Creating Public Opinion, Advancing Knowledge, Engaging in Politics: The Local Public Sphere in Chengdu, 1898–1921

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Abstract

Situated far from coastal cities and foreign concessions, Chengdu yields insights into the role of the local press and its specific publics in the political evolution of the late Qing and early Republic. Despite its remote location, Chengdu developed its own modern press in the late Qing, relying on print entrepreneurs and modern journalists recruited from the ranks of the local literati and traditional sociability, in particular teahouses. They all played a role in forming a modern reading public which came to understand itself as a distinct local political community in dynamic interaction with national politics and transnational networks. The local press evinced three successive but intertwined ideals of publicness: as a link between the state and the people and a vector of enlightenment, as a professional forum for public opinion and as a tool for political mobilization. In solidifying public opinion around the local community, the press served as a forum and catalyst for political activism in the 1911 Railroad Protection movement and the 1919 May Fourth movement, events which were shaped as much by local dynamics as they were by national developments.

Keywords: publicness; print culture; press; Sichuan; 1911 Revolution; May Fourth movement

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The notion of a public sphere has sometimes been rejected as a Western concept that either does not match the blurred boundaries between state and society in late 19th- and early 20th-century China,[1] or at best usefully describes a model of print capitalism that entered China through the treaty ports without substantial grounding in local practices.[2] While these critical assessments have productively challenged the notion of simple equivalencies between the status and role of the press in Enlightenment Europe and modern China, they have not dampened

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1 Wakeman 1993.

2 Wagner 2001.

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scholars' interest in trying to tie together the history of the press, publications and public opinion from the late Qing to the early Republic.

The period between the failed Reform movement of 1898 and the May Fourth protests of 1919 saw a "dramatic" rise in the number of publications and readers in China,[3] with a huge diversity of form (classical and vernacular language, pictorials), content (from serious politics to entertainment), status (official government-run gazettes, party publications advancing political programmes, activists seeking a social role, or businessmen making money) and geographical location (Beijing, foreign concessions in coastal cities, but also inland and smaller towns). Although a law on printing and newspapers promulgated in 1906 required the registration of all editors, publishers and printers, made it mandatory to submit writings for censorship prior to publication and criminalized libel, slander and unfavourable mentions of the imperial government, the law largely remained a dead letter.[4] The provisional constitution of 1912 ostensibly granted freedom of speech, assembly and press, but with restrictions to maintain peace and security. After a provisional press law was enacted in 1912, Yuan Shikai 袁世凯 cracked down with a series of laws and ordinances in 1914, including the Press Regulation and Publication Law. Further, a state of emergency was proclaimed, which allowed police to control associations and their publications, banned workers from organizing and compelled all publications to register with a deposit of money, with heavy penalties for violations.[5] Yet although the press suffered a decline after 1914, the repression was ultimately short lived and the period after Yuan's death, from 1917 to 1925, has been described as China's golden age of freedom of the press.[6] Legal protections were admittedly shaky, but the empirical evidence does not bear out the notion that it was impossible to publish a critical newspaper outside the foreign concessions in the late 1910s and early 1920s. Indeed, the May Fourth era saw an unprecedented increase in the number of journals published throughout the country: Chow Tse-tsung documented 587 new periodicals established between 1915 and 1923 (he estimated the total to be 700).[7] The number of periodicals, including newspapers and magazines, compiled from Year Book lists published by the post office, continuously rose, from 15 in 1890 to 60 in 1898, 487 in 1913, 840 in 1921 and 1,200 in 1925.[8]

Rudolf Wagner makes the case for the decisive role played by foreign concessions and transnational networks in the establishment and development of a modern press and a viable public sphere in late-Qing China, which he believes some scholars have overlooked because of the attraction of the

3 Lee and Nathan 1985, 363.
4 Britton 1966[1933], 108–09; Hsu Ting 1974, 9–11.
5 Chow 1960, 43–44. Chow quotes Ge Gongzhen's (1927) figures showing a decline in the circulation of journals, from 42 million in 1913 to 39 million in 1915. See also Hsu Ting 1974, 12–14.
6 Lin 1968[1936], 114.
7 Chow 1964, 1.
8 Britton 1966[1933], 125. According to the proceedings of the second world press conference, China had 1,137 periodicals in 1921, of which 550 were dailies, as compared to 78 in 1886; according to the Bureau of Chinese and Foreign Periodicals, China had 628 daily newspapers in 1926. Lin 1968[1936], 124.

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"China-centered" approach.[9] To some extent, there has been an excessive focus on concessions to the detriment of inland cities. No systematic study has been devoted to the modern press that developed away from Shanghai and Beijing, although some specific examples have been studied. As part of his study of the "rise of an extra-bureaucratic 'civic' or 'public' sphere" in the commercial town of Hankou, William Rowe argues that local newspapers like the *Zhaowen xinbao* 昭文新报 and *Hanbao* 汉报 transformed urban culture in the post-Taiping years,[10] corresponding with the decline of the imperial administration and ultimately precipitating its collapse.[11] Yet Frederic Wakeman counters that the only widely read newspaper during most of the period in Hankou was the *Shenbao* 申报, published in Shanghai.[12] Henrietta Harrison's study of the *Shanxi Gazette* (*Jinbao* 晋报, 1902–1911) highlights the coexistence of a modern press with a traditional public space in rural Shanxi (the main road), where the written news was challenged by oral sources and rumours. After 1911, when the press became more and more politicized and the Shanxi governor Yan Xishan 阎锡山 (1883–1960) set up reading rooms to better implement government policy, oral discussion subsisted as a continued sphere of opposition.[13] Robert Culp argues that in the early Republic, the advances of mechanized printing and the popularity of short essays facilitated the production of local periodicals in Zhejiang, and "interactions between readers and writers of local journals constituted a new kind of public sphere, one demarcated by both regional context and professional identification."[14] At least some publications outside of foreign concessions and urban centres are therefore documented.

Another large inland city, Chengdu, the setting for Ba Jin's 巴金 (1904–2005) novel *Family* (*Jia* 家) which vividly portrays the rise of a vibrant local culture of political debate around 1919, yields some unique insights into the role of the local press and its specific publics in the early Republic. Wang Di, from the perspective of cultural history, makes an intricate argument for the existence of a fully fledged public sphere in Chengdu's teahouses and other public spaces before 1900, a sphere that was continually repressed and curtailed by modernization and Westernization efforts led by elite reformers. Wang views the teahouse as the equivalent of the Paris café, an "arena where opinions were shared" and which the government continuously tried to regulate and control.[15]

Concurrently, Chengdu developed its own modern press beginning in the late Qing, relying on print entrepreneurs, modern journalists recruited from the ranks of the local literati, and traditional sociability (teahouses), all of which played a

9 Wagner 2001, 27.
10 Rowe 1989, 24.
11 Ibid., 183.
12 Wakeman 1993, 128.
13 Harrison 2000.
14 Culp 2010, 251.
15 Wang, Di 2008, 255. Sun Shaojing (1996, 238) also points out that gazettes were printed in Chengdu as early as around 1800, set in wood or dried tofu blocks.

