

THE POST OFFICE AND
STATE FORMATION IN MODERN CHINA, 1896-1949

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the myriad ways the Imperial/Chinese Post Office contributed to the formation of the modern Chinese state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. In particular, this is a study of how the nineteenth and twentieth century internal and external crises in China began a process in which the Post Office played an instrumental role in transforming the presiding state of an agrarian empire into a centralizing nation-state. In the midst of that transformation, the Post Office contributed to the shift of the locus of sovereignty from the person of the Emperor to the impersonal state.

Originating in 1896, the Chinese Post Office became universal within the country by the Communist victory in 1949. The Post Office survived as an administrative entity throughout this entire period because its foreign and Chinese administrators pursued strategies to insulate, protect, and strengthen this “non-political” institution from external disruption and territorial division. In the midst of protecting its territorial integrity, the Post Office also challenged and out-competed six other pre-existing postal services on Chinese soil. In attaining its monopoly, the Post Office occupied the entire geographically-defined territory of China as the postal monopolist and attained international recognition as sovereign in postal affairs. As a new-style interventionist central government institution, the Post Office not only carried mail, but also heavily subsidized the modern press and offered a wide variety of “public services” such as money orders, parcel post, postal savings, and simple life insurance to transform society and the economy as an “extramarket” force mitigating some of the negative effects of capitalist development. Coupled the Post Office’s role as an extramarket agent was its creation and control over a new “information infrastructure” for the modern Chinese nation-state. Within this infrastructure, the Post Office coordinated all modern and traditional forms of transportation,

filling in the gaps with its own couriers, to revolutionize the sense of space, time, and speed in Chinese society and create a new informational environment for the modern nation-state. Controlling that infrastructure allowed the Post Office to become the most important censoring institution of the Republican state through its ability to place institutional controls on the circulation of information. If the Post Office intervened negatively in the public sphere through censorship, it also positively advocated for itself by creating its corporate identity through the use of sophisticated public relations techniques that blurred the lines between public information and advertising. Finally, the Post Office was one of the most important state institutions maintaining contact with overseas Chinese networks through its long-term relationship with Qiaopiju remittance firms. In the midst of that relationship, the Post Office facilitated the transnationalization of the state by creating its own overseas remittance network.

In sum, this dissertation argues that sandwiched between the establishment of a modern Postal Service in 1896 and the Communist takeover in 1949, the late Qing, warlord, and Nationalist governments created the structures of an internationally-recognized, and internally-coherent, independent and territorially-sovereign state. One of the most important state institutions in this process was the Chinese Post Office.

For Mei Chun and Panpan

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Abbreviations Used

CPO: Chinese Post Office

D.G.: Directorate General of Posts

D.G. of P.R. & S.B. = Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks

IPO: Imperial Post Office

NCH: North China Herald

RWCPO: Reports on the Working of the Chinese Post Office

RWCPOSB: Reports on the Working of the Chinese Post Office Savings Bank

RWDGPRSB: Reports on the Working of the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks

QGGJZXWSZL: *YDSL*: Quanguo geji zhengxie wenshi ziliao: Youdian shiliao

Note on Archival Citations

All citations of archival material are listed in the notes as follows:

SHAC137.2182-2

SHAC = Second Historical Archives of China

137 = Catalog Number

2182 = File Number

-2 = Sub-File Number



Postal Song

寄書致遠， Mailing letters to faraway,
 馳驛行空。 speeding across the land.
 我們是大家的鱗鳴。 We are everyone's fish and birds.

政令班宣， Delivering political orders and announcements,
 文化溝通， Cultural communications.
 我們是將命的先鋒。 We are the vanguard of leadership.

匯兌往來， Postal remittances to and fro
 調節金融， Regulating finances.
 儲金保壽。 Savings and insurance.

尚儉移風。 Promoting frugality and influencing morals,
 責任重重， 都在我郵政員工。 These are the great responsibilities of the postal
 staff.

奮勉勤忠， Diligence and loyalty,
 責任重重， 都在郵政員工。 These are the great responsibilities of the postal staff.

It is the Invention of the Post which has produced Politics

-- Montesquieu, 1725

Introduction

The Directorate General: The Post Office and the Chinese State

Few branches of the central government more strikingly illustrate the birth, growth, and extension of the modern, centralizing Chinese state as the Post Office. Under Théophile Piry as Postal Secretary (1901-1915), Henri Picard-Destelan as Co-Director General (1915-1928), and numerous Chinese Directors General (1928-1949), the Post Office directed the primary communications, transportation, and financial networks of the Chinese government serving exemplary duty to the state and providing reliable services to the public.¹ The head of the Chinese Post Office, his commissioners, and his numerous staff became the architects, engineers, and operators of the largest civilian state institution. At its greatest extent, the Post Office consisted of 72,000 offices, a staff of 40,000 employees, and a network of 400,000 miles of mail routes.

Originating in 1896, the Chinese Post Office became universal within the country by the Communist victory in 1949. It had an agency in every community of import and an army of workers in every province. Under a program of rural free delivery started in 1935, the reach of the Post Office extended to every town and village in the Republic. It carried mail for everyone from the lowliest peasant sending a New Years' greeting to vital state documents passing between Jiang Jieshi and Mao Zedong. The Post Office transmitted millions of magazines representing every political stripe, trade circulars for shopkeepers, books for students, and material for the blind. By degrees, the Post Office also facilitated economic growth, market integration, and welfare services by offering parcel post, money orders, postal savings, and

¹ The official administrative name of the Post Office from its founding to the 1911 Revolution was the Inspectorate General of Posts (郵政總局) (1896-1911), but it was known popularly as the Imperial Post Office (IPO) (大清郵政). From 1911 to 1949, its name was the Directorate General of Posts (郵政總局) (1911-1949) or Chinese Post Office (CPO). The head of the Post Office was known as the Postal Secretary (1896-1911), the Postmaster General (1911-1915), Associate Director General (1915-1917), Co-Director General (1917-1928), and Director General (1928-1949).

simple life insurance. It delivered telegrams, conducted censuses, created its own romanization system, issued atlases and maps, and sold revenue stamps. Postage stamps, institutional flags, uniformed mailmen, and offices physically symbolized the spread of the postal institution. The Post Office also maintained carriage contracts with traditional and modern transportation firms, contributing most directly to the development of Chinese aviation through direct subsidies. Finally, the Post Office trained an extensive staff of civil servants to be familiar with the most modern administrative techniques, eschew politics, and give loyal devotion to the central government. The Chinese Post Office, it is no exaggeration to say, was one of the most important state institutions of the late Qing and Republican eras.

How, one might naturally ask, has the importance of the Post Office been neglected for so long? The lack of scholarly appreciation of the Post Office is a reflection of its apparently mundane and uncontroversial activities. The state's decision to carry mail, however, was as revolutionary to people in the nineteenth century as the computer was to the twentieth. Of late, a few scholars have begun to study postal history in various national settings such as the United States and Japan. While each sees the creation of the postal service as profoundly shaping the structure of the modern nation-state, no one has yet more broadly theorized the intimate relationship of modern postal services to the birth of modern nation-state system. While I cannot offer such a theory here, it is suggestive that the appearance of modern postal services as "one of the mainsprings of modern civilisation"² coincided approximately in time to the spread of the nation-state system.³ In China, there have been a few dedicated scholars working on the history

² F. H. Williamson, "The International Postal Service and the Universal Postal Union," *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs* 9: 1 (January 1930), 68.

³ Although there are always minor disputes about the exact dates of origin for any modern postal system, understood as a state-run "public enterprise" carrying mail for the general populace, the general dates are: Europe/England (early 17th century), Americas (late 18th/early 19th century), Middle East, South Asia, East Asia (mid- to late 19th century), which coincided with or followed the spread of the nation-state system. For examples of recent postal

of the Chinese Post Office. Until the 1970s, former Directorate administrators such as Zhang Liangren, Liu Chenghan, and Lou Zuyi authored most of the works on Chinese postal history.⁴ In 1970, Ying-wan Cheng published her pre-history of the modern Post Office emphasizing its delayed establishment as an example of the “retardation of modernization.”⁵ Although Cheng’s modernizationist paradigm is no longer current, her work, as well as several others in the early 1980s, began laying the groundwork for more in-depth study of the Post Office. In the early 1980s, mainland scholars began gaining access to some archival materials, particularly of the Customs Administration, which officially administered the Post Office from 1897 to 1911.⁶ Numerous other document collections appeared in the early 1990s with the loosening of access to the Second Historical Archives in Nanjing, where the Directorate’s own records were stored after 1949.⁷ Taiwanese scholars, too, began utilizing their Republican-era archives to reconstruct the history of the Post Office in the early twentieth century, but their works, like many of those produced by mainland scholars since the mid-1990s, are primarily focused on the establishment

history, see the works by Richard Kielbowicz, Richard R. John, Patricia L. Maclachlan, Adam Silverstein, and David M. Henkin in the bibliography.

⁴ Zhang Liangren, *Zhongguo youzheng* (The Chinese postal service), 3 vols (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935-1936); Liu Chenghan, *Cong you tan wang* (Discussing the postal service), 4 vols (Taibei: Guangwen shuju, 1969); Lou Zuyi, *Zhongguo youyi fada shi* (A history of the development of postal service in China) (Kunming: Zhonghua shuju, 1940). Each of these scholars produced numerous works on the Chinese postal service. For other titles, see the bibliography.

⁵ Ying-wan Cheng, *Postal Communication in China and Its Modernization, 1860-1896* (Cambridge: Harvard East Asian Monographs, 1970), 102.

⁶ Zhongguo jindai jingji shi ziliao congkan bianji wenyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo haiguan yu youzheng* (Chinese customs administration and the postal service) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983).

⁷ e.g. Yuan Fenghua and Lin Yumei, “1949nian Guo-Gong shuangfang juban tongyou tonghui dang’an ziliao xuan” (Selections of archival material on the handling of mails and remittances between the Guomindang and Communist areas in 1949), *Minguo dang’an* “Republican Archives” 3 (1988): 28-45; Yang Bin, “Youzheng zongju deng guanyu ‘Jiu-yi-ba’ shibian hou chuli Dongbei youwu jingguo mi chenggao” (Draft confidential despatches of the Directorate General of Posts, etc., on handling Northeastern postal affairs after the September 18th incident), *Minguo dang’an* “Republican Archives” 3 (1990): 22-26; Huang Lihui, comp., “Xinhai geming qijian duli ge sheng gexin youzheng de bufen shiliao” “Materials on the postal reform of independent provinces during the 1911 Revolution,” *Minguo Dang’an* “Republican Archives” 7 (1991): 6-11.

