foreigners were almost nonexistent. The motto for the rebellion in its dealings with foreigners, whether missionaries, businessmen or government officials, was “Don’t touch the foreigner or his

¹⁸⁰ *West China Missionary News*, January 1912, 14.

¹⁸¹ Lawton, 1436.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

property or our cause is doomed.”¹⁸³ This indicated that the movement had no desire to draw in the Western powers by attacks on foreigners.

Examples of the discipline exhibited were abundant. One was the experience of the Olsen family in Zhongzhou, in western Sichuan. For two months, the city had been assaulted by antirailway party troops, robbers, revolutionaries, and Imperial soldiers one after the other. When things settled, rebel militiamen escorted them to Chengdu, where they gained passage for themselves down the river to Shanghai.¹⁸⁴ Another example was that of the last foreigners escorted from Chengdu, including 148 members of the British, German, and French Consuls. They paid \$2,000 dollars for protection on their journey to Yichang with their escort made up of Railway Rights militia, revolutionaries, and *Gelaohui* members. They reached their destination safely, except for a mishap at Hejiang Xiang where they received fire by a unit of Qing troops.¹⁸⁵

With this history, it is quite startling that the *Gelaohui* did not use this rebellion as an excuse to attack missionaries and other foreigners in the confusion. In not doing so, however, they achieved two significant goals. First, they understood from prior incidents both in Sichuan and the rest of China that any attacks would be detrimental to their cause by bringing in foreign troops. Second, this further emphasized that the true enemy of the rebellion were not foreign missionaries or foreign powers, but the Qing themselves. The weakness of the Qing and their refusal to address these weaknesses became the reason for the shift from a desire for constitutional monarchy to a total regime change.

¹⁸³ *West China Missionary News*, October 1911, 8.

¹⁸⁴ *Chinese Recorder and Missionary Journal*, January 1912, 56.

¹⁸⁵ *West China Missionary News*, January 1912, 26.

While Zhao Erfeng was bogged down in Chengdu and unable to secure a decisive victory, he faced other threats from his own side. Duanfang, the Manchu general appointed to take charge of the railways was still sitting in Yichang. In Duanfang's view, Zhao had mismanaged the protests completely and on August 29th Duanfang memorialized the Court to have Zhao impeached and arrested.¹⁸⁶ This memorial was the main reason for the Court orders forcing Zhao to take action in the first week of September that led to the arrests of the protest leadership.¹⁸⁷ The increasingly caustic situation in Sichuan forced Duanfang to finally take action himself.

On October 5, Duanfang took some New Army troops from Wuchang and advanced to Wanxian in eastern Sichuan,¹⁸⁸ the first time he entered the province. One byproduct of this situation was the Wuchang Uprising. The troops that Duanfang used to man his army came from the Wuchang garrison. Wu Yuzhang writes that by 1911, nearly one third of the nearly 16,000 New Army troops were members of the Literary Association, which was a front organization for the Revolutionary Movement. When calls for troops came out in September for an expedition to Sichuan, the governor-general there saw his chance to rid himself of some of the revolutionary elements. On the ninth of October, a bomb inadvertently exploded in a secret bomb making plant in the city. The governor-general seized and executed several prisoners taken there and ordered the arrest of all other revolutionaries who could be found. He underestimated their numbers, however, and in a surprise counterattack the revolutionaries captured Wuchang on

¹⁸⁶ Felsing, 161.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 164.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 171.

October 11th. Five days later the sister cities of Hankou and Hanyang fell to the revolutionaries.¹⁸⁹

Back in Sichuan, Duanfang's army entered Chongqing on October 11th and by the end of November was approaching Chengdu.¹⁹⁰ After closing in on the outskirts of the city, his forces ran into hard opposition and his line of retreat was cut off. S.C. Yang reports that when the general failed to push on to Chengdu, his deputy became frustrated and led a revolt that killed him.¹⁹¹ Robert Felsing attributed his death to mutiny by revolutionary elements that had infiltrated the New Army while in Wuchang.¹⁹² The *West China Missionary News* merely reports that on November 27th, the same day Zhao surrendered to the new provisional government, "Duanfang executed at Fuzhou, his troops leaving with his head."¹⁹³ Duanfang's death meant the end of Qing efforts to retake Sichuan.