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crucial role in forming a modern reading public. Social and political issues were often discussed in publicly disseminated texts which circulated among specific reading publics. A steady increase in the number of publications can be observed over the quarter century from the Hundred Day Reforms to the Provincial Autonomy movement, with peaks in 1912, 1919 and 1921 (Table 1). Yet the curtailing of traditional public spaces and concurrent development of modern spheres of political discussion and participation suggest that no simple argument can be made about a correlation between the rise of "publicness" and "modernization" or "Western impact." Rather, attention should be paid to the transformation of practices of publicness in the context of ongoing controversy about the viability of Chinese and Western political institutions.

For the purposes of the present article, the public sphere is defined as a set of discourses on current events, politics and society, their vectors of circulation, and the venues of "democratic sociability" in which they were publicly exchanged.[16] The essay mainly examines a series of locally published newspapers and journals that enjoyed widespread circulation in Chengdu between 1898 and the aftermath of the New Culture movement. In particular, it draws on editorial statements (*fakanci* 发刊词) and editorials to investigate the self-understanding of editors and print entrepreneurs, seeking to shed light on several questions. First, it will attempt to grasp the changing notion of "public" (*gong* 公), situated at the boundaries of state and society and under the shadow of encroachment by partisan politics. Second, it will investigate the changing boundaries of the reading public as a "discursive community" from the late Qing to the May Fourth era, paying particular attention to the formation of a local public articulated in connection with Sichuan as a claimed identity. This local public relied on both traditional and modern forms of sociability in Chengdu, as old teahouses coexisted with new universities. Finally, it will probe the relations of centre and periphery, and the respective roles of local and national reading publics and public opinion. The local identity foregrounded in early publications was not necessarily in contention with participation in a nationwide public opinion, but can we observe a gradual construction of a nationwide public sphere based on the tiered emergence of local publics? How did information and political notions circulate between transnational, national and local spheres at the time of May Fourth? Did local society simply absorb and reproduce the ideas stemming from new journals in Beijing or Shanghai, or was it able to influence the national public sphere? This case study suggests the existence of a complex reciprocal dynamic between local intellectual networks and national politics.

Three main strands can be distinguished, which although they overlap appear roughly in chronological succession. Between 1898 and 1911, local publications were mainly in the hands of the reformist literati. They embraced the ideal of publicness (*gong*), defined in terms inspired by classical thinking, namely the

16 Chartier 2000, 229.

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Table 1: **New Periodicals Launched in Sichuan**

Year(s)	1897–1900	1901–1905	1906–1910	1911	1912	1913	1914	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	Total
Number	6	17	16	23	44	26	15	14	16	11	19	30	24	58	319

Source:
Wang, Lüping 2011.

ideal of "roads of speech" (*yanlu* 言路) connecting the state and the people. At the time of the New Policy (1902), the need to further extend the moral community to non-elite society led to a broadening of publicness to include the enlightenment agenda of producing and disseminating knowledge. Around 1911, this ideal crystallized into a representation of democratic legitimacy based on public opinion.[17] After 1912, the Sichuan press came to be dominated by a new generation of entrepreneurs and modern journalists, leading to a professionalization of the press, which was now required to both entertain its readers and inform them in an accurate and timely fashion. Finally, around 1919, the Chengdu press came under the influence of political activists, and periodicals took on a more partisan aspect as they became vectors to advance political agendas.

The Local Modern Press in the Late Qing and its Role in the 1911 Revolution

As elsewhere in China, the appearance of the modern press in Chengdu is linked to the Reform movement of 1898, as the modern conception of journalism gradually emerged from within the orbit of traditional learning. The Respect the Classics (Zun Jing 尊经) Academy set up by Zhang Zhidong 张之洞 (1837–1909) in Chengdu in 1875 produced a generation of scholars who supported reform, the most prominent among them being the New Text advocate Song Yuren 宋育仁 (1857–1931), who established what became the first local newspapers: the *Yubao* 渝报 (*Chongqing Journal*) in 1897, followed by the *Shuxuebao* 蜀学报 (*Sichuan Study Gazette*) in Chengdu in 1898.[18] *Yubao* had a print run of around 2,000 copies and was distributed in 52 towns around Sichuan. *Shuxuebao* was a continuation of *Yubao*. It was printed in the Academy and read by scholars and some business people; reportedly, officials did not dare read it. It claimed to be available in 20 towns in Sichuan and 22 cities outside Sichuan.[19]

Like many newspapers of the time, *Yubao* typically began with a reprint of a series of imperial edicts. Following these edicts, the opening issue ran several articles introducing foreign and Chinese newspapers and making an argument for the press's ability to spread learning and therefore morality. The press was also presented as a convenience (as also illustrated by the long list of commodities and produce prices at the end of the issue): "Without leaving your home, you can immediately grasp the benefits and drawbacks of the situation in the world."[20] The editorial also notes the political implications of the rapid availability of information:

> Not only can you learn about ordinary people's affairs, but also about the great turning points in each nation's development: before such military and political events are revealed, if they are

17 This process is analysed in Joan Judge's seminal study (Judge 1996).
18 Stapleton 2000, 54. The journal accompanied the *Shuxuehui* and was modelled on Kang and Liang's *Qiangxuehui* in Changsha.
19 Wang, Lüping 2011, 2, 4.
20 "Lun baoguan" (On newspapers). *Yubao* 1, Guangxu 23, first *xun* of the tenth month (November 1897), 14.

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reported and discussed by the press, the people's support or opposition (*renxin zhi congwei* 人心之从违) can immediately be determined.[21]

This formulation represents an early but eloquent articulation of the notion of public opinion, something which newspapers are able to measure effectively. Finally, an article devoted specifically to the *Yubao*'s mission references a term that was beginning to be widely adopted at the time, the notion of "public speech" (*tianxia zhi gongyan* 天下之公言): "What is called a newspaper is public speech, not private knowledge. Adopting it is beneficial to the world, not only for private profit."[22]

While the term *gong* can be interpreted in many ways, its use by the reformers of 1898 was related to their attempt to articulate the public good in a new way that connected it to a broader definition of society.[23] Referencing the traditional dyad of public and private, the statement makes an argument for the contribution of newspapers to the moral community (*tianxia*), rather than being an (ethically questionable) enterprise of private profit. Although the newspaper was useful to merchants and favoured commerce, it fitted into a larger design of social utility and public good. The *Shuxuebao*'s charter emphasized the need to extend the benefits of the new studies to all walks of society – officials, literati and merchants, as well as labourers and farmers.[24] After the suppression of the Reform movement, the *Shuxuebao* had to cease publication, and modern scholars returned to concession papers such as the *Shenbao* or the *Shiwubao*.[25] However, newspapers remained at the forefront of reformist activities and a few new papers continued to be set up each year after 1898.

