Assisting and Educating Chinese Workers in World War I

The role of the work-study movement in the workers’ daily life

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Motivation

An interesting aspect of the massive labour migration episode:

- Not only involved the Allied forces’ governments (and military commandment),
- but also a number of civil organizations or associations.
  - Role of the YMCA.
  - Less known and less-studied assistance brought by civil organizations to the workers took place within the "work-study movement" in the form of recruitment, education, information diffusion, intermediation.
YMCA – Work-study movement

- Commissioned by the British commandment.
- Western impulse at first.
- Religious component.

- Close to the French Ministry of Labour / converging interests.
- Deeply rooted in the involvement of Chinese reformers.
- Anarchist ideals.
- Specific target of education (through evening classes in French factories).
Aim of the presentation

- To shed light on the forms that the assistance of the “work-study movement” towards Chinese workers took.
  - Use of a specific material in the form of accounts provided in a journal, the *Chinese labourers journal* (*Huagong zazhi*), published under the auspices of the promoters of the work-study movement between January 1917 and June 1920.
Outline

- The work-study movement
- The recruitment of Chinese workers
- The forms of assistance and education: examples and accounts from a journal dedicated to Chinese workers *Huagong zazhi*
The work-study movement
A brief overview

- Initiated by Li Shizeng, from 1908 (bean-curd processing factory / school for Chinese workers).
- Concept of the alliance of work and diligent studies to transform Chinese workers into informed citizens.
- 1912: work-study scheme aiming at sending students to France.
- Various societies created between 1912 and 1916, in order to assist Chinese students before their departure and after their arrival.
The “opportunity” of WWI

The massive arrival of Chinese workers in France from 1916 as a formidable opportunity for the promoters of the work-study movement to implement on a large scale their ideas about education.

Li Shizeng (1917): “Chinese workers in France would form the nucleus of a future skilled working class that would contribute to the diffusion of industrial skills on their return to China. Furthermore, having been exposed to European civilization, such workers would also help in the reform of society and the elimination of undesirable social customs.” (cited by Bailey 1988, p. 448).
New societies formed

- June 1915: *Qingong jianxue hui* (diligent work and frugal study association).

- June 1916: *Huafa jiaoyu hui* (Sino-French Educational Association).
  - A Chinese workers’ school opened in Paris, funded by the French government, to teach them French, Chinese and scientific courses.
  - An objective of the school was that some of the workers would serve as interpreters in French factories and would teach evening classes to other Chinese workers (*Lüou zazhi*, No. 1, August 15, 1916).
The recruitment of Chinese workers
Different channels for recruitment on the French side

- Spring 1916: negotiation between the *French military* and China.
  - Intermediation of the Huimin company.
  - August 1916: first battalion of 1,700 Chinese workers recruited by the Huimin company for the French military arrived in Marseille.

- New scheme of recruitment established by the French *Ministry of Labour*, parallel to the recruitment conducted by the military with the Huimin company.
  - Planned to recruit 50,000 workers.
  - A representative of the Sino-French Educational Association sent to Yunnan and Guangxi to recruit 5,000 workers between August and September 1916 [Clifford, 1979].
Concomitant and converging reasons for the involvement of the work-study movement

- **On the movement leaders’ side:**
  - Fear that Chinese workers might be badly treated, as had been the case for coolies sent to South Africa or the United States.
    - Wu Zhuhui: comment on the British media being prompt to criticize the French military for introducing in Europe “uncivilized” coolies [Clifford 1979].
  - Concern that the workers recruited by the Huimin company may not be carefully selected and that they may abandon themselves to gambling, drinking or smoking opium, all activities that would reinforce the negative image of Chinese workers in the European population [Li Shizeng, *Huagong zazhi*, Issue 7].

- **On the French side:** the French Ministry of Labour was working on preventing the military from being involved in the recruitment of civil workers.
A first step in assistance: the design of a new contract

- 5-year labour contract:
  - Guarantee of equal working conditions and pay as compared to French workers.
  - Salary arrangements to be done directly between the French employer and the Chinese worker, without any intermediation from a third party (as it was the case with the Huimin company).
  - French employer to take in charge the education of the Chinese workers.
  - In return, the selected workers should not have “bad habits” (Lüou zazhi, No. 2, September, 1, 1916).
Huagong Zazhi (Chinese labourers journal)

A journal dedicated to Chinese workers in Europe
Characteristics of the journal

- Published between January 1917 and December 1920 (#49).
- Announced frequency of 2 bulletins per month:
  - 18 issues during the first year.
  - Monthly journal from February 1918 onwards.
  - About 30 pages (up to 60 pages for some issues in 1919/1920).
- Publication under the patronage of the Sino-French Educational Association.
  - Editorial staff: qingong jianxue hui.
- Circulation:
  - About 100 workers in May 1917.
  - About 30,000 by the middle of 1918 [Levine, 1993].
The journal

Issue 1, January 1917: First page

Last page
Didactic features of the journal

- Language: vernacular written Chinese (baihua), instead of literary Chinese (wenyan):
  - Followed the reform movement of late Qing China: “newspaper style for a less educated readership” [Kaske, 2004].
  - Clear intention to use a language that is both simple and easy to understand.