A number of important primary source collections also came out of provincial archives in the early 1990s. Qiu Runxi, et al. ed., *Tianjin youzheng shiliao* (Historical materials on the postal service of Tianjin) Six vols (Beijing: Beijing hangkong hangtian daxue chubanshe, ?-1992).

of the Post Office, its growth, and internal development.⁸ While both mainland and Taiwanese scholars are now producing new articles on postal history almost every year, their works are usually narrow in scope. One of the purposes of this dissertation, then, is to integrate previous scholarship on the Post Office with primary documents unearthed at the Second Historical Archives to write a history not only of the Post Office, but more importantly its contributions to the construction, development, and extension of the modern Chinese state.⁹

Describing the Post Office, its organization, and many services is a simple matter, but understanding its role in the development and restructuring of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century Chinese state is not. While this study focuses on the history of the Post Office, it is, unequivocally, a history of the changes in the Chinese state. In particular, this is a study of how China's nineteenth and twentieth century internal and external crises began a process in which the Post Office played an important role in transforming the state from one presiding over an agrarian empire to one centralizing a nation-state. In the midst of that transformation in China, the locus of sovereignty shifted from the person of the Emperor to the impersonal state rather than to "the People" as a form of popular sovereignty – the Post Office was at the center of that shift.¹⁰

The Presiding Agrarian State in Late Imperial China

The late imperial Chinese state, born in the Song dynasty (960-1279), is the classic example of a small bureaucratic monarchy capable of governing an enormous agrarian multi-ethnic empire.

⁸ The two best examples of this type are: Xu Xuexia, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng, 1896-1928* (Modern China's postal service, 1896-1928) (Taipei: Sili dongwu daxue, 1992); Yan Xing (A. S. Pan), *Zhonghua youzheng fazhan shi* (History of the expansion of China's postal service) (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994).

⁹ The Second Historical Archives in Nanjing has some 30,000 files of postal material to which I was fortunate enough to have access.

¹⁰ This dissertation was written and defended before the publication of Peter Zarrow's *After Empire: The Conceptual Transformation of the Chinese State, 1885-1924* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012) and consequently I have not been able to fully engage this important book in any depth.

Made up of an Emperor and royal family, a bureaucracy staffed by literary elites, and the socializing role of Confucian ethics, the late imperial state allowed the emperors to assure obedience from their subjects, collect taxes, administer justice, and, with the occasionally assistance of the military, suppress rebellion. This basic model proved adaptable to periods of alien rule such as the Mongol Yuan and Manchu Qing dynasties (1279-1368, 1644-1911) and sustained and devastating warfare during such times as the Ming-Qing cataclysm (1640s-1660s).

At the head of the state was the Emperor who stood at the apex of a complex hierarchical bureaucracy. Beneath the emperor was, after 1730, the Grand Council, followed by the Grand Secretariat that advised the emperor on policy matters and handled routine paperwork. The Boards of Appointments, Finance, Rites, War, Punishments, and Public Works handled the collection and processing of information and implementation of policy. Although the Boards appear similar to modern ministries, they had limited authority to make policy – they could not issue orders to provincial or local officials, but had to secure the Emperor's approval beforehand. Even within one of the Boards, the two Presidents and four Vice-Presidents had to jointly decide on policy matters before petitioning the throne. Out in the provinces were imperial viceroys who governed the affairs of two or more provinces, provincial governors, intendants, prefects, and county magistrates, but it was primarily the magistrates who carried out the administrative functions of government. In the early nineteenth century, there were roughly 1300 county magistrates governing a population of some 350 million. Although both small and occasionally cumbersome, the imperial government functioned effectively enough to achieve its primary goals.

The reason the late imperial state could govern such a large population with its small bureaucracy was because of its limited goals. Practically, the imperial government administered the physical realm, but dynasts and philosophers theoretically conceptualized the Emperor as

presiding over a civilization – a civilization made up of the entire world or “all under Heaven” (天下). As the Son of Heaven, the Emperor’s primary duty was cosmological – to maintain the balance between Heaven and Earth through the performance of state rituals. As such, it was not the Emperor or his officials’ duty to regularly interfere in the lives of his subjects, but simply to reign over the people loosely to ensure the socializing effects of Confucian ethics played their proper role in governing the population. Scholars typically call this late imperial government a “presiding” or “superficial” state to emphasize its general laissez faire attitude towards the public.¹¹ There were times when the late imperial state was capable of vigorous action, but generally speaking it preferred to perform only the most basic functions of government such as collecting taxes, administering justice, raising military forces, and maintaining certain types of infrastructure such as river dykes and canals.¹²

From the Song through the eighteenth century, the late imperial state largely succeeded as a great universalist empire made up of a multi-ethnic, heterogeneous population by maintaining cosmic harmony and local stability through the spread of Confucian morals and civilization. In actual administration, the late imperial state held together a highly diverse population with the appearance, if not always the reality, of standardization across the empire while granting local officials wide latitude in governing local populations. When the system functioned effectively, as in most of the eighteenth century, powerful emperors physically expanded the realm, agriculture flourished, scholarship increased, and peace reigned. When confronted by numerous, complex crises in the long nineteenth century, the small imperial government proved incapable

¹¹ Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 12; Mary B. Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), 13.

¹² Pierre-Etienne Will, “State Intervention in the Administration of a Hydraulic Infrastructure: The Example of Hubei Province in Late Imperial Times,” in *The Scope of State Power in China*, edited by S. R. Schram, 295-347 (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1985).

of effectively responding to global economic effects, significant population growth, the weakness of its military, huge peasant rebellions, and the challenge of Western imperialism.

The Long Nineteenth Century and the Crisis of the Imperial Order, 1790-1911

To any percipient observer in the 1790s, the Qing government was showing all the classic signs of dynastic decline. The once invincible Banner armies saw their last great victory against Nepalese Gurkha forces in Tibet in 1791-92, but they proved ineffective against the guerilla tactics of the huge White Lotus Rebellion (1796-1804) forcing the already unpopular Banner forces to turn to simple brutality against the local population.¹³ In the capital, the lowly imperial bodyguard Heshen (和珅) had secured the unwavering loyalty of the Qianlong Emperor (r. 1736-1796) who eventually appointed him Grand Councilor. Heshen proved exceptionally corrupt using his position to appoint cronies throughout the bureaucracy who helped him pilfer fabulous sums. At the height of his power, Heshen stood by the Qianlong Emperor to receive a new type of visitor, a British representative, Lord McCartney, sent to establish diplomatic relations and tear down the restrictive Canton System of Trade. Not long after McCartney's failed mission, the Qianlong Emperor died and his successor, the Jiaqing Emperor (1796-1820), destroyed Heshen's power, rallied the Banner forces to crush the White Lotus Rebellion, but failed to restore the empire to its former glory.¹⁴

Unbeknownst to the imperial government, global transformations in the political, demographic, and economic landscape were creating challenges the late imperial government

¹³ Aside from official peculation during the White Lotus Rebellion, regular army funding proved such a drain on the Imperial Treasury that it brought an end to Qing expansionism. Yingcong Dai, *The Sichuan Frontier and Tibet: Imperial Strategy in the Early Qing* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009), 226.

¹⁴ As a recent group of scholars argue, however, the Jiaqing Emperor and his officials were able to re-stabilize the Empire through various reforms that allowed it to survive another century. Ironically, it was through these reforms that the Qing Court initiated the "state breakdown" that would evolve over the next century. For a summary of this new work, see: William T. Rowe, "Introduction: The Significance of the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition in Qing History," *Late Imperial China* 32: 2 (December 2011): 74-88.

would be unable to solve. Since the sixteenth century, the Pacific Columbian Exchange had brought new crops and improved species to China, which diversified diets and the agricultural economy. The Portuguese, Dutch, and British began to arrive and flood the empire with New World silver to purchase Chinese silks, tea, and porcelain. The eighteenth century economy flourished under such conditions as did the population. Eighteenth-century economic growth was coupled with a long period of peace that doubled the population between 1741 and 1800 when it reached about 300 million. Soon enough, however, this great population explosion would bring about structural shifts in political, social, and economic life that would turn the prosperous eighteenth century into the disastrous nineteenth. As the population continued to increase, competition for increasingly scarce land resources led to sharper competition for jobs, rising prices, and conflicts between Han migrants and ethnic minorities on the periphery.

As the internal crises mounted, the British East India Company traders were already creating the framework for a global narco-empire designed to replace New World silver with opium grown in India to purchase tea for consumption in Europe. Although the trade started slowly enough, by the 1830s the opium trade resulted in a massive outflow of silver from the Qing empire. The outflow of silver effectively raised taxes on Chinese peasants because they had to convert their copper into silver. The peasants were thus facing numerous challenges – local government corruption, increased tax rates, and population pressures on the land.

By the 1830s, numerous high officials, many of them new-style statecraft thinkers such as the famous anti-opium Commissioner Lin Zexu, recognized they were confronting problems on a massive scale. The long-term effects of Heshen's corruption continued to plague local government, population pressures forced large-scale internal migration that touched off local and sometimes regional rebellions, and the rapid influx of opium and outflow of silver was

devastating the overall economy. Facing an unprecedented series of crises, the average imperial official struggled to find solutions that would be sanctioned by tradition, but a few also started to pursue more radical responses.