Broadening the community of readers to beyond the fully literate elite remained an essential aspect of establishing the notion of popular opinion. In the context of the New Policy decreed by the court in 1902, there was a trend, mainly in the lower Yangtze area, to establish "radical vernacular journals."[26] In Sichuan, Fu Chongju 傅崇矩 (1875–1917), a local journalist and publisher who later became a *Tongmenghui* 同盟会 (Revolutionary Alliance) member, established the *Enlightenment Colloquial Gazette* (*Qimeng tongsubao* 启蒙通俗报) in as early as 1901. Advocating "popular enlightenment," this journal used local language to popularize reformist ideas.[27] Fu also opened a public reading room and supplied it with Beijing and Shanghai periodicals and, during a trip to Japan in 1903, he bought a colour printing press and a movie projector,

21 Ibid., 13.

22 "Shuo *Yubao*" (About *Yubao*). *Yubao* 1, 24.

23 See Judge 1994.

24 "Shuxuebao zhangcheng" (Charter of the *Sichuan Study Gazette*). *Shuxuebao*, Guangxu 24, third month (April 1898), 12.

25 Sun 1996, 238.

26 Kaske 2007, 172–74. These journals were first published in Shaoxing, Hangzhou and Ningbo, followed by the more well-known *Anhui baihua bao* established by Chen Duxiu in early 1904. See also Li, Hsiao-T'i 1992.

27 Sun 1996, 238–39. Sun further notes that the newspaper, set in woodblocks and printed on a mechanical press, was particularly popular because it published poems and riddles for a fee, using the money as a prize.

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which he shipped back to Chengdu.[28] Fu was a reformer whose newspapers advanced not only constitutionalism but also modernization and dissemination of knowledge in the areas of hygiene, medicine, social and gender issues.[29]

In 1909, *Qimeng tongsubao* added a pictorial to reach a larger readership: the *Tongsu huabao* 通俗画报.[30] The first editorial, written in a vernacular style and punctuated by simple blanks, emphasizes four benefits of newspapers: they provide access to knowledge (*jianshi* 见识) for people from all walks of life without them having to leave their home; they advance understanding of current affairs (*shiwu* 时务); they offer reliable information to merchants (*bian shangren* 便商人); and advance learning (*xuewen* 学问). The editorial goes on to estimate that less than one in a thousand of China's 400 million inhabitants read newspapers, highlights the importance of railroads and the postal service in expanding the reach of the press, and praises the cheap price of newspapers. It concludes:

> Reading books is old learning, reading newspapers is new learning. I hope that people with resolve, in addition to reading books every day, can read some well-informed newspapers, sweep away their conventional knowledge and old habits, cleanse their spirit, practise their skills and become useful human beings. Wouldn't this be a good thing indeed?[31]

While the *Yubao* and *Shuxuebao* were at pains to reconcile the benefits of modern public discussion with the traditional moral community, the emphasis in the new century was on the intrinsic value of knowledge and broadening the community of readers.

Sichuanese intellectual elites were undergoing a similar process of politicization to that experienced by their counterparts in coastal areas. After the repression of the Reform movement, Tokyo became a publishing hub for both reformist and revolutionary Chinese newspapers and was host to a large population of Chinese students eager to consume these publications and disseminate them in China.[32] Sichuanese students in Tokyo published three issues of *Sichuan* in January–February of Meiji 41 (1908) before the journal was shut down during a crackdown by the Japanese authorities. Its opening editorial statement characteristically deploys patriotic rhetoric in relation to both China and Sichuan, arguing that, "It is our duty to love Sichuan in order to love China. Therefore, we have established this journal as an alarm bell for the southwestern half of the country."[33] The society charter also states: "The mission of this journal is to instil

28 Stapleton 2000, 115.

29 Stapleton (2016, 43) also quotes his lengthy denunciation of exorcists and quack doctors.

30 Wang Di (2003, 208) emphasizes the use of local language in *Qimeng tongsubao* to popularize reform ideas; Stapleton (2016, 158–59) points out that the *Pictorial* excelled at using Confucian imagery for the same purpose. Fu also compiled the *Chengdu tonglan*, a virtual encyclopaedia of life in late Qing Chengdu and published as a periodical from 1909 to 1911.

31 "Lun kanbao cai zhi shiwu" (On why you can only understand current affairs by reading the newspaper). *Qimeng tongsu shu* 1(1902), n.p.

32 Zheng estimates that there were 45,000 Chinese students in Tokyo during the 1898–1911 period (Zheng 2018, 76).

33 "Benshe zhongyao guanggao" (Important announcement from our society). *Sichuan* 1, 25 January [1908], unpaginated (1961 reprint).

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civilization and allow knowledge to penetrate."[34] *Sichuan* thus aimed to build on the project of the press as a channel for disseminating knowledge, adding an early articulation of its new role to advance an explicitly political (revolutionary) agenda for its community of local readers.

The New Policy led to the rise of civil society organizations and to the election of local assemblies in 1909 and 1910, including in Chengdu, where returned overseas students played an important role. These assemblies provided a forum for public speech, which was disseminated by the press. The provincial administrations had set up their own newspapers using staff from their administrative offices in as early as 1904, attesting to the popularity of the press as a tool of political communication: the *Sichuan guanbao* 四川官报 and *Chengdu ribao* 成都日报 not only published the edicts of the provincial government but also reprinted reports and editorials from constitutionalist newspapers like the *Shenbao*, ultimately boosting the dissemination of reformist ideas.