- First issues of the journal also included the recently created phonetic script, zhuyin zimu.

- List of vocabulary at the end of almost each issue (French, English, Chinese).
Language and vocabulary

Issue 1, January 1917: First list of expressions
## Didactic features of the journal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>List of vocabulary</th>
<th>No. of pages of vocabulary</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>10/01/1917</td>
<td>Roman alphabet + In the street</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>25/01/1917</td>
<td>Numbers + In the dining-room</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>10/02/1917</td>
<td>Measures + Weights + At the Station (The departure)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>25/03/1917</td>
<td>The human body + In the express train</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10/04/1917</td>
<td>The five senses and speech + The arrival + The bazaar</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>25/04/1917</td>
<td>Time + The bazaar (continued)</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>25/06/1917</td>
<td>Food + Clothing and Attire + Beginning of the class</td>
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<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>10/07/1917</td>
<td>Clothing and Attire + Beginning of the class</td>
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<td>Relations</td>
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<td>10/08/1917</td>
<td>The house + The bedroom</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>10/09/1917</td>
<td>The house + Furniture + The bedroom + The dinning-room</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Games and amusements + The class</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>25/11/1917</td>
<td>The school + The class</td>
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<td>10/12/1917</td>
<td>The school + misc.</td>
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<tr>
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<td>10/01/1918</td>
<td>The school + misc.</td>
<td>4</td>
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<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>25/01/1918</td>
<td>The earth + The sky + misc.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>25/02/1918</td>
<td>Fire and Light + Air and Water + misc.</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>25/03/1918</td>
<td>Changes in nature + The garden + misc.</td>
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<td>21</td>
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<td>The orchard + The vegetables + misc.</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>25/05/1918</td>
<td>Domestic animals + The field + misc.</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>25/06/1918</td>
<td>Birds + Wild animals + misc.</td>
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A vehicle for educating and assisting the workers

Stated objectives in the preliminary issue:
- To encourage workers to work diligently and save money to finance their own education and training.
- Insist on the idea that studying would help workers to achieve a better and happier life.

During wartime:
- Dissemination of basic daily life advices to the newcomers.
- Convey moral values deeply rooted in the anarchist ideals of education, mutual assistance (*huzhu*) and frugal life.

Paternalistic discourse to educate the workers and rid them of their “undesirable habits” and “childish attitudes”.
Structure of the journal

Organized in “sections”:

- Recent events (worldwide, in China, among Chinese workers in Europe).
- Civilization: history and geography taught in simple terms.
- Chinese workers’ good-manners (*huagong xuzhi*).
- Chinese workers’ life in Europe:
  - including transcripts of “conversations” with workers or individual accounts.
- Biographies
- Letters to the editor.
Heading: “Recent events”

- A way to both teach geography and disseminate information (though not objective) about the war.
  - Issue 1: map of Europe positioning the two warring parties
    - Germans pointed to as responsible for the start of the war / described as imperialists and “the enemy of humanity”.
    - Distance between New York and Chicago expressed in Chinese measure (720 Chinese li).
  - Issue 6: account of the number of vessels sunk in the two sides / strikes of German workers in the biggest armament factory / coupon rationing system starting to be applied in Germany.
Heading: “Chinese workers’ good-manners”

Objective: to enact rules and advices

- Rules to be obeyed, some of them being very practical (mostly related to cultural differences)
  - Examples (Issue 3): “when you go out, please wear clean clothes and do not forget to wear a hat” / “when you visit a museum, do not touch anything” / “in shops, if you do not want to buy anything, you should not ask all the time prices to the vendors”

- Advices to guide workers in their daily life and prevent misunderstandings or misbehaviours. Uncivilized behaviours are particularly pointed to and denounced.
  - Stated objectives: mutual assistance / money saving / studying / no gambling or smoking and drinking.
Transcripts of ‘conversations’ with Chinese workers in France

- A way to disseminate “models” of behaviour.
  - **Issue 7**: account on the reasons why they came to France and their hopes for the future
    - Economic reason: higher salary than in China.
    - Political ideal: French Republic.
    - Accumulation of experience.
    - Education (“without education, we do not know how to organize ourselves”)
    - French model of strong trade unions to defend the workers’ interests.
Concluding remarks

- Highlight the role of the work-study movement in the recruitment of Chinese workers and in the dissemination of information and education.

- Only a brief overview of this role through a few examples from the *Huagong zazhi*.

- Further steps:
  - Most systematic account of the various approaches to education
  - The changing nature of the journal over time, towards intermediating in conflicts or complaints after the end of the war.