After the British victory in the Opium War (1839-1842) and the outbreak of the Taiping Rebellion (1851-1864), the late imperial state was constantly buffeted by a series of internal rebellions and external wars. The emergence of the Unequal Treaty system governing the relations between the Qing dynasty and the Western Powers coupled with what seemed a never-ending series of regional rebellions slowly undermined the foundations of the late imperial state. Philip Kuhn, in a brilliant series of essays examining the crises that beset the Qing in the nineteenth century, argues that some Qing officials recognized in these crises a broad “constitutional” challenge to the structure of the presiding agrarian state.¹⁵ There were a variety of responses to these numerous challenges – the granting of unheard of authority to local gentry to form militia to contain the peasant rebellions, a traditional-style Confucian restoration during the Tongzhi period (1861-1875) to re-stabilize rural society, joint public-private self-strengthening projects to industrialize the country from the 1860s to 1890s, and explicit demands for political reforms in the late 1880s and early 1890s. All of these movements shared the tacit assumption that fundamental reforms to the structure of the late imperial state were necessary not just for to ensure the state was not extinguished (亡國/滅國), but also for the survival of the race in a social Darwinian struggle between ethno-nations (民族).¹⁶

When the Japanese Empire defeated the Qing in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95), all previous efforts to reform the state appeared to have failed. Recognizing the extent of the crisis,

¹⁵ Philip A. Kuhn, *Origins of the Modern Chinese State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

¹⁶ Late Qing thought was deeply imbued with the notion of a social Darwinian struggle among nation-states for survival, particularly after the Boxer Incident when talk of “national extinction” seemed on the lips of most political observers.

a new coterie of reformers, spearheaded by Kang Youwei (康有為) (1858-1927), advised the Guangxu Emperor (r. 1875-1908) to enact a series of wide-ranging reforms to the structure of the state known as the Hundred Days Reforms (1898).¹⁷ Concerned with the implications of the reform movement, Empress Dowager Cixi carried out a palace coup against the Emperor. Shortly thereafter, the Boxer Rebellion broke out, which Cixi used to declare war against the foreign powers. After the disaster of the Boxer Rebellion and the Western occupation of Beijing in 1900 even conservatives within the central government admitted the need for radical political change. In the immediate post-Boxer period, the Empress Dowager launched the New Policies reforms (1901-1911) that intentionally restructured the state as a modern-style centralizing ministerial government.¹⁸ Within a decade, the reforms began transforming the ancient agrarian empire into a thoroughly modern state designed to defend its territorial and administrative integrity: the government abolished the civil service examinations, reorganized the Six Boards into modern ministries, and undertook reforms in education, the military, and commerce as well as setting a timetable for the introduction of a constitutional monarchy. By delegitimizing the Confucian rationale for imperial rule and creating the framework of a powerful centralized state capable of interfering with society, however, the New Policies reforms alienated conservatives, liberals, and revolutionaries who created new opposition groups that quickly sapped government autonomy. The Qing fell to an uneasy alliance of Northern militarists, Southern constitutionalists, and Republican revolutionaries in the 1911 Revolution.

¹⁷ Luke Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Peter Zarrow and Rebecca E. Karl, eds., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002).

¹⁸ Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1993); Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities*, 20-27; Richard Horowitz, "Breaking the Bonds of Precedent: The 1905-06 Government Reform Commission and the Remaking of the Qing Central State," *Modern Asian Studies* 37: 4 (2003): 775-797.

Defining the Modern State

Most recent studies of the state begin with Max Weber's influential work on the sociology of the state. Weber simply defines the state as "a human community that (successfully) claims the *monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force* within a given territory."¹⁹ This legitimacy, Weber argues, rests on one of three ideal-typical models: tradition or the "eternal yesterday" of customs sanctioned by the past; the charisma of the individual leader; or, by the belief in the validity of "legality" as based on rational, internally-coherent laws. Although Weber emphasizes that few actual states represent any of his ideal types – most being hybrids – the majority of more recent studies of the state have focused on Weber's rational-legal type as the basis of the *modern* state with its constitutions, bureaucracies, and laws. Neo-Weberians thus shift focus away from Weber's emphasis on violence/coercion towards the effectiveness and legitimacy of bureaucratic administration. A general definition of the state from this perspective is usually something like: the modern state is a set of autonomous institutions exercising supreme political authority within a geographically-defined territory.²⁰ That is, the state is no longer a "human community" in these works, but a "set of institutions." It is these institutions that jointly possess supreme political authority, a monopoly of 'legitimate' coercion, administer a given territory, and have a capacity to capture revenue for the support of state activities. Finally, scholars of sovereignty – the idea undergirding Weber's "legitimate" – also argue that within a nation-state system, a state

¹⁹ Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," translated and edited by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 78.

²⁰ Edward S. Greenberg, "State Change: Approaches and Concepts," in *Changes in the State: Causes and Consequences*, edited by Edward S. Greenberg and Thomas F. Mayer (Newbury Park, NY: Sage Publications, 1990), 12; Colin Hay and Michael Lister, "Introduction: Theories of the State," in *The State: Theories and Issues*, edited by Colin Hay, Michael Lister, and David Marsh (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 8; Anthony D. Smith, "State-Making and Nation-Building," in *States in History*, edited by John A. Hall (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 235.

must achieve *de facto* and *de jure* international recognition as sovereign in order to discursively and physically defend its borders.²¹

According to either the Weberian or Neo-Weberian definitions, there was no state either in the last decades of the late Qing or in the early Republic. Liang Qichao (梁啟超) frequently made the same observation in the first decade of the twentieth century by calling the Qing “stateless” (無國).²² There was clearly a set of institutions or corporate structure claiming status as the state (the government), but there was no single body holding political ultimacy, much less one commanding an effective force monopoly. It was, Liang wrote, “a Court without a State.”²³ Or, in the words of an anonymous journalist in the late Qing, it was “a dynasty and not a state” (朝代也, 非國也).²⁴ Huang Jie (黃節), a conservative and proponent of National Essence, argued that China appears to be a country, but for the past two hundred years [under the Manchus] it had been “literally stateless.”²⁵ In January 1896, Sir Robert Hart, Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, wrote:

The Government of China is a puzzle: it to-day looks like a lot of quicksilver on a flat surface with little curleycues cutting across to join larger ones and these again splitting up and forming new centres without seeming rhyme or reason!...There is a Govt. and it continually is felt, but it's more of an atmosphere than a body and there's no locating it for grappling purposes.²⁶

²¹ Michael R. Fowler and Julie M. Bunck, *Law, Power, and the Sovereign State: The Evolution and Application of the Concept of Sovereignty* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996), 7-8, 36-37.

²² Zhang Foquan, *Liang Qichao guojia guannian zhi xingcheng* (The formation of Liang Qichao's idea of the state,” *Zhengzhi xuebao* (Journal of Politics) 1 (1971), 5-11.

²³ Liang Qichao, “Lun guojia sixiang” (On statist thought) in *Xinmin shuo* (On the new citizen) (1902, reprint: Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1998), 68-69.

²⁴ “Yuan guo” (The origin of the state), *Minguo bao* (The citizen) (10 May 1901) cited in Li Huaxing and Zhang Yuanlong, “Zhongguo jindai guojia guannian zhuanxing de sikao” (Reflections on the transformation of the concept of the state in modern China), *Anhui daxue xuebao (zhexue shehui kexue bao)* “Journal of Anhui University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)” 29: 1 (January 2005), 3.

²⁵ Cited in Wang Fansen, *Zhongguo jindai sixiang yu xueshu de xipu* (A genealogy of Modern Chinese thought and scholarship) (Taipei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 2003), 198.

²⁶ Robert Hart, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, edited by John K. Fairbank, et al. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1975), 1047.

Hart's inability to locate the State for "grappling purposes" is a problem that continues to plague historians of China. Hart had difficulty locating "the state" because he, like many Westerners of his time, considered the modern nation-state as the juridical-political form (國體) necessary for enjoying what was once called the "Comity of Nations" (國際禮讓) but more widely understood as sovereign state autonomy in international law.²⁷ By the late Qing, the imperial state had lost considerable sovereignty over its rule making (setting customs tariffs), allowed the existence of an *imperium in imperio* (International Settlements/Concessions), lacked legal control over foreigners on Chinese territory (extraterritoriality) as a result of the Unequal Treaties, had few internationally-recognized borders, and had little understanding of international legal precepts such as consular jurisdiction, diplomatic immunity, the constitutional foundation of foreign affairs powers, or similar notions of international law premised on notions of Christian civilization.²⁸ Internally, the Qing had granted extraordinary juridical powers such as corporal punishment and tax collection to non-state local elites during the Taiping Rebellion and was incapable of retrieving them once the rebellion was defeated. After the Sino-Japanese War, the late Qing presiding state began the long-term process of transitioning to a modern centralizing state legitimized by rationally-defined rules and regulations.

At the core of the Qing reforms designed to modernize the state was the assumption that there must be a shift away from a traditional model of the state in which the Emperor's authority was based on custom, ritual, and the sanction of the Mandate of Heaven towards a legal-rational

²⁷ Richard S. Horowitz argues that "state transformation" in the late Qing was the result of external diplomatic pressure by Western nation states. In order to increase their autonomy, Qing bureaucrats adopted standards of international law thus beginning the transition towards a modern nation-state. "International Law and State Transformation in China, Siam, and the Ottoman Empire during the Nineteenth Century," *Journal of World History* 15: 4 (December 2004): 445-486. For a broader work on the significance of international law in the late Qing, see: Rune Svarverud, *International Law as World Order in Late Imperial China: Translation, Reception and Discourse, 1847-1911* (Boston: Brill, 2007).

²⁸ On the shift to a Christian civilizational standard in international law, see: *Ibid.*, 452-53.

state in which both the imperial family and state bureaucrats would be governed by an authority constituted of written rules and procedures such as laws, constitution, and regulations. By the Boxer Rebellion (1900) high Qing officials were already uncertain about the locus of sovereignty in the Qing state.²⁹ During the Rebellion, many of the most powerful Vicereroys in central and southern China formed the Mutual Protection Pact of the Southeastern Provinces (東南互保) to work with the foreign powers to avoid external intervention in their provinces. In so doing, these insubordinate Vicereroys expressly described the Court's order to declare war on the foreign Powers as a "fake decree" (矯旨).³⁰ A few years later, the Court itself began to redefine the Emperor's role in cosmological terms. By creating new state rituals around Confucius, the Court shifted the status of the Emperor's vis-à-vis the Sage – henceforth the Emperor and people would be one body (君民一體) in the veneration of this religio-philosophical figure. In so doing, the Court was effectively sacrificing ruler sovereignty for sovereignty embodied in the impersonal state.³¹ At the same time, the late Qing state was intentionally restructured itself as a rules-based ministerial government during the New Policies Reforms in 1905/06.³²

That an uneasy alliance of social groups unified by anti-Manchu sentiment toppled the dynasty in midst of this shift to a centralizing state should not be surprising. Once the Qing state signaled the abandonment of its traditional source of legitimacy by abolishing the civil service examinations, restructuring the government, sponsoring plans for a constitutional monarchy, and

²⁹ Marianne Bastid, "Official Conceptions of Imperial Authority at the End of the Qing Dynasty," in *Foundations and Limits of State Power in China*, edited by Stuart Schram (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1987), 178-79.