The Sichuan provincial assembly elected in 1909, which comprised many local activists and future protagonists of the 1911 Revolution, launched the *Shubao* 蜀报 (Sichuan), which printed about 1,000 copies and ran for 12 issues. It was edited by one of Sichuan's most prominent intellectuals and journalists, Wu Yu 吴虞 (1872–1949) who, after graduating from the Zun Jing Academy, turned against his more conservative colleagues and became increasingly critical of Confucianism (and filial piety in particular) after a public falling-out with his father in 1910.[35] The publisher was the president of the provincial assembly, the famous constitutionalist Pu Dianjun 蒲殿俊 (1876–1934), and the chief editor was Zhu Yunshi 朱云石 (?–1912), a journalist who had studied with Liu Shipei and worked at the Chongqing *Guangyi congbao* 广益丛报.[36] Zhu's editorial statement emphasized "Sichuan People talking about Sichuan affairs."[37] As Xiaowei Zheng notes, the members of the first provincial assembly regarded themselves as "Sichuanese" (*Sichuanren* 四川人) and saw themselves as representative of the "views of the public" (*gong yi* 公意).[38] In the first issue of *Shubao*, published on 19 August 1910, one of the three editorials (by Ye Zhijun 叶治均) describes its mission as follows:

> It aims to disseminate political thought to our Sichuan, to produce a robust public opinion (*jianquan zhi yulun* 健全之舆论), which will directly support the work of our assembly and indirectly benefit the strength of the government, encouraging the establishment of a national assembly.[39]

A second editorial (by Yang Shiqin 杨士钦) argued for the necessity of establishing a newspaper to disseminate political thought and support political autonomy:

34 "Benshe jianzhang" (Charter of our society). *Sichuan* 1, 25 January [1908], 162 (1961 reprint). This principle is significant as the nine other rules of the charter are mostly administrative.
35 See Stapleton 2008.
36 Sun 1996, 241.
37 See Wang, Lüping 2011, 27.
38 Zheng 2018, 126. By Zheng's count, more than 30 new journals appeared in the immediate aftermath of 1909. Zheng 2018, 139.
39 See Wang, Lüping 2011, 27.

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> A newspaper represents general public speech, not private discussions of an individual or a family. This newspaper is established by various groups working for the public interest, certainly not by the private calculations of individuals.[40]

This editorial echoes earlier formulations of the Constitutionalist movement. Public speech as an articulation of public interest, as opposed to private discussion, is compatible both with traditional representations of the moral community (*tianxia*) and conducive to modernizing the political system in connecting the elected assembly to "public opinion." It reflects the views of different groups devoted to public interest (*gongyi tuanti* 公益团体). It is not in contention with the state, yet it cannot simply be understood as part of the official sphere. The relevant community for discussion is presented as being the *Shuren* or Sichuanese, who are also represented by the assembly.[41] It is their views that are crucial in shaping "robust public opinion."

The *Shubao* supported constitutionalism (*xianzheng* 宪政) and generally took the side of the assembly against the imperial governor and the provincial administration. The assembly and the *Shubao* were both closely involved in the Railroad Protection movement (*Baolu yundong* 保路运动) in the summer and autumn of 1911, which placed Sichuan at the centre of national politics. This movement marked two important evolutions: first, it played out largely in public space and through printing and publishing activities, and second, it marked the formation of a public opinion anchored in the Sichuanese community. The *Shubao* published a special issue opposing nationalization of the railroad, which was privately owned by local shareholders, on 17 June 1911 – the same day a mass demonstration took place in Chengdu. It included an article by one of the movement leaders, Luo Lun 罗纶 (1876–1930), arguing that the railway needed to be self-managed to realize the goal of "true national ownership" (*wanquan guoyou* 完全国有), since nominal state ownership would lead to foreign control.[42] Several other papers appeared during the movement, including the daily *Newsletter of the Railroad Protection Association* (*Sichuan baolu tongzhihui baogao* 四川保路同志会报告), which had a print run of 15,000.[43] The *Newsletter* frequently mobilized the notion of "we Sichuanese" (*wo Chuanmin* 我川民) alongside "nationals" (*guoren* 国人) to provide a concrete image of public opinion, buttressed by popular imagery of local heroes.[44] Funded by money taken

40 Ibid.

41 Culp (2015) similarly notes that the new-style periodicals in the last years of the Qing empire were sites of public speech and vehicles for self-expression that produced locality and spatially bounded communities (more than they generated profits).

42 "Sichuan shen min Luo Lun deng qianzhu Yue-Han Chuan-Han tielu jiekuan hetong" (Comments on the foreign loan agreement for the Canton and Sichuan to Hankou railroad by Luo Lun and other gentry and people of Sichuan). *Shubao* special issue, 17 June 1911, reproduced in Dai 1994, 633; cited in Zheng 2018, 148.

43 Zheng 2018, 2. See also a more detailed discussion of the *Newsletter* content in Zheng 2018, 157–165.

44 See "Chuanmin yutian ge" (Sichuan people pleading to heaven) in *Sichuan baolu tongzhihui baogao* 6, 1 July 1911, and the following quote, "Our homeland is Sichuan and the Sichuan railway is the common property of 70 million *Chuanren*," in "Qing aiguozhe zhuyi" (Patriots please pay attention) in *Baogao* 11, 8 July 1911. Both quoted in Zheng 2018, 161–62. Zheng further describes "*Chuanren*" as an "intermediated collective identity" (2018, 165).

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from the railroad company, it was actively disseminated to every county where a branch of the association could be established. In late August and early September, lectures were held on street corners, flyers were printed, distributed and posted in public spaces, and memorial tablets (*xianhuangtai* 先皇台) for the Guangxu emperor were publicly displayed and served as rallying points for the claims of the public.[45] When the imperial governor Zhao Erfeng 赵尔丰 (1845–1911) arrested the movement's leaders, he also banned a whole series of newspapers, including the *Shubao*, and tried to replace them with an official gazette as well as posters and public lectures in the vernacular language.[46] In a long article entitled "The response of the emperor to the minister and the people" published in the official *Chengdu Daily*, Zhao argued that "public matters under heaven" should be left to the emperor.[47] This attempt to use the newspaper as a modern tool of political communication to negate the legitimacy of public opinion was of course inherently contradictory, but it further illustrates the growing importance of the press and a grudging acknowledgement by officials of the need to persuade public opinion. The sphere of the locally published modern-style newspapers had now become the most important space where the struggle for public opinion was waged between constitutionalists, revolutionaries and provincial officials.

According to Wang Di, teahouses were centres of political debate in the city during the Railroad Protection movement.[48] There are also records of speeches given in teahouses in the countryside.[49] Teahouses had existed for centuries in Chengdu and were traditionally linked to a "third realm" outside the immediate reach of the state, as attested by their use as a venue for judicial mediation – as a "quasi-civil court."[50] Wang Di estimates that in 1911 there were around 5,000 teahouses in the city, with 100,000 daily visitors, noting that Chengdu's teahouses were socially more diverse than those in most other areas of China. In particular, their role in spreading news is noteworthy. Wang describes them as a "community information center," first through gossip but also as a place for reading newspapers, which could be bought or rented, and for commenting on the news.[51] The conjunction of modern newspapers and traditional spaces of democratic sociability again suggests that "publicness" in late imperial Chengdu should not be understood as a product of modern or Western influence, but rather as a gradual transformation or hybridization of existing social practices.