The discord between Zhao Erfeng and Duanfang proved to be the death knell of the military operations of the Qing. In fact, it was for this reason that the rebellion succeeded as these two focused more on each other than on putting down the rebellion. During the initial protests over the railway seizure, both Duanfang and Sheng Xuanhuai came to see Zhao Erfeng as ineffective and possibly treasonous.¹⁹⁴ In addition, Zhao had vacillated from trying to negotiate for the protestors to seeking reason for executing the nine gentry captives.¹⁹⁵ Duanfang's orders, however, were to arrest Zhao and put down

¹⁸⁹ Wu, 117-120.

¹⁹⁰ Felsing, 185.

¹⁹¹ Yang, 80.

¹⁹² Felsing, 186.

¹⁹³ *West China Missionary News*, January 1912, 15.

¹⁹⁴ Felsing, 161.

¹⁹⁵ Yang, 73.

the rebellion by force of arms.¹⁹⁶ The acrimony between Zhao and Duanfang reached fruition when Zhao Erfeng turned over control of the province to the rebels. He did it on the same day that troops rebelled and executed Duanfang just outside Chengdu. As far as Zhao knew, Duanfang was still closing in on Chengdu to arrest him.

The End of Revolution

Recognizing that the situation had gotten out of hand, the Viceroy released the nine hostages on November 20th and feasted them in supplication. On the 27th, they issued joint proclamations in an effort to pacify the situation.¹⁹⁷ At the meeting, Zhao Erfeng and the arrested leaders negotiated a change of government with Pu Dianjun as the new Governor-general and General Zhu Qinglan (1874~1941) as vice-Governor-General. In contrast to the organization under the Qing, Zhao Erfeng retained several units but the bulk of the army fell under the authority of General Zhu as part of a compromise between Pu Dianjun and the army.¹⁹⁸ General Yin Changheng (1884-1953), a *Tongmenghui* member, was made Director of War and served as senior military commander.¹⁹⁹ On November 27th, Zhao Erfeng "placed the Chengdu Great Han Sichuan Independent Military Government under the temporary stewardship of Pu Dianjun whom, he explained, was a logical choice since he had represented the entire province as Assembly President."²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Felsing, 161.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁸ Zheng, 406. Zhu Qinglan was commander of Sichuan's New Army 17th Division. He would later become an ally of Yuan Shikai on the national scene.

¹⁹⁹ Yang, 81.

²⁰⁰ Hedtke, "The Szechwanese Railroad Protection Movement: Themes of Change and Conflict," 389.

The end of the government built upon the Railway Movement was as swift as its conception. On December 8, 1911, Pu Dianjun scheduled a military review in Chengdu to observe the quality of the new Sichuan Army. This was done because of the many factions that existed among the troops, creating discord. S.C. Yang wrote that

The vice-president or vice-governor, Zhu Qinglan, was not a native of Sichuan, and the old troops were mostly from other provinces and could not agree with the Sichuanese troops. In the Elder Brother Society many of the troops were no better than robbers. At this time the Manchus living under the "Eight Flags" were in financial difficulties. Formerly the government paid their expenses, but who was to be responsible for them under a republic? The question arose too, about the gentry and officials who had come from other provinces to assist in the Sichuan revolutionary activities. Also, there were still two parties, the Revolutionists and the Constitutionals, and most naturally friction broke out between them at many points. Many of these questions seemed impossible of speedy solution, especially since the governor, Pu Dianjun, was more of a scholar than a politician. So many things needed to be decided that if he had had ten months he could not have argued them all, and if he had had ten pairs of hands he could not possibly have managed so many activities. The most difficult question of all was the settlement of the Railway League problems.²⁰¹

He was not to get a chance, however, as the troops there that day mutinied and began the "day of looting." Yang explains that "the entire day from morning until dark was spent firing was indulged in."²⁰²

Military order was re-established by General Yin Changheng, elected as the new governor and Luo Lun as vice-governor.²⁰³ Several scholars have suggested that General Yin secretly started the riots himself so as to deliver the province to the *Tongmenghui*.²⁰⁴

²⁰¹ Yang, 82.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 83.