³⁰ Lin Shiming, *Yihetuan shibian qijian Dongnan hubao yundong zhi yanjiu* (Research on the Southeast Mutual Protection Movement during the Boxer Incident) (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1980).

³¹ Ya-pei Kuo, "'The Emperor and the People in One Body': The Worship of Confucius and Ritual Planning in the Xinzheng Reforms, 1902-1911," *Modern China* 35: 2 (March 2009): 123-154. Kuo does not discuss the implications for this shift in sovereignty, but interprets the transformation of imperial ritual from the perspective of nation-building.

³² Horowitz, "Breaking the Bonds of Precedent."

organizing various representative assemblies, the legitimacy of the imperial system disintegrated. Although the late Qing Court and the Republican revolutionaries both worked to maintain and then successfully transition from a multi-ethnic empire into a multiethnic country, almost all observers of Yuan Shikai's dictatorial presidency (1912-1916) and the warlord era (1916-1928), agreed that no central state existed in China.³³ The idea of the state, however, continued to work in the minds of Chinese of every political stripe who were "awakening" to their peril in the late Qing and early Republic.³⁴ Late Qing and Republic officials, reformers, local militarists, moderate constitutionalists, urban merchants, student agitators, or political revolutionaries might differ immensely in their vision for modern China or its form of government, but they saw themselves as new-style "citizens" who, Shen Sung-chiao argues, could not "escape the shadow of the state." Most understood citizenship as making them "people of the state" and as such there should be a modern China and one with a strong state.³⁵ "The state," Shen opines, "was the

³³ There has been considerable work done on the transition from empire to nation-state, and the significance of borderlands history to the maintenance of the territorial entity of "China," over the past five years. Each of the works focuses on a specific issue or time period, but all agree the continual pressure of Western imperialism along the borders of the Qing empire forced the Court, and then the revolutionaries, to ratchet up their defense of these areas to incorporate the former dependencies into a new notion of "China." William C. Kirby, "When Did China Become China? Thoughts on the Twentieth Century," in *The Teleology of the Nation-State: China and Japan*, edited by Joshua A. Fogel, 105-114 (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Pamela K. Crossley, "Nationality and Difference in China: The Post-Imperial Dilemma," in *The Teleology of the Nation State*, 138-158; Gang Zhao, "Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese National Identity in the Early Twentieth Century," *Modern China* 32: 1 (January 2006): 3-30; Joseph W. Esherick, "How the Qing Became China," in *Empire to Nation: Historical Perspectives on the Making of the Modern World*, edited by Esherick, Hasan Kayali, and Eric Van Young, 229-259 (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006); Prasenjit Duara, "The Multi-National State in Modern World History: The Chinese Experiment," *Frontiers of History in China* 6: 2 (2011): 285-295; most recently, Lu Yong has pushed this decision to redefine Qing policy towards the borderlands to the immediate aftermath of the Sino-French War (1884-85). Lu Yong, "'Ning shi fan fu, wu sun jun xian': Zhong-Fa zhanzheng yu wan Qing guojia guannian de bianqian ('It's better to lose a dependency than harm prefectures or counties'): The Sino-French war and changes in conceptions of the state in the late Qing), *Jiangsu keji daxue xuebao* (Journal of Jiangsu university of science and technology) 11: 4 (December 2011): 1-4.

³⁴ John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

³⁵ Of course, there were always alternatives to the modern state as an idea of what "China" might become. Prasenjit Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning Narratives of Modern China* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

ultimate goal of one's existential concern."³⁶ How might we understand the challenge faced by late Qing reformers, postal administrators, and other "vicarious statesmen" like Yan Fu, Liang Qichao, and others who "could not forget the goal of state power," while simultaneously imagining how they conceptualized their role in the creation of the modern state?³⁷

The work of the Neo-Statists provides some guidance.³⁸ While there are some Neo-Statists who speak of "the State" in holistic terms, most understand it as constituted of a number of different institutions, bureaucracies, and agencies engaging in activities that individually increase the strength of the state or its degree of stateness by understanding it in its own right as an autonomous political entity with its own goals and capacity to achieve them. The intellectual genealogy of the Neo-Statists implicitly goes back to the Hegelian idealist metaphysical theory of the state. Idealist philosophers of the metaphysical state strove to demonstrate that a separate Will of the state existed apart of the individual will of its members – "The State is the Divine Idea as it exists on Earth."³⁹ As the metaphysical theory of the state evolved, some of its basic ideas were expounded upon by organicist thinkers such as Johann K. Bluntschli.⁴⁰ Bluntschli argues there is a fundamental distinction between the "idea" of the state and its "conception." While the conception of the state is related to the nature and characteristics of actual states, the "idea" of the state is a picture in the minds of the public "as not yet realized," but to be

³⁶ Shen Sung-chiao, "Discourse on Guomin ('the citizen') in late Qing China, 1895-1911," *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 7: 1 (2006), 1, 3, 10.

³⁷ The phrase "vicarious statesmen" comes from Benjamin I. Schwartz, *The Search for Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1964), 75.

³⁸ The *locus classicus* of the Neo-Statist school is: Peter B. Evans, Dietrich Rueschemeyer, and Theda Skocpol, *Bringing the State Back In* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³⁹ G.W.F. Hegel, "The Philosophy of History," in *Reading Hegel: The Introductions*, edited by Aakash Singh and Rimina Mohapatra (Melbourne: re.press, 2008), 133

⁴⁰ The organic theory of the state holds that the state is an entity that emerges quite independently of the autonomous will of man. The state is thus an organism with its own purposes and ends, which may be quite different from those who constitute civil society.

pursued.⁴¹ John W. Burgess expands on Bluntschli's argument by defining the "idea" of the state as something "perfect and complete" while the conception is the state developing towards and approaching perfection.⁴² The distinction drawn between the "idea" of the state and its "conception" is essential for understanding the situation in late-nineteenth and early twentieth-century China. Although the "conception" of the state existed in rudimentary form (those bureaucracies straddling the 1911 Revolution) or not at all, the subjects and citizens of the late Qing and early Republic, and particularly government bureaucrats, continued to act with the "idea" of the state in mind. Numerous Chinese scholars, most notably Liang Qichao, embraced the organicist interpretation of the State as expounded by Bluntschli.⁴³ Others, such as Yan Fu (嚴復), transformed liberal thinkers such as Herbert Spencer and John Stuart Mill into spokesmen and advocates for a strong state.⁴⁴ If we can assume the "idea" of the state continued to exist "as not yet realized," we might ask how it was realized.

It is the Neo-Statists again who provide the answer when they implicitly link the otherwise opposing Weberian empirical sociology of actual states and the Hegelian-inspired metaphysical theory of ideal states by positing the State is as an autonomous political entity with its own goals and capacity to achieve them.⁴⁵ Granted, few social scientists, Weberian-inspired

⁴¹ Johann K. Bluntschli, *Theory of the State*, authorized English translation from the sixth German edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 15.

⁴² John W. Burgess, *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1900), 49.

⁴³ For Liang's work on Bluntschli, see: Liang Qichao, "Zhengzhixue dajia Bolunzhili zhi xueshuo," (The theories of the great political scientist Bluntschli) in *Yinbingshi zhuanji* (Collected writings from the ice drinker's studio) (Shanghai, 1932), 13: 70-71. For an interpretation of Liang's thinking on Bluntschli, see: Marianne Bastid-Bruguière, "The Japanese-Induced German Connection on Modern Chinese Ideas of the State: Liang Qichao and the *Guojia lun* of J. K. Bluntschli," in Joshua A. Fogel, ed., *The Role of Japan in Liang Qichao's Introduction of Modern Western Civilization in China*, 105-124 (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California-Berkeley, Center for Chinese Studies, 2004) and Ba Sidi (Marianne Bastid), "Zhongguo jindai guojia guannian suyuan (The origins of the concept of the state in modern China), *Jindaishi yanjiu* "Researches in Modern Chinese History" 4 (1997): 221-232.

⁴⁴ Schwartz, *The Search for Wealth and Power*, 70-79, 136-141.

⁴⁵ This is not to say that the Neo-Statists accept Hegel's ethical Idea as the final end of the state – they prefer to study the means by which the state exerts the "legitimate use of physical force" through institutions – but that they have reinserted the study of states as autonomous entities pursuing their own ends.

or not, would claim the modern state is working towards some ethical end, but they do consider the state as an autonomous actor as did the proponents of the metaphysical theory of the state.⁴⁶ In so doing, the Neo-Statists are not only connecting Weber's social science definition of the state with the metaphysical formulations of Hegel and his intellectual descendents, but are also rejecting the dominant Marxist theory of the state. Scattered throughout Marx's works are two theories of the state.⁴⁷ In Marx's early work on the state he posits it as a superstructural reflection of capitalist relations of production and therefore representing the interests of the bourgeoisie.⁴⁸ In his later work, Marx grants the state a certain level of autonomy suggesting the substructure does not necessarily determine the superstructure. There are, Marx argues, certain conditions under which the permanent institutions of the state – the bureaucracy – are able to assert their authority without reference to the dominant class. Taken to its logical conclusion, then, the Neo-Statists argue that the state is an autonomous bureaucratic entity standing apart from the class system.⁴⁹

We are still left with the problem of how to conceptualize the purpose of government institutions continuing to exist in a country without a state. R.M. MacIver pushes us towards our conclusion when he speaks of “state-institutions” that maintain the idea of the “incarnate state” and work to extend the logic of power of the corporate structure of the state to make it coexistent with political society.⁵⁰ Since, in MacIver's terms, such state-institutions are “in Society” their purpose “is not the will for a policy but the will *for* the state.”⁵¹ State-institutions can therefore

⁴⁶ Theda Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In: Strategies of Analysis in Current Research,” in *Bringing the State Back In*, 9; Smith, “State-Making and Nation-Building,” 235.

⁴⁷ David Held, “Central Perspectives on the Modern State,” in *The Idea of the Modern State*, edited by Gregor McKennan, David Held, and Stuart Hall (Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1984), 52.

⁴⁸ Karl Marx, “Preface to *A Critique of Political Economy*,” in *Karl Marx: Selected Writings*, edited by David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 389.

⁴⁹ Skocpol, “Bringing the State Back In.”