45 See Wang, Di 2003, 215.
46 Sun 1996, 240.
47 Quoted in Zheng 2018, 206. She further notes that people in Chengdu tore down the governor's posters and refused to buy his newspaper.
48 Wang, Di 2003, 233 (he quotes Han Suyin's memoirs as his source).
49 Zheng 2018, 155 (in Zizhou prefecture).
50 Wang, Di 2008, 178. This type of mediation was known as "arguing one's case in a teahouse" (*chaguan jiang li*) or "drinking settlement tea" (*chi jiangcha*).
51 This role is not limited to Chengdu. Qin Shao in her study of Nantong (Jiangsu) describes teahouses as "information centers and forums where customers would come to gossip, to exchange news, and to offer their opinions" (Shao 1998, 1016).

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Overall, the press played a central role in mobilizing local public opinion during the Railway Protection movement, which led to the 1911 Revolution in Sichuan. The new notions of public discourse and public opinion, which had been advanced by successive publications since the reforms of 1898, found a direct translation in the social movement of 1911. As Xiaowei Zheng documents, the notion of Sichuan as a local political community was buttressed by the idea of opposing the taxation imposed by the imperial bureaucracy and instead establishing a local taxation system to fund the Chuan-Han Railway Company under local Sichuanese, rather than national, ownership and management. Public opinion was connected to the Sichuan community and opposed to the court. After the massacre of protesters on 7 September 1911, the movement continued and eventually led to the Sichuan proclamation of independence from the Qing empire under Pu Dianjun on 27 November of that year, and its rallying to the new Republic in 1912.[52]

The Professionalization of the Public Sphere under the Republic

The press's role continued to grow under the Republican government, in conjunction with the further development of parliamentary politics, although the provincial assembly was often marginalized by the military men who occupied various areas of Sichuan. A journalist of the May Fourth generation, Sun Shaojing 孙少荊, writing in 1919, argued that the press played a significant role in the new political system, as the reformists now in power "understood the advantages of public opinion," and hence granted the press access to government departments and encouraged accountability.[53] The early Republican period marked a structural shift away from the quasi-official types of publication and towards a greater diversity of journals more grounded in various groups in society. In particular, it witnessed the rise of two new types of publication: commercial journals centred on leisure activities, and political journals directly in the service of one of the new parties that intermittently supported Yuan Shikai, in particular the KMT and Republican and Democratic parties. These were joined after 1919 by the many political journals that emerged from the protest movement.

After 1911, Wu Yu became the editor, and main contributor, of a series of reformist newspapers until his temporary move to Beijing in 1920. He also set up a short-lived political party in 1912, the *Zhengjin dang* 政进党 (Progressive Politics Party). Several women's publications were also established. Zeng Lan 曾兰 (1875–1917), a poet and women's rights activist (as well as Wu Yu's wife), was the main writer for the *Nüjie bao* 女界报 from April 1912. Among other claims, the women activists of the early Republican era were eager to

52 Pu later became the editor of the *Chenbao*, an emblematic New Culture publication, after turning down the position of minister of education during the May Fourth protests (Zheng 2019).

53 Sun 1996, 244.

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take part in the public sphere and female reporters successfully lobbied to be allowed access to the debates in the provincial assembly.[54]

The most important media entrepreneur in early Republican Chengdu was Fan Kongzhou 樊孔周 (?–1917), who became the head of the new Chamber of Commerce in 1912 and under its auspices published the *Guomin gongbao* 国民公报 (*Citizen's Gazette*), to which Wu Yu was a regular contributor. In addition to his own newspaper, Fan also imported books and newspapers from east China and controlled most of the printing market in Chengdu. Although newspapers from coastal regions would take several weeks to reach Chengdu, there was still a lively market for them, as reported by the Young China activist Shu Xincheng 舒新城 (1893–1960).[55] Fan's most significant innovation was to set up, in 1914, a bimonthly literary supplement to *Guomin gongbao* entitled *Yuxianlu* 娱闲录 (*Amusing Accounts*, or literally, *Records of Amusement and Leisure*), which became known for its humorous style and entertainment news. The writer and journalist Li Jieren 李劼人 (1891–1962) played a central role in *Yuxianlu*, where he first met Wu Yu. The supplement was extremely popular, with a print run of about 2,000 copies. It published fiction as well as plays, essays and cultural criticism, including more than 40 short pieces of fiction by Li Jieren providing satirical portraits of Sichuan society. It was also famous for its cover printed in colour. Although *Yuxianlu* was different from previous publications with political or educational content, its editorial statement suggests that its humorous tone was an elegant foil for deeper concerns with society:

> Dear Gentlemen: you have decided, in your free time from daily publications, to collect random writings in a journal named *Records of Amusement and Leisure*. Ah! What times are today's times? Natural disasters and man-made calamities follow in hot pursuit, as anxious sighs echo from home to home. Among such pitifulness, where to find amusement and what to call leisure? Each word touches on the worries for our country, the sadness of life, and you never experience freedom from wringing your hands and heaving deep sighs.
>
> Based on what I have seen and heard, I believe that there will be nothing amusing in the "amusements" you will publish and that "leisure" will make your heart the heaviest in the world. In today's press, it is hard to use solemn and elegant language whereas it is easy to use humour. Free speech has never been as suppressed as nowadays; if one is not satisfied with striving to survive while avoiding society, one has not much choice apart from writing humorous tales like *Manqian* [Dongfang Shuo] or parables like *Zhuangzi*. Therefore, these "records," as you gentlemen call them, no doubt also reveal your mental anguish and contain many things that can be grasped indirectly through these frivolous writings. Hence, you may not simply be playing with these texts for your own pleasure.[56]

Echoing the notion of "worrying for our country" (*jiaguo zhi you* 家国之优), this editorial statement is in fact a call to read beyond "amusement and leisure" and to grasp the social and political concerns addressed in some of its pieces, in a

54 See the eloquent editorial statement of the *Nüjie bao* quoted in Sun 1996, 244–45. Stapleton mentions that a female reporter from *Nüjie bao* tried to attend the provincial assembly meeting in 1916 and that Fan Kongzhou intervened to support her request (Stapleton 2016, 172).

55 Shu (1934, 163) reported that about 100 copies of Shanghai and Beijing papers sold daily in Chengdu in 1924.

56 "Shuge sheng lai jian" (A letter from Shuge). *Yuxianlu* 1 [16 July 1914], n.p. (1). This passage is also discussed in Zhou 2008, 198–99.