²⁰³ *Ibid*.

²⁰⁴ Qin Qiu and Kefu Jiang, "Zhu Qinglan," in *Minguo renwuchuan* [The Biographies of Republic People]. Vol. 10, eds. Xin Li and Sibai Sun. (Beijing: Zhonghua shu ju, 2000), 125. Yin's history tends to give credence to these rumors. In Juwu Chen, "Yin Changheng," same vol., 41-42, it states that Yin joined the *Tongmenghui* while as a student in Japan. He was later exiled from Guangxi by the government there for his efforts to radicalize trainees. He returned to his native Sichuan as a junior officer until

Pu Dianjun fled for his life and remained in hiding. Zhao Erfeng ultimately received blame for starting the riots as a pretense to regain power. Despite his requests to return to his military career on the Tibetan border, the new revolutionary government beheaded him on December 28, 1911.²⁰⁵ The Chengdu Great Han Sichuan Independent Military Government ended and the Sichuan Military Government took its place.

The protest and rebellion with Sichuan and later the rest of the country had a significant effect on the Qing court. On October 27th, 1911, they tried to pacify the situation with the impeachment of Sheng Xuanhuai, in an effort to use him as a scapegoat. Sentenced the next day to execution in absentia, he fled to his seemingly erstwhile allies in the foreign legation.²⁰⁶ Despite several successes, such as recapturing two of the three Wuhan cities, conditions throughout the nation rapidly unraveled. At long last motivated toward constitutionalism, the Qing issued a Nineteen-Article Compact that effectively ended imperial rule in China. The leadership of the nation then passed to Yuan Shikai (1859-1916) as the new Prime Minister.²⁰⁷ Finding that even this was not sufficient, the government ended the Qing dynasty entirely with the founding of the Chinese Republic on December 29th and the abdication of the last emperor, Pu Yi (1906-1967), on January 20th, 1911.

events in 1911 permitted him to rise in the ranks. On p. 124, Qiu and Jiang state that the riots were started by lower level officers, with whom Yin would have direct connections.

²⁰⁵ Yang, 88

²⁰⁶ Feuerwerker, 82.

²⁰⁷ Edward J.M. Rhoads, *Manchus and Hans: Ethnic Relations and Political Power in Late Qing and Early Republican China, 1861-1928* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2000), 184. Yuan Shikai was an important general of the New Army created in the last few decades of the Qing. He was also an able politician and opponent of Sheng Xuanhuai. After retaining his position on the fall of the Qing, he tried to declare himself emperor in 1915.

CONCLUSION

The Qing court's rationale for seizing the Sichuan railroad was two-fold. First, they recognized that local resources were not sufficient to construct it. In fact, China's reliance on foreign loans indicates that the central government's resources at the time were equally insufficient. Second, the railway company's means for collecting revenue afflicted the population with onerous taxes for an increasingly futile project. In their every action, however, the government ignored local concerns either through ignorance or neglect. In addition, Sichuan's place as rice bowl for the country, treasury, and as a strategic base for foreign policy obliged the government to maintain its control. The anger from this dichotomy created an increased desire for economic and political rights as articulated by China's leading reformer, Liang Qichao. Despite this, the central government ultimately surrendered the very thing the local populace had strived to preserve – sovereignty from foreign powers. It is not without irony that the mechanism intended for Sichuan's further integration with the rest of China – the railroad – was the last provocation in causing Sichuan's separation from the Qing.

The government's own economic decisions contrived to set up the conditions for their nationalization program. Xiliang had, in accordance with the plan initially drawn up by the students abroad, instituted the three pillars for financing the project. The zugu was the main pillar, but it relied equally on private donations and the tax on opium. Zhao Erxun's opium eradication program closed off one of these revenue streams,

forcing a heavier reliance on the zugu. Corruption would decimate the funding the project received from private donors. Unfortunately, these private donors were the true measure of confidence in building the railway, providing more ammunition for the government's criticism. Local leaders, desperate to see the railway completed, saw the zugu as the only remaining option for raising railway capital. That these taxes came from every stratum of Sichuan society meant that the populace considered themselves owners of the railway, despite the lack of progress in its construction.