⁵⁰ R.M. MacIver, *The Modern State* (1926, reprint: London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 8-9.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

bring into being, or accentuate, social relations across considerable reaches of time and space giving meaning to the state as a political community governing a territorial unit over which it claims sovereignty.

What we have, then, is an idea of how state-institutions like the Post Office can work toward actualizing the state. As Philip Abrams so ably puts it, it is the “state-idea, projected, purveyed, and variously believed in” by bureaucratic institutions that helps transition from the presiding state of the late Qing to the centralizing modern state of the Republic.⁵² As understood in this dissertation, then, the Post Office as a state-institution in a state-less society pursuing three goals – autonomy, organization, and stateness. In pursuing each of these goals, I understand the state-institution of the Post Office as a historical subject with its own interests (creating the state) not reducible to those of a social class. By “autonomy” I mean freedom of the state from interference by civil society, but also from foreign imperialism. Autonomy in this sense stems from the idea of sovereignty, itself understood as the supreme authority to possess coercive power (law, rules) within the territory claimed. Although all actual states have only relative degrees of autonomy, state administrators work towards achieving exclusive control of a given territorial area over which it can exercise jurisdiction and law enforcement, but also protect it against foreign encroachment. By “organization” I mean the various government institutions that not only carry out their activities in accordance with laws, regulations, etc., but also the corporate organization of government institutions that transform the abstraction of the state into the actual exercise of sovereignty. Finally, by “stateness” I mean the relative degree to which institutions like the Post Office are able to successfully imbue subjects and citizens with an ideology of impersonal state sovereignty. One of the most important elements of the modern

⁵² Philip Abrams, “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1: 1 (March 1988), 58.

state – the one separating it from all other forms – is the idea of impersonal state sovereignty. With impersonal state sovereignty, the legitimacy of the state resides not in the personal ruler (the emperor) or in an abstract “popular sovereignty of the people” but in the state itself.⁵³ It is this sense of the impersonal state which proved so troubling to Chinese in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for whom this was an entirely alien idea.⁵⁴ Simply put, the overarching purpose of this dissertation is to demonstrate the various ways in which the Post Office increased its autonomy, expanded its organization, and achieved a higher degree of stateness, both for itself and the impersonal centralizing modern state.

A Global Design: International Bureaucrats in a Cosmopolitan Service

Although I view the Post Office as primarily a Qing/Chinese government institution carrying out internally-defined goals, the Post Office between 1896 and 1928 was unquestionably a semi-colonial or, to use John K. Fairbank’s term, synarchic institution jointly administered by foreigners and Chinese.⁵⁵ The Post Office was one of three such institutions along with the Imperial Maritime Customs Service and the Salt Gabelle (latterly Salt Inspectorate). There has long been considerable controversy about the nature of the Customs, Post Office, and Salt Gabelle with some scholars seeing them as wholly representative of imperialist interests, others

⁵³ There are a variety of sources for the idea of impersonal state sovereignty, notably Thomas Hobbes. Brian R. Nelson, *The Making of the Modern State: A Theoretical Evolution* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), 55-82.

⁵⁴ Although not using the specific terminology of impersonal state sovereignty, Joseph Levenson begins the second volume of his famous trilogy by touching on this problem highlighting the anachronism of Yuan Shikai declaring himself the monarch of a Confucian universal empire at the precise moment when the impersonal state had already taken root, which comically made Yuan simply the “king of China.” Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), II: 3-21.

⁵⁵ Fairbank defined synarchy simply as joint rule/administration between Chinese and aliens (Manchus/Westerners). John K. Fairbank, “Synarchy under the Treaties,” in *Chinese Thought and Institutions*, edited by Fairbank, 204-212 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957).

viewing them as institutions of informal empire, and some as shifting from a joint Sino-foreign administration to one more aligned with imperialist interests over time.⁵⁶

In the pages that follow, I take the controversial position that the synarchic, or semi-colonial, character of the Post Office was of relatively little consequence to its history. Certainly, the role of foreigners in the Post Office proved of great importance at certain moments (discussed in Chapter 1), but the uniqueness of such moments reveal the otherwise insignificant role of foreigners as foreigners in the Post Office. The type of foreigners who served in the Post Office, their motivations for going to China, and the manner in which they conducted themselves all suggest they constituted a short-lived, but unique group of largely anonymous, certainly unknown, cosmopolitan group of “international bureaucrats.”

Unlike the Imperial Maritime Customs Administration that employed thousands of foreigners in its century of existence, the Post Office typically had only 110-120 foreigners in its service, reached a peak of 131 in 1925, and then precipitously declined in the late 1920s as the Nationalists took power.⁵⁷ By 1932, there were only 47 foreigners left in the Post Office and that number continued to dwindle to less than 20 by 1937. As with the Customs, who administered the Post Office from 1896 to 1911, the foreign staff was predominantly British, usually constituting between 40-50%, but with a strong cosmopolitan contingent made up of French, Germans, Americans, Italians, Portuguese, Swiss, Japanese, Norwegians, and others. Early on, it

⁵⁶ Jurgen Osterhammel, “Semi-Colonialism and Informal Empire in Twentieth-Century China: Towards a Framework of Analysis,” in *Imperialism and After: Continuities and Discontinuities*, edited by Wolfgang Mommsen and Jurgen Osterhammel, 290-314 (New York: Allen & Unwin, 1986); Richard S. Horowitz, “The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution: Crisis and Transition in the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1899-1911,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36: 2 (June 2008): 275-294.

⁵⁷ After 1928, the National Government refused to hire new foreigners, but continued to employ a small group of high-ranking commissioners. Initially, those foreigners serving the National Government were retained for their experience and expertise, but gradually were used by the Nationalists as a way to resist Japanese encroachment on the Post Office in Manchuria in the early 1930s and throughout the east coast during the War of Resistance (Chapter 1). After 1928, the foreigners in the Post Office acted more in the manner of “foreign advisors” than colonial administrators.

was recognized that the foreign staff would play a different role in the Post Office than the Customs. As Shanghai Postmaster Brewitt-Taylor wrote in 1905, “The number of Foreigners on the I.P.O. Staff will always be, and must be, small compared with the number of Chinese. Their part being to stiffen the ranks rather than to do the actual fighting.”⁵⁸

Who were the men who “stiffened the ranks” and what were their motivations for joining the Post Office? Most of the early recruits came directly from the Customs Service. Men entered the Customs Service, Catherine Ladds argues, for a variety of reasons. Those hoping to join the prestigious “indoor” staff with its higher status in foreign settler society in China, were usually drawn from the professional, middle-class in Europe, but who had little specialized training. Some were familiar with China, but most were simply seeking a reliable career with the possibility for advancement. By contrast, the outdoor staff, socially lower in status in Treaty Port China, viewed Customs employment as a temporary measure as they shifted between work on ships, the docks, or other “blue collar” employment.⁵⁹ The indoor Customs staff assigned to postal work typically saw it as an “Irish promotion.”⁶⁰

In contrast to the Customs, the early postal secretaries recognized the problems of recruiting Europeans for postal work and defined their ideal candidate in strikingly different terms than the Customs. In 1901, Postal Secretary Jules van Aalst described why typical Customs recruits were unsuitable for postal work:

The European element is expensive: often afflicted by illness and climacteric perturbations: often ignorant of Chinese ways and language: often attracted by wine, women, or pleasure: often anxious to be elsewhere than at work. To get white men from abroad is even more dangerous than to pick up what we find here,

⁵⁸ Memorandum on the Recruiting of the Foreign staff of the I.P.O., Shanghai District Postmaster Brewitt-Taylor, 19 August 1905 in SHAC137.1762.

⁵⁹ Catherine Ladds, “‘Youthful, Likely Men, Able to Read, Write and Count’: Joining the Foreign Staff of the Chinese Customs Service, 1854-1927,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36: 2 (June 2008): 227-242.

⁶⁰ Private No. 2, Brewitt-Taylor to Piry [June 1903] in SHAC137.1802-8.

for we get cats in bags and our home recruits if not rendered useless by sickness are often rendered so by disillusion and nostalgia.⁶¹

Many of the early foreign postal staff did come from “what we find here” and were similar in status to the Customs outdoor staff – a cosmopolitan group of transient employees constituting the foreign “flotsam and jetsam” of Chinese ports who were looking for more settled indoor employment.⁶² The Post Office offered them more opportunities and better social status in the foreign community. Some were recruited in the more formal Customs fashion in Europe, but they frequently failed to succeed in China. Part of the problem were the work requirements in the Post Office – long hours, lower pay than in the Customs, frequent transfers to isolated Post Offices, regulations forbidding marriage for five years, and so on. Whether picked up in China or recruited from Europe, the foreign staff of the Post Office felt postal work was hard with only mediocre prospects for promotion. Most of the men who joined quit within the first few years – some were wracked by loneliness, others mental exhaustion, some became neurotic, others paranoid, and at least one committed suicide. Others were shuffled out for marrying local women, having “Jew friends,” or being overly fond of drink.

Those who succeed in the Post Office constituted the elite executive staff, usually postal commissioners, or Directorate employees. Some like Théophile Piry (served 1874-1915), Frank Poletti (s. 1906-1948), A. H. Hyland (s. 1892-1932) were one of several generations of the same family to serve in the Customs or the Posts. Other outstanding individuals such as the Norwegian Erik Tollefsen (s. 1896-1926, 1929-31) or the Frenchman A.M. Chapelain (s. 1905-1943) rose to prominence through dint of hard work and perseverance – with a fair bit of politicking. Essential to their occupational survival was the ability to adapt to China, master

⁶¹ Report of Jules van Aalst to Sir Robert Hart, 5 May 1901 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

⁶² Memorandum on the Recruiting of the Foreign staff of the I.P.O., Shanghai District Postmaster Brewitt-Taylor, 19 August 1905 in SHAC137.1762.

classical and spoken Chinese, and function within the British-style civil service system where individual initiative was often met with suspicion or outright hostility. Of the lesser known employees who managed to survive in the Post Office for more than a few years, a description from one of their Service Records suffices to represent the qualities sought in such men – “very methodical employee, well experienced in postal affairs, willing, and disciplined.”