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context in which the critical press had come under pressure.[57] *Yuxianlu* represented an intermediate form of publicness, a "stage" on which the contradictory identities of its contributors, who were both proponents of new culture and literati nostalgic for earlier times (Wu Yu played both roles), were acted out.[58] While the ideal of elegant restraint in dealing with politics was rooted in tradition, it was confronted in the pages of *Yuxianlu* with increasingly urgent political agendas – for example, reforming traditional theatre to make it a tool for enlightenment and new ideas. *Yuxianlu* ceased publication in 1918, on the eve of the May Fourth movement, and it marks a transition from the intermediary generation of Wu Yu to the modern journalists like Li Jieren, who continued as editor of the *Sichuan qunbao* 四川群报 from 1915 and then of the *Chuanbao* 川报 from 1918.

Newspapers published in the early Republican years were often characterized by financial precarity and were frequently targeted when political problems arose. Despite these difficulties, this period saw the transition from a more traditional view of publicness (*Yuxianlu*) to a new model of modern newspaper devoted not only to professional reporting but also to a greater diversity of content, opening up a space for the expression of different opinions. Members of the previous generation of literati (Wu Yu) were joined by a new generation of print entrepreneurs and journalists who were educated in modern schools and who formed a community with the intellectuals and activists preoccupied with local issues around Li Jieren. Their publications laid the foundation for a new form of public discussion that came into full bloom in the May Fourth period. Despite efforts to build a new democratic state around a national public opinion, the Sichuan public sphere retained a strong local dimension, as the titles of many journals attest. Coverage of national and international events increased, in particular through the professionalization of journalism and the rise of modern education, but only reached a peak with the events of 1919.

May Fourth and New Culture Activism in Chengdu

As in 1911, Chengdu also played a prominent role in the national events of 1919. Shakhar Rahav, underlining the role of Yun Daiying 恽代英 (1895–1931) and the local movement in Wuhan, argues: "May Fourth political culture thus emerges as the outcome of a dialectical process shaped by the hinterland no less than by the coastal centers."[59] This is particularly true of the journal *Shaonian Zhongguo* 少年中国 (*Young China*), which from 1919 served as a forum for the broad circulation of ideas between many centres, one of which was Chengdu (along with Nanjing), rather than just dissemination from the centre to the provinces. As the publication of a political organization, the Young

57 When Yuan Shikai appointed his crony Hu Jingyi governor of Sichuan in July 1913, there was a significant crackdown on the press.

58 Zhou 2008, 215–16.

59 Rahav 2015, 10.

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China Association, it also marked a watershed in the transformation of the print media into a tool of political mobilization.

Modern-style schools and universities had been developing in Chengdu since the Reform movement, with the first modern school of higher learning, the Sichuan East-West Academy, established in 1896. In 1912, Sichuan College and Sichuan Teachers College were set up (at a time when only three national universities existed, in Beijing, Tianjin and Shanxi), which later respectively became National Chengdu Teachers College (1916) and National Chengdu University (1926). Wu Yuzhang 吴玉章 (1878–1966), who was a contributing editor to *Sichuan* in Tokyo in 1908, and Zhang Lan 张澜 (1872–1955) later became presidents of these institutions.[60] These colleges were followed in 1914 by five professional colleges which were merged to form National Sichuan University in 1927.[61] Modern secondary schools also played an important role, for example the Foreign Languages School where Wu Yu was Ba Jin's teacher, as immortalized in *Family*. These new venues gradually replaced traditional spaces for public discussion.

The May Fourth period saw a nationwide boom in journal publications; it was also a time of "hyperactive publishing" in Chengdu, and both the press and universities were closely linked to the events that unfolded.[62] The Sichuanese journalist (and later musicologist) Wang Guangqi 王光祈 (1892–1936), whom Li Jieren recruited to write for the *Chuanbao* from Beijing, was the driving force behind the Young China Association, which first met in Beijing on 30 June 1918.[63] Li Jieren set up its Chengdu branch on 15 June 1919 with eight other founders including the historian Li Sichun 李思纯 (1893–1960), who later became a member of *Critical Review*.[64] Wang Guangqi contributed more than 50 articles to the *Chuanbao* from Beijing. He immediately sent a telegram about the May Fourth demonstration, which took 3 days to reach Chengdu and was published as a very brief report on 7 May.[65] A fuller account of events reached Chengdu a week later and was published by Li Jieren on 16 May. The next morning at

60 Zhang Lan was an imperial degree holder who had studied in Japan in the early years of the century. He was a leader of the 1911 Railway movement and Sichuan delegate to the first National Assembly in 1913, which was dissolved by Yuan Shikai. He then decided to pursue education reforms in his native town of Nanchong (following the model of Zhang Jian's town Nantong in Jiangsu). In 1919, he took part in demonstrations in Beijing before returning to Nanchong in 1920, where he hired Wu Yuzhang and Yuan Shirao as teachers. Zhang Lan served as the principal of Sichuan Teachers College (1925–1927) and Chengdu University (1928–1931) before becoming involved in the China Democratic League in the 1930s. He spent most of the war in Hong Kong before joining the inaugural CPPCC at Mao's invitation.

61 Sichuan daxue 2006, 52–82.

62 Stapleton 2016, 188; Ran 2009, 243 ("fengfengbobo").

63 Zhang, Yunhou, et al. 1979, 1, 218.

64 "Huiyi shaonian Zhongguo xuehui Chengdu fenhui zhi suoyou chengli" (Remembering how the Chengdu branch of the Young China Studies Association was established) in Li, Jieren 2011, Vol. 7, 52–56. The original founders in Beijing were Zeng Qi, Wang Guangqi and Li Dazhao in 1918. See Choh 1997. Also Zhang, Yunhou, et al. 1979, Vol. 1, 211–572.

65 See "Wusi zhuiyi Wang Guangqi" (Remembering Wang Guangqi on May Fourth) in Li, Jieren 2011, Vol. 7, 45–47.

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the National Chengdu Teachers College, second-year *guowen* 国文 student Yuan Shirao 袁诗荛 (1897–1928) read Li Jieren's article out loud, provoking indignation among the students, who immediately organized a demonstration.[66] On 19 May, 10,000 people marched in Shaocheng Park, followed by another 20,000 on 8 June, urging the boycott of Japanese goods. Later that month, Yuan presented the students' demands to governor Xiong Kewu 熊克武 (1885–1970), who offered his support.[67]

Both before and after these demonstrations, the New Culture debate was largely played out in student journals. In Chengdu, the most prominent of these was *Sunday* (*Xingqiri* 星期日), a weekly published from July 1919 to July 1920 with a print-run of more than 3,000 copies. It was edited by Li Jieren, with the Chengdu members of the Young China Association, and supported by the *Chuanbao*. *Sunday*'s links with the association weakened after several members of Young China left to study abroad and the journal set up a separate publishing office. Li Jieren wrote a "*Sunday* manifesto" for its inaugural issue:

> Why are we setting up this weekly? Because the dark and corrupt old world has come to an end. In the future lies a world of light, a world in which everyone shall be awakened. Yet many people here are still hampered by blinkers, which they are unable to shed, and cannot yet achieve awakening. If no one was able to come and cry out, that would be terrible. That is why we, a handful of young people, in line with our own personal spirit, dare to lay out some very simple truths.[68]

Written almost three years before Lu Xun's 鲁迅 preface to *Nahan* 呐喊, this manifesto uses similar imagery typical of May Fourth thought: darkness and light, calling out and awakening.[69] The absolute moral contrasts are typical of the mobilizational aims of *Sunday* and its contemporaries, and diverge from the earlier aspiration for a shared "publicness."