As devastating as the corruption proved to the railway construction effort, it did provide an opportunity for the returned students to acquire more political access. The anticorruption campaign and the elections giving them control of the provincial assembly, both efforts led by Pu Dianjun, allowed these former student leaders to create a semblance of local power and control. This façade was destroyed, however, when Zhao Erxun, the provincial governor at the time, curtailed their power within the assembly. Later, the central government's rejection of their protests of the railway seizure displayed the insignificance of their concerns in national policy. In the context of Sichuan politics, the government's inability to maintain its own sovereignty in the face of foreign political pressure over railway loans was only slightly more vexing than the Qing state's role in relation to foreign missionaries. It was now clear to the emerging Sichuan public that foreigners had more access and sway in the imperial court than the apprehensions of provincial elites. This disregard drove the elites into the arms of the one association that had shown a willingness to take on the foreign powers and their assumed missionary emissaries, the *Gelaohui*.

The economic and political situation in Sichuan affords a singular case study for

the interaction between the weakened Qing government and provincial political forces in the collapse of the dynasty. Yet how unique was Sichuan? Other provinces experienced government negligence, corruption, and the contraction of government services in the aftermath of the Taiping Civil War. This showed in many ways an even higher disregard for local concerns, as the people were left to fend for themselves after almost total devastation. Other areas had suffered greatly in building their railways, only to have them seized in the same nationalization program. Railway rights movements sprung up in several provinces, but Sichuan was the only one to transition from protest to armed conflict over the railway seizure. This was because Sichuan's funding of the railway provided a level of ownership unmatched by other railway projects and Sheng Xuanhuai's betrayal over restitution. In the lead up to the revolutionary events of 1911 in Sichuan, the Qing's determination to retain supremacy in Tibet by stationing almost the entire Sichuan garrison were of even greater consequence than either economics or politics. The selection of Zhao Erfeng as Governor-general reinforced this priority. During his tenure as the railway company chairman, provincial military commander, and as Governor-general, he had focused almost exclusively on Tibet to the detriment of Sichuan.

When armed conflict broke out subsequent to the arrest of Pu Dianjun and his fellow provincial leaders, the rebels had a severe disadvantage in military capability. Although they could call up around 100,000 passionate volunteers, they were poorly armed and organized. Because of this, Zhao Erfeng, with a force less than one-tenth in size, held off this rebel army besieging Chengdu for about two months. This created a temporary stalemate, as the Qing's adventures against Tibet had misallocated forces

necessary to quell the rebellion and the rebel army provide incapable of taking the capital. Duanfang's expedition would have broken this stalemate, but Zhao Erfeng's fear of an arrest order forced a change in relations with the rebel leadership. Although he initially wanted to execute the nine hostages, Zhao negotiated the surrender of central government forces to them just before Duanfang reached the capital. Despite Zhao's fears, Duanfang was killed on the same day, negating any military contribution his forces could have made at the scene. Victory for the provincial leadership therefore did not come through military success, but because the two imperial commanders were at odds.

Although the battle over the railway was the spark for the anti-Qing protest movement described by Zheng Xiaowei, its foundations were laid over the previous two years as a politicalized public, consisting of a new elite leadership in conjunction with secret society members from every level of society, emerged in reaction to one central government sleight after another. The railway seizure was the last in a series of altercations between provincial leaders and the central Qing government over economic and political rights. Government interference in both of these areas provided motivation for protest participation, with Qing military disarray contributing to its success. This experience made Sichuan singular, in that its population was already revolutionary at the outbreak of conflict while agitators in the rest of China were first rebelling in order to transform society. Despite how Sichuan's creation of a unique, unified political movement, the implications of how government policy affected relations between provincial government and gentry in other provinces would provide a deeper understanding of the 1911 Revolution. This would be beneficial to other scholars in that the creation of a public sphere, especially revolutionary ones, are in reaction to

government failures as much as a desire for public participation. In the end for China, however, Sichuan, for all its isolation, lends credence to S.C. Yang's words that "when the provinces are experiencing unrest Sichuan is always the first to start things."

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