As with the Customs men, the foreign postal staff came to China or joined while living in China for a variety of reasons – none of which was to further the specific imperialist interests of their own country. Granted, the control of the Post Office by Piry and H. Picard-Destelan from 1901 to 1928 bolstered the French imperial position vis-à-vis the British in their internecine struggle for prominence among the imperialists, but neither Piry nor Destelan appear to have specifically sought to expand French imperial ambitions. Even after their rise to power, roughly fifty percent of the foreigners in the Post Office were British. As Piry wrote in 1910, “no foreign power is disposed to come forward and claim any special advantage or position [in the Post Office].”⁶³

All this is to say, foreign postal officials were not “great men” and rarely attained notoriety for their work, never published diaries, and only one or two published memoirs of any kind. The only general qualities they shared was a general, non-specialist Western education, a social commitment of service for the sake of principle (or income), a willingness to try to adjust to work in China, and the fortitude to try to rise through the ranks of a British-style civil service. I describe them as a group of anonymous, cosmopolitan, international bureaucrats because their agenda – if they ever conceptualized it as such – was to spread certain Western ideas in China. In particular, they seemed to regard nationality as of a deep and desirable human significance and saw the world through the lens of the nation-state system. Their “global design” for China,

⁶³ Confidential Memo re Postal Separation, unsigned and undated in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

as seen from their practices and policies within the Post Office, was not to further the subjugation of the country to imperialism, but to make China a secure and equal partner in the world system as defined by “the West.” To achieve their goal, the foreign postal staff sought to spread the ideas and practices of Western international law, the nation-state as the highest form of political organization, and the modern British-style civil service bureaucracy as the most efficient means of government administration.

Outline of the Dissertation

The origins of the modern Chinese state are impossible to determine conclusively. The general tendency among scholars has increasingly pushed the origins of the modernizing state incrementally backwards in time. For decades, scholars emphasized the impact-response model focusing on the rise of anti-imperialist nationalism as the core issue redefining the state in the early twentieth century, but this interpretation was a teleological projection of the establishment of the Communist state in the 1950s.⁶⁴ Those who looked at Republican-era efforts at state formation saw them as “abortive.”⁶⁵ Once Deng Xiaoping repudiated the Maoist revolutionary paradigm in the late 1970s, however, historians such as Robert Bedeski began arguing that the framework for the unified state of the early Communist period was the result of “moderately successful” state-building efforts by the Nationalist Party during the Nanjing decade.⁶⁶ In the early 1990s, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the concomitant re-emergence of new states and questions about their origins, Douglas Reynolds radically re-interpreted the New

⁶⁴ e.g. James E. Sheridan, *China in Disintegration: The Republican Era in Chinese History, 1912-1949* (New York: The Free Press, 1975).

⁶⁵ Lloyd Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974).

⁶⁶ Robert E. Bedeski, *State-Building in Modern China: The Kuomintang in the Prewar Period* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1981), viii.

Policies Reform (新政) era, which he re-defined as the period between 1898 and 1911, arguing that it was state-sponsored reforms of this period that caused a “revolution” in thinking about the structure of the state.⁶⁷ Although initially greeted with much skepticism, Reynolds’ re-periodization of the origins of the modern Chinese state has gradually gained acceptance, particularly among political historians.⁶⁸ Since the early 1990s, the general trend among historians of China has been a shift away from the studies of the state towards civil society, particularly exploring the issue of citizenship to understand the transfer of sovereignty from the ruler to the people.⁶⁹ The study of sovereignty is vital to our understanding of changes to the late imperial state, but so too are the institutional means by which the impersonal, centralizing state began to express its own sovereignty.

From the perspective of the Post Office, the origins of the modern centralizing state should be located in a little known reform movement launched by the Guangxu Emperor in the immediate aftermath of the Sino-Japanese War. During this movement (1895-1898), Guangxu initiated reforms in education, industrial development, government administration, and military reorganization.⁷⁰ Although the Court enacted a number of reforms, the Guangxu Emperor’s most radical departure was to sanction the creation of the Imperial Post Office (大清郵政) on 20

⁶⁷ Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912*.

⁶⁸ Julia Strauss’ *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities* is probably the best known work based on an understanding of the Xinzheng period as setting the state-making agenda for the twentieth century. For other scholarship using this perspective, see the special issue of *Modern Asian Studies*, 37: 4, particularly the introductory essay by Roger R. Thompson, “The Lessons of Defeat: Transforming the Qing State after the Boxer War,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37: 4 (2003): 769-773.

⁶⁹ Roger R. Thompson, *China’s Local Councils in the Age of Constitutional Reform, 1898-1911* (Cambridge, MA: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University, 1995); Joshua A. Fogel and Peter G. Zarrow, eds., *Imagining the People: Chinese Intellectuals and the Concept of Citizenship, 1890-1920* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997); Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Merle Goldman and Elizabeth J. Perry, eds., *Changing Meanings of Citizenship in Modern China*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002); Robert A. Culp, *Articulating Citizenship: Civic Education and Student Politics in Southeastern China, 1912-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2007).

⁷⁰ Lü Xiaobo, “Court-Sponsored Reforms, 1895-1898,” in *China, 1895-1912: State-Sponsored Reforms and China’s Late-Qing Revolution, Selected Essays from Zhongguo Jindai Shi*, edited and translated by Douglas R. Reynolds, 49-66 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

March 1896. This sanction was not the extension of the traditional presiding state, but the onset of a series of efforts to create a centralizing modern state.⁷¹

To address the role of the Postal Service in the transition to a modern centralizing state, I divide the first half of the dissertation into four chapters. Chapter One argues that the foreign administrators of semi-colonial institutions such as the Post Office, as with the Imperial Maritime Customs Service and the Salt Gabelle, shared the statist imperative with Chinese government officials. That is, foreigners in Chinese government service maintained the presupposition of the state as the legitimate expression of the aspirations of “China.” In so doing, they were working within the discursive field of the modern State and focused on the process of state-making to achieve their goals. More specifically, the foreign and Chinese administrators of the Post Office sought to preserve China’s territorial and administrative integrity by engaging in a “nation-wide project” to bring post offices to every village, town, and city, transmit news and spread cultural and educational influences to every community, and offer innumerable postal and peripheral services to the entire population. Absolutely essential to the Post Office’s ability to effectively protect China’s territorial integrity was to preserve its own administrative entity when almost all other government institutions failed to do so. Numerous attempts were made to either interfere with the administrative operations of the Post Office or divide it territorially. When external or internal forces threatened the administrative or territorial integrity of the Post Office, its staff understood them as threats against the idea and reality of the Chinese nation-state. Postal administrators pursued a series of strategies to insulate, protect, and

⁷¹ Even before the late nineteenth century, there were centralizing tendencies in the late imperial state. Beginning in the Song, emperors occasionally made changes to the structure of the state to increase centralization, particularly through increasing the number and scope of laws by Ming Taizu, stricter surveillance through the repeated introduction of the *baojia* mutual surety system, creation of ad-hoc administrative bodies such as the Grand Council in the Qing, and tighter control over communications through such institutions as the Yongzheng Emperor’s Palace Memorial System.

strengthen the institution and the larger state from external disruption and territorial division. By promoting the Post Office as a non-political or impartial institution, the foreign administrators of the Post Office retained their autonomy even as the foreign and Chinese postal staff endured terrible hardships, humiliating persecution, personal financial loss, physical harm, and even death to protect the administrative and territorial unity of the Post Office.

The Qing government that established the modern Post Office had an essentially pre-modern level of stateness. The Qing government recognized the need for some “reform,” but usually responded simply by grafting modern bureaucratic institutions like the Post Office onto the existing government without granting it the usual authority given to modern state institutions. Chapter Two, then, is a study of the various methods employed by postal administrators to gain sovereignty over postal affairs by outcompeting five separate postal services serving different constituencies – the government-run postal relay (驛站) and post station (舖) systems for imperial officials, the Wenbaoju (文報局) for overseas Chinese officials, the Minxinju (民信局) serving Chinese businesses and private individuals, the Municipal Council Local Post Offices (工部書信館) handling mail for the foreign settler communities, and the Foreign Post Offices (客郵) connecting foreigners in China with their home countries. The competition between the Post Office and these other postal services is not only the story of conflict between the state and private business, both foreign and domestic, but also reveals the increasing power and authority of the modern state itself as it fought to consolidate its sovereignty. The Post Office’s pursuit of a national monopoly thus provides an opportunity to explore the nature and processes of state-making as the acquisition of autonomy from and supremacy over other postal services, the occupation of the entire geographically-defined territory of China as the postal monopolist, and attainment of international recognition as sovereign in postal affairs.

Although the origins of the Imperial Post Office are briefly narrated from different perspectives in the first two chapters, Chapter Three begins with a detailed examination of debate held amongst foreign and Chinese officials over the creation of an interventionist state institution like the Post Office. In the debate, scholars and government officials brought together two on-going discussions – on the nature of relations between the state and civil society and between the government and capitalism – that helped rationalize the creation of the Post Office. Once created, its establishment proclaimed the emergence of a more aggressive central state driving its own reforms. The second section of this chapter examines the creation of the postal network, its offices, and basic provision of services leading up to a case study of postal subsidies of newspapers, magazines, and books showing the great lengths to which the state would go to facilitate the flow of information throughout the country to bind it together. In addition to typical communications services, the Post Office also provided banking and transportation facilities that put the central government into business, but for particular reasons. By offering such a wide variety of “public services” such as money orders, parcel post, postal savings, and simple life insurance, postal administrators not only wanted to create a strong, centralizing state, but also one capable of transforming society and the economy as an “extramarket” force mitigating some of the negative effects of capitalist development.

Having discussed the creation of the postal network, its competition with other postal services, and its services, Chapter Four is an examination of the Post Office’s creation of an “information infrastructure” for the modern Chinese nation-state. Within a fifty year period from 1890 to 1940 there was an unprecedented expansion in printing and publishing, the introduction of communications technologies like the post office, telegraphs, telephones, and radio, and a rapid development in transportation with the growth of steamships, railroads, modern roads,

automobiles, and airlines. These communications and transportation industries and routes reinforced each other; they were complementary institutions working together to revolutionize the sense of space, time, and speed in Chinese society. The transportation and communications revolutions forged in these decades by government bureaucrats, foreigners, businessmen, and ordinary Chinese profoundly altered existing patterns of life. The movement and circulation of information, people, and goods at incredible speeds, in great volumes, and at regular intervals all contributed to reshaping the country and laying the foundation for the modern Chinese nation-state. At the heart of this network was the Chinese Post Office. It melded all old and new types of transportation and communications and transmitted all forms of information and media. In bringing together the communications and transportation systems, the Post Office revolutionized the informational environment of China.