Sunday advocated May Fourth ideas, in particular critiquing social hierarchies embedded in filial piety and promoting women's emancipation and social equality. Many articles highlighted women's lack of rights and unequal treatment ("three obediences and four virtues") and sparked a debate about whether women's emancipation should take place through law or through economic independence.[70] The two special issues on women contain articles on early marriage, co-educational schools, cutting hair and women's voting rights. The themes of individual autonomy and emancipation run throughout the journal. An article published in January 1920 discussed the "destruction of idols and the ability to judge," arguing for freedom of thought: "Thoughts are free, but when they encounter idols, they are no longer free. This entails blind obedience, the inability to retain and discard … Only by taking down idols can we achieve rational

66 Sichuan daxue 2006, 72–73; Zhang, Xiushu 1979, Vol. 1, 872.
67 Stapleton 2016, 190.
68 "*Xingqiri* de guoqu he jianglai" (The past and future of *Sunday*, 12 Feburary 1920) in Li, Jieren 2011, Vol. 7, 2.
69 See also Fitzgerald 1996.
70 See He Weixin's "Women's liberation and its clash with the law" in the *Sunday* special issue on the "Social question" in January 1920.

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thinking."[71] This essay, echoing Chen Duxiu's 陈独秀 famous "On the destruction of idols" (*Ouxiang pohuai lun* 偶像破坏论), published in *New Youth* on 15 August 1918, again takes up the enlightenment theme and a clearly prescriptive stance. *Sunday* was open to a vast array of different persuasions including liberalism, socialism, anarchism and feminism. The journal was very popular in Chengdu, selling subscriptions for 30 yuan.[72] Wu Yu actively promoted *Sunday* through his connections, sending several copies of each issue to his cousin in Beijing and making sure that Hu Shi 胡适 was given a copy, and solicited manuscripts from famous activists. This networking paid off for Wu Yu, who was invited to teach at Peking University, illustrating the two-way circulation of new culture ideas between the centre and the periphery.[73]

In May 1920, Yuan Shirao (now in his third year) and two classmates launched a second important student journal, the *Sichuan Student Tide* (*Sichuan xuesheng chao* 四川学生潮). Published by the Sichuan Students' Federation, it ran for 19 issues in total and marked a further step towards a more militant, directly political stance. *Sichuan Student Tide* took on a vanguard role with its call to "First arouse the young, then let them arouse other people in society."[74] More generally, it opposed the old customs and in particular the traditional status of women. Issue 10 published a special feature on women's equality and liberation, advocating co-educational schools, economic independence for women and free marriage. *Student Tide* also specifically denounced teachers who did not support the New Culture movement and the soldier violence against students.

In 1919, Ba Jin joined the Equity Society (*Junshe* 均社), the first of several anarchist societies that existed in Sichuan in the 1920s.[75] The society's journal publicized several prominent incidents including the beating of students in November 1920 and an edict against hair-bobbing in July 1921. It also published three famous articles on anarchism by Ba Jin. Yuan Shirao also joined the Equity Society before turning to Marxism. He was eventually arrested and executed with 13 other communists in February 1928.[76] Wu Yuzhang, who also formed a Marxist study group and organized a commemoration for Lenin's death in Shaocheng Park in 1924, later spent ten years in Moscow teaching in the University for the Toilers of the Far East, before returning to Yan'an and eventually becoming the first president of the People's University in 1949. Many of the New Culture proponents who did not adopt Marxism regrouped at Sichuan University under Zhang Lan's leadership in the late 1920s (including

71 "Ouxiang dapo yu bianbieli" (The destruction of idols and the ability to judge). *Xingqiri,* 4 January 1920, in Zhongyang Ma En Lie Si zhuzuo bianyiju yanjiushi 1958, Vol. 1, 283.

72 Sichuan daxue 2006, 79.

73 Ran 2009, 249. Xu Jilin makes a similar argument about different forms of literati sociability in the late Qing and early Republican period. The traditional locally embedded personal ties coexist with the modern "radiation" of ideas from the centre through impersonal vectors such as publications. See Xu 2008, 32–52, 70–72. My thanks to Joachim Boittout for pointing out this reference.

74 Sichuan daxue 2006, 79.

75 Stapleton 2016, 195. The *Sichuan daxue shigao* plays down the anarchist dimension of this journal.

76 Ibid., 203.

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Li Jieren and Wu Yu who both returned to Chengdu in 1924, respectively from France and Beijing, and were hired by the university in 1926), creating a space for transmitting May Fourth thinking to another generation of students.

Finally, political debates between activists of the New Culture movement and conservatives also continued to play out in traditional locales. At this time, Sichuan University students met at the Four Dimensions Teahouse (*Siwei chashe* 四维茶舍), while scholars of old learning organized a series of lectures at the Three Way Guild (*San dao huiguan* 三道会馆).[77] The Guoxue College, established in 1914, served as a rallying point for conservatives under Liu Shipei's 刘师培 brief leadership, and published a journal called *Guoxue huibian* 国学荟编 until 1919. Teahouses were the New Culture activists' preferred venue for advancing opera reform. They began staging new spoken dramas in the early 1920s, a noteworthy example being a stage adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, followed a little later on by film screenings in places like the Joy Tea Garden (*Yuelai chayuan* 悦来茶园), which had been set up in 1906 as a space for reformed plays.[78] In this respect, Chengdu intellectuals seem to have been more flexible than their counterparts in coastal China in accommodating modern politics and traditional public forums.[79]

The last act of the New Culture movement in Chengdu is the least well studied. In late 1920, the provincial assembly followed other provinces engaged in the Provincial Autonomy or Federalist movement (*liansheng zizhi* 联省自治) in claiming autonomy for Sichuan and independence from both the Northern (Beiyang) and Southern (KMT) governments. The provincial assembly appointed Liu Chengxun 刘成勋 (1883–1944) as governor and chose Dai Jitao 戴季陶 (1891–1949) to draft a provincial constitution, while Wu Yuzhang joined the drafting committee.[80] The drafting committee published a weekly journal, which ran for 22 issues from 30 September 1922, under the title *Sichuan choubei shengxian zhoukan* 四川筹备省宪周刊 (*Sichuan Provincial Constitution Preparation Weekly*). The journal drew on previous nativist writings, some dating back to student journals in Tokyo more than a decade earlier, to stress the unique characteristics of Sichuan while at the same time advocating the federalist model, referring to the US example (as well as Prussia and Switzerland). A constitution was drawn up, but the experiment ended when Liu Chengxun was driven out of Chengdu in early 1923. From 1924 under the leadership of Yang Sen, Sichuan underwent a period of authoritarian modernization, which continued after the Kuomintang established nominal power in the province in 1927. However, until 1949 (since Chengdu remained under KMT control during the war), the public sphere remained active, benefiting from the support of local business elites and continuity ensured by local intellectuals like Li Jieren.

77 Wang, Di 2008, 174.
78 Ibid., 148.
79 Shao argues that in Jiangnan, "the teahouse was purged from the new cultural elite discourse as a legitimate public space" (Shao 1998, 1028).
80 Stapleton 2016, 202. Wu Yuzhang apparently pushed to include workers' rights.

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Despite a final attempt at reviving the slogan of "Sichuan for Sichuan people" during the Federalist movement, the May Fourth period marks a further stage in the emergence of a fully formed national public opinion. Whereas endogenous dynamics dominated in 1911, the events of 1919 were marked by a two-way circulation of ideas and information between national and local stages. Following the effervescence of 1919, by the early 1920s the press had become a vital tool for political mobilization. Although it retained its earlier roles as both a channel for the formation of public opinion and a vector for the dissemination of knowledge, its growing political polarization was not without impact on the viability of its earlier aims.

Conclusion

This preliminary sketch attempts to explore the networks that constituted the public sphere in New Culture Chengdu – the modern press and the journalists who ran it, universities, local assemblies and political associations, as well as teahouses and traditional forms of sociability. A key role was played by a socially diverse set of individuals, often bound by personal connections, who took on the roles of print entrepreneurs (Fu Chongju, Fan Kongzhou), journalists and writers (Wu Yu, Li Jieren), educators (Zhang Lan) and political activists or student leaders (Wu Yuzhang, Yuan Shirao). During this period, the notion of publicness changed in content, evolving from a traditional understanding of *yanlu*, allowing the formation of public opinion, to a space for personal emancipation and political activism.

The diversity of players is mirrored in the plurality of ideas and political agendas that were set out in various publications. At three important historical junctures – the Reform movement of 1898, the 1911 Revolution and the New Culture movement – the press served as a significant instrument for local mobilizations. In as early as December 1897, the *Yubao* in Chongqing was discussing the importance of public opinion and the need for every member of society to be swiftly informed of political events. The Revolution was very nearly launched in Chengdu in September 1911, owing in large part to the involvement of the modern press. Finally, the various currents of the New Culture movement – socialists, anarchists and federalists – conducted their debates within the pages of the student journals of 1919 to 1922. The three ideals of publicness as a connection between state and people and a vector of enlightenment, a professional forum for public opinion and increasingly a tool for political mobilization were often intertwined (see Table 2). Throughout this period, the press played the role of making public the important issues for the political future of Sichuan, enabling the formulation of critical views and the elaboration of public opinion. The provincial community of Sichuanese people was naturally considered to be the most adequate venue in which to debate such issues.

From this perspective, the events that took place in Chengdu in 1911 and 1919 cannot simply be explained as a local spin-off from national events, but rather they took place in a mature local public sphere, a sphere which not only made

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Table 2: **Summary of the Evolution of the Sichuan Press, 1898–1921**

Period	**Determining political events**	**Associated prominent publications in Sichuan**	**Dominant players**	**Main ideas**
1898–1911	1898 Hundred Days Reform	*Yubao* *Shuxuebao*	Reformist literati; print entrepreneurs	Publicness as *yanlu*: regulating relations between state and society Public opinion as basis for democratic legitimacy
	1902 New Policy	*Qimeng tongsubao*		Enlightenment Producing and disseminating knowledge
	1909 Constitutional reforms	*Shubao*		Extending the moral community Popular sovereignty Local civic community
	1911 Railroad Protection movement	*Sichuan baolu tongzhihui baogao*		
1912–1918	1912 Republican constitution	*Qunbao*/ *Yuxianlu supplement* *Chuanbao*	Print entrepreneurs; modern journalists	Professional journalism Entertainment Diversity of content
1919–1921	1919 May Fourth movement	*Xingqiri* *Sichuan xuesheng chao*	Modern journalists; political activists	Partisan agendas Mobilization
	1921 Provincial Autonomy movement	*Sichuan choubei shengxian zhoukan*		Individual moral reform Utopianism

the events possible but was also in turn further stimulated by them. This reciprocity illustrates the complex structure of intellectual networks. The New Culture movement, and indeed the public sphere itself, cannot be seen as a one-way dissemination of information or ideas from the centre to the periphery. While *New Youth* was of course influential in Chengdu,[81] Wu Yu also published his essays in Chengdu before publishing them in Beijing, illustrating the two-way flow of ideas. Young China, a loose political grouping with many Chengdu activists in Beijing and at home, played an important role on a national level, organizing lectures in Beijing in the early 1920s and advancing the cause of the Work–Study movement in France. More generally, the modern press and student journals were grounded in local practices and connections and relied on traditional sociability networks with a strong local flavour to gain a social following. While the events of 1919 marked the emergence of a nationwide public opinion, they continued to draw on the local communities of knowledge and public opinion which had been established in earlier movements.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

Biographical note

Sebastian VEG is a professor of intellectual history of modern and contemporary China at EHESS (School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences), Paris, and an honorary professor at the University of Hong Kong. His most recent book is *Minjian: The Rise of China's Grassroots Intellectuals* (Columbia UP, 2019).

摘要： 成都远离沿海城市和外国租界，因此就早期地方报刊及其特定公众在民国初年政治演变中的角色而言，可带来新视角。尽管地处偏僻，但从晚清开始，成都借着印刷企业家、从当地文人招揽而来的现代记者，以及传统公共场所（如茶馆），自行发展出成熟的现代报业。这些群体合力营造出现代读者公众，将自己视为一个独特的地方政治共同体。在1911年的保路运动和1919年的五四运动中，地方报业成为政治活动的论坛，起了推

81 Ibid., 194. Ba Jin's older brother bought him a complete boxed set in 1919.

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波助澜的作用。这个案例突显出国家政治、跨国关系网络和地方社团之间的复杂关联。

关键字: 公共性; 印刷文化; 报刊; 四川; 辛亥革命; 五四运动

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