“The Nation comes into being with the creation of the State. It is the consciousness...of political connection and unity which lifts the Nation above the People,” wrote Johann Bluntschli, who was translated approvingly by Liang Qichao.⁷² How to bring about this “consciousness...of political connection”? In the new epoch of modernity, print capitalism played the crucial role in forging this sense of political connection, however, the too often privileged link between popular nationalism, print capitalism, and the founding of revolutionary states, slights the role of state power in promoting and shaping their nations/citizens. At the center of the remaining chapters in this study is the belief that the politics of communications in China were entangled in the politics of the nation. The foreign and Chinese administrators of the Post Office believed they could bring about such connections between the State and its citizenry – “the full and harmonious development of the entire nation” – through a process scholars call nation-building. The Post Office would encourage the population to identify with the nation, foster individual participation

⁷² Bluntschli, *Theory of the State*, 86.

in national life, and increase the people's sense of commitment and loyalty to the national community.

Chapter Five examines the Post Office's efforts *via negationis* to define "legitimate speech" and a loyal "civil society" through its role as a censor of the State. The Post Office was the institution most capable of carrying out censorship from the late Qing through the Republic because of its role in transmitting information throughout the public sphere. By examining censorship through the Post Office, we can detect that state-sponsored censorship gradually evolved from the late Qing desire to maintain social stability by ridding the country of rebel elements through violent, uninstitutionalized and unsystematic means to late Republican ideologically-informed checks on seditious, subversive, and traitorous elements through the placement of institutional controls on the circulation of information in the Post Office. The shift from violent acts of suppression to institutional control on circulation followed changing government definitions of seditious discourse and the advent of modern bureaucratic institutions like the Post Office able to control the flow of information. The Post Office therefore played the central role in facilitating the development of modern, less violent, but more ideological forms of censorship in the public sphere.

As an actor within the public sphere, the state also positively advocated for itself. Chapter 6 looks at the variety of ways in which the Post Office created its corporate identity and distributed it throughout the country to foster the nation's commitment to and confidence in the State. Postal administrators culturally constructed the Postal Service as a fast, efficient, and modern institution to serve the needs of its citizens at the very moment when various innovative practices broadly related to publicity helped to simultaneously transform older and create new notions of the state. In direct response to the growth of a public sphere and as part of larger

global and local trends towards “good government,” the Post Office began emphasizing its relations with the public through publicity campaigns. As both a new government institution in the late Qing responding to the public sphere and an institution finely-attuned to the importance of communications, the modern Chinese Post Office provides an avenue to approach the complex relations between the public, state-sponsored public relations, and institutional identity as they emerged in the twentieth century. This chapter focuses specifically on the construction of the Post Office’s corporate identity through its yearly *Working Reports*, advertising, its use of color branding, the uniforms worn by postal workers, and behavioral regulations for postal staff. These various “media” – print, color, clothing, and bodies – were just some of the ways the Post Office engaged the public by discursively and visually presenting itself as a modern, competitive, innovative, efficient, service-oriented, and trustworthy state institution.

Finally, Chapter 7 investigates the state’s role in the creation of a transnational Chinese community through the Post Office. The nation is usually defined politically through citizenship or ethnically through race, but in the early twentieth century the Chinese state also intervened in the transnational social spaces occupied by overseas Chinese. The purpose of this intervention was not only to create a deterritorialized cultural identity of Chineseness, but also to gain access to the financial resources of overseas Chinese communities in order to strengthen the economic foundation of the state. The relationship between the Chinese Post Office and the Qiaopiju (僑批局) remittance firm network constitutes one of the most important long-term contacts between the state and overseas communities in the early twentieth century. To understand these contacts, this chapter is both an examination of the Qiaopiju as a “colonial modern” form of business and its interactions with the Chinese state through the Post Office. By describing the Qiaopiju as a “colonial modern” form of business, I emphasize their melding of culturalist

business practices with capitalist profit-making strategies to thrive in the interstitial gaps between nation-states, colonies, and empires and link overseas Chinese to the homeland through the movement of people, remittances, goods, and information. Although the Qiaopiju thrived in these interstitial gaps, they also confronted the Chinese state through the Post Office. From the Post Office's perspective, this confrontation allowed the state to facilitate the creation and maintenance of transnational Chinese communities by encouraging "diasporic nationalism" as a method of transnational reincorporation into the state. The Chinese state sought to reincorporate the overseas Chinese by emphasizing the responsibility of diasporic communities to contribute economically to the burgeoning state. One of the ways to make such "contributions" was to send their remittances back "home" either through Qiaopiju or the Post Office or, eventually, both in cooperation. The relationship between the Qiaopiju and the Post Office, however, was not without conflict. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Qiaopiju's continued success, in spite of tightening postal regulations, forced the Post Office to both poach and co-opt many of the Qiaopiju's business and organizational strategies to break their stranglehold on the loyalties of overseas remitters. Upon the outbreak of World War II in 1937, the Post Office followed a dual policy of direct cooperation with the Qiaopiju while simultaneously transnationalizing itself by building its own overseas network through a series of agency agreements between the Post Office and international banks. Time and again, however, the transnational dexterity and flexibility of the Qiaopiju overmatched the superior political and financial resources of the Republican-era states.

In sum, this dissertation argues that sandwiched between the establishment of a modern Postal Service in 1896 and the Communist takeover in 1949, the late Qing, warlord, and Nationalist governments created the structures of an internationally-recognized, and internally-

coherent, independent and territorially-sovereign state. One of the most important state institutions in this process was the Chinese Post Office.

A Note on Organization

This dissertation is intentionally organized in a non-linear fashion. Each chapter is a mini-history of the Post Office, but with a longitudinal focus on specific themes and salient features of postal history. Only in combination can there be an appreciation of the complexity of the Postal Institution and its myriad activities. The initial inspiration for this approach came from reading Sima Qian's *Historical Records* (史記). Sima Qian frequently narrates a single event from multiple perspectives or includes details of a single event in different chapters requiring a careful reading to understand all the elements of a particular historical episode. I have not intentionally sought to try the reader's patience, but by re-narrating certain events, such as the founding of the Post Office, my purpose has been to acknowledge the multiple causes behind events. As Noël Carroll writes, "a single event can play a different role in different causal chains."⁷³ Even with such multiple narratives, I have not exhausted the possible interpretations available, but hope that this work spurs other scholars to examine the heterogeneous history of the Post Office and its involvement in countless aspects of modern Chinese history.

⁷³ Noël Carroll, *Beyond Aesthetics: Philosophical Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 144.

Chapter 1

Protecting China's Territorial and Administrative Integrity: The Chinese Post Office and the Centralizing State

By the end of the nineteenth century, the millennia-old Confucian state system had already endured a century that included two of history's largest agrarian-millenarian rebellions and more than a half century of imperialist military aggression, political manipulation, and economic exploitation. The Qing state ceded considerable political control to local elites to mobilize militia and provincial-level officials to raise armies independent of the central government to defeat the rebellions, but the process resulted in a devolution of government authority that seriously weakened the state. In an attempt to strengthen itself, the Qing government launched a conservative "restoration" of the imperial order in concert with sanctioning provincial viceroys to create "self-strengthening" projects, but both proved failures with China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). Shocked by their loss, late Qing reformers, who had already begun to intellectually undermine the Confucian ecumenical worldview, introduced the Hundred Days' Reforms of 1898. Empress Dowager Cixi and Yuan Shikai feared losing their power and carried out a coup d'état against the Emperor and his reformist advisors. Shortly thereafter, resentment against foreign privilege and dynastic weakness led to the outbreak of the Boxer Rebellion.

As the foreign powers amassed troops along the coast preparing to attack Beijing and lift the Boxer's siege of the Legation Quarter, American Secretary of State John Hay, concerned the powers would partition China after occupying the capital, issued the second of the famous "Open Door" notes. In his circular telegram, Hay declared United States policy was to "preserve China's territorial and administrative entity."¹ The Post-Boxer Qing government, as with all later state regimes in China, was quick to adopt Hay's language as goals of the "quiet revolution"

¹ For the content of all the open door notes, see: William R. Wheeler, *China and the World-War* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1919), Appendix IV.

of the *xinzheng* (新政) or New Policies reform era (1898-1912).² Within a decade, the reforms began transforming the ancient agrarian empire into a thoroughly modern state designed to defend its territorial and administrative integrity – the government abolished the civil service examinations, reorganized the Six Boards into modern ministries, and undertook reforms in education, the military, and commerce, and set a timetable for the introduction of a constitutional monarchy. By delegitimizing the Confucian rationale for imperial rule and creating the framework of a powerful centralized state capable of interfering with society, the New Policies reforms alienated conservatives, liberals, and revolutionaries who created new opposition groups that quickly sapped government autonomy. The Qing fell to an uneasy alliance of Northern militarists, Southern constitutionalists, and Republican revolutionaries in the 1911 Revolution.³

The unstable coalition of provincial-level political and economic elites, military leaders, and revolutionaries held together by anti-Manchu rhetoric quickly vanished in a maelstrom of violence and war. Within in a few years, the newly-established Republican government was itself de-legitimized in a series of tragi-comic revolutions, including Yuan Shikai's monarchical fiasco and a Protect the Constitution Movement led by military strongmen defending an illegitimate constitution. When Yuan died, the country plunged into more than a decade of warlord struggle that engendered territorial disintegration, local violence, and social division. Cultural and intellectual elites responded by generating the New Culture and May Fourth movements (1915-1923) that mixed political nationalism and cultural iconoclasm to working

² Hay's subtle use of "entity" was quickly abandoned as the foreign powers agreed to protect the territorial and administrative "integrity" of China. Ge-Zay Wood, *The Genesis of the Open Door Policy in China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1921), 129. On the New Policies era, see: Meribeth E. Cameron, *The Reform Movement in China, 1898-1912* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931); Mary C. Wright, *China in Revolution: The First Phase, 1900-1913* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1993).

³ e.g. Joseph W. Esherick, *Reform and Revolution in China: The 1911 Revolution in Hunan and Hubei* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Edward Rhoads, *China's Republican Revolution: The Case of Kwangtung, 1895-1913* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975).

towards a new-style modern Chinese nation-state. Their inability to overthrow warlord rule and bring an end to Western imperialism, however, led many intellectuals to turn against liberalism in the early 1920s in search of political alternatives.

Politically-oriented intellectuals finally settled on Leninist party structure and democratic centralism as the two revolutionary tools most likely to bring down the warlords and eject Western imperialists. The Nationalists and Communists cooperated in launching the Northern Expedition to unify the country militarily, but once the National Revolutionary Army reached Shanghai Jiang Jieshi (Chiang Kai-shek) turned against the Communists in the White Terror of April 1927. The Nationalists immediately established their capital in Nanjing and began working to create a territorially- and administratively-unified state. Although the Nationalists accomplished part of their agenda, the Japanese invasion and the outbreak of World War II interrupted their efforts. From July 1937 to the end of the Civil War in 1949, the state and country remained divided. Only in the early 1950s did the People's Republic of China complete territorial unification and the creation of a strong centralized state administration.

As this brief narrative demonstrates, late Qing modernizers, New Policies bureaucrats, warlord rulers, elite intellectuals, and political revolutionaries all shared an interest in the statist imperative. That is, a deeply ingrained belief that China must have a strong, unified, centralizing state. The ardent belief in the need for a strong state was necessitated by the bare semblance of administrative and territorial integrity from the late Qing throughout the Republic. Chinese and foreign political observers recognized there was no central unified state – there were many governments claiming such status, but never did a single one govern the entire country; instead, numerous mini- or quasi-states continued to operate with more or less autonomy acting as a

centrifugal force in Chinese state-making.⁴ Despite the existence of separate governments, most Chinese maintained the presupposition of the state as the legitimate expression of the aspirations of “China.” In so doing, they were all working within the discursive field of the modern State and focused on the process of state-making to achieve their goals.

Historians of China have disagreed about the centripetal force bringing the state back together in Republican China. The currently accepted interpretation places the origin of the Nationalists’ and Communists’ state-making agenda in the New Policies reforms, but recognizes they failed to bolster the already weak Qing state. Instead, it was the Nationalists who were able to actualize part of the New Policies state-making agenda by creating a small number of strong institutions that laid an effective framework later utilized by the Communists to build their state.⁵ While this narrative is essentially correct, it overlooks a number of pre-existing institutions of the late Qing government that survived throughout the Republican era by making significant contributions to the creation of the modern state. These institutions were the semi-colonial, foreign-administered, and Chinese-staffed Maritime Customs Service, Salt Inspectorate, and the Imperial/Chinese Post Office.⁶ The foreigners who administered these three services strongly felt their broader mission was, harkening back to Hay’s second note, to protect and preserve

⁴ On the theory of quasi-states, see: Robert H. Jackson, *Quasi-States: Sovereignty, International Relations and the Third World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); on bandit mini-states, see: Phil Billingsley, *Bandits in Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988). Despite seeking to control limited territory, local warlords almost always professed to rule in the name of a national government. Hsi-sheng Ch’i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916-1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 190.

⁵ Robert E. Bedeski, *State-Building in Modern China: The Kuomintang in the Prewar Period* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1981); Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

⁶ On the history of the Maritime Customs Administration, see: John K. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of the Treaty Ports, 1842-1854* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953); Stanley F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast: WM. Mullan & Son, 1950); Thomas P. Lyons, *China Maritime Customs and China’s Trade Statistics, 1859-1948* (Trumansburg, NY: Willow Creek of Trumansburg, 2003); Donna Brunero, *Britain’s Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2006); on the history of the Salt Inspectorate, see: Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities*, 80-105; S. A. M. Adshead, *The Modernization of the Chinese Salt Administration, 1900-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).

China's territorial and administrative integrity. While the Customs Service and Salt Inspectorate both performed some broader services for the government, they were primarily important as revenue-generating agencies and limited geographically either to the Treaty Ports or salt-producing areas.⁷ By contrast, foreign and Chinese postal staff saw the construction of a modern nation-state as “their Service” – what they invariably called the Post Office – service to their parochial concerns, but also service to the broader idea of strong nation-state *for* China.

That foreign and Chinese postal administrators could imagine such a role for the Post Office in the turbulent decades of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries should not be surprising. Many government officials and academics around the world during that period made a distinction between “the government” and “the state.” Government institutions, bureaucracies, and agencies were seen as the physical manifestations of a more ethereal state. As Robert Hart described it, the state was “more of an atmosphere than a body.”⁸ The “idea” of the State could survive both the disintegration of a government, but also help reconstitute it through the process of state-making. In enacting a state-making agenda, institutional actors thus distinguished between what Bluntschli called the “conception” of the state as the characteristics of actual states as they progressed through history and the “ideal” State as “perfect and complete.”⁹

Postal administrators believed they could help bring this perfect and complete state to fruition by engaging in a “nation-wide project” to bring post offices to every village, town, and city, transmit news and spread cultural and educational influences to every community, and offer

⁷ In his study of the early Customs Service, John Fairbank emphasizes its financial functions, but also its contributions to lighthouse construction, harbor conservancy, and other maritime activities as well as serving as a general government printing office specializing in statistical, scientific, and commercial publications. Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy*, 462. On the Customs' statistical activities, see: Andrea Eberhard-Bréard, “Robert Hart and China's Statistical Revolution,” *Modern Asian Studies* 40: 3 (2006): 605-629.

⁸ Robert Hart, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, edited by John K. Fairbank, et al (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 1047.

⁹ Johann K. Bluntschli, *Theory of the State*, authorized English translation from the sixth German edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1885), 15-24.

innumerable postal and peripheral services to the entire population.¹⁰ As Director General Guo Xinsong would write in 1935, the Post Office “must be present anywhere and everywhere.”¹¹ Indeed, the Post Office truly was everywhere. It quickly became the largest civilian government service, employed more workers than any other government institution, controlled a nation-wide communications network, and offered an astounding number of services to the general public and other branches of government. Absolutely essential to the Post Office’s ability to effectively perform these state-making functions was its ability to maintain both its administrative and territorial integrity when almost all other government institutions failed to do so. Numerous attempts were made to either interfere with the administrative operations of the Post Office or divide it territorially. When external or internal forces threatened the administrative or territorial integrity of the Post Office, its staff understood them as threats against the idea and reality of the Chinese nation-state. Foreign and Chinese postal staff would endure terrible hardships, humiliating persecution, personal financial loss, physical harm, and even death to maintain the administrative and territorial unity of the Post Office. When they succeeded in fending off such attacks, they felt they were profoundly contributing to the maintenance of Chinese nation-state by operating the Post Office as a national service throughout the entire country and across decades of turmoil.

*The “Daughter Service”: The Customs Years, 1896-1911*¹²

Sir Robert Hart, Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service, had been advocating the creation of a national postal service for more than thirty years when the Guangxu

¹⁰ *RWCPO, 1921*, 7.

¹¹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1600 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular memo no. 1600), 27 June 1935 in SHAC137.6284-2.

¹² The phrase “daughter Service” comes from *RWCPO, 1921*, 8.

Emperor finally gave his approval in 1896.¹³ The timing of the Emperor's edict made Hart less than sanguine about imperial motivations. The Qing had just been resoundingly defeated and forced to sign the humiliating Treaty of Shimonoseki granting Japan a huge indemnity of 200 million taels, roughly equivalent to the government's entire yearly income. By establishing a modern postal service, Hart wrote, "They are...hoping to get revenue out of it, and talk of introducing stamps – thinking they might thereby raise the equivalent of the Likin [transit taxes]."¹⁴ The Qing's hopes were based on a new trend amongst Western governments that were raising new revenues by selling stamps, particularly commemoratives, to collectors and private speculators in the 1880s and 1890s. Since philatelists would never use the stamps, their sale was almost total profit to the state. In China, both the Local Post Offices of the Treaty Port Municipal Councils and the foreign-controlled Alien Post Offices were already famous for producing speculative stamps designed solely for sale to European and American collectors. The creation of the Imperial Post Office from Hart's perspective was thus largely a knee-jerk reaction to China's loss in the Sino-Japanese War and the need for additional state revenue to help pay the war indemnity.

Fearing the domestic viability and international credibility of the infant postal service might be destroyed by a cash-strapped Qing state before it proved a success, Hart decided to insulate and protect it by having it "literally housed and fed" by the Customs Administration.¹⁵ As Inspector General of Posts, Hart based the Imperial Post Office's organization, regulations, and staff structure almost entirely on the Customs model. Hart made each customs office a

¹³ The official edict authorizing the establishment of the Imperial Post Office is dated 20 March 1896. Hart planned to open the Post Office on 1 January 1897, but delays pushed the date back to lunar New Years' day (2 February 1897).

¹⁴ Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1047. This was a common assumption among foreigners in China who believed the Qing Court had finally authorized the creation of a modern postal service to "squeeze" money out of the (particularly foreign) public. *NCH*, 22 January and 5 February 1897.

¹⁵ *RWCPO*, 1921, 8.

district head post office, each customs district a postal district, each customs commissioner a postmaster, and had his staff undertake all secretarial and statistical duties – something many of the commissioners deeply resented.¹⁶ Many of the customs indoor and outdoor staff suddenly became district and deputy postmasters or postal inspectors and officers – the only unique postal staff were sorters and couriers. Internal regulations governing salaries, leave, allowances, promotion, and so on were also drawn from existing customs regulations. One of Hart's early postal secretaries, who ran the day-to-day operations of the Post Office, described the Post Office as “just like the ivy unable to stand by its own strength and relying on the oak, the Customs, for its support.”¹⁷ Hart's strategy was based on a complex calculation of political interests both within the Qing government itself, but also amongst the foreign powers who were eagerly jockeying to place one of their own nationals at the head of a Chinese government service. Qing officials, Hart believed, would not interfere with the smooth-functioning and financially-lucrative Customs Service nor would the foreign powers endanger the repayment of Qing loans and debts, which were secured by customs revenues, by playing politics with the Post Office. The foresight of Hart's policy was demonstrated before the Post Office even opened when he blocked French efforts to place their countrymen in the new service by refusing to appoint anyone not part of the existing customs staff.¹⁸

¹⁶ The additional duties were particularly resented by the older Customs commissioners as was the use of Customs revenues to pay for the Post Office. Commissioner Brewitt-Taylor put it simply to Postal Secretary Piry, “You know the Post office is not popular in the [Customs] Service.” Private Letter from Brewitt-Taylor to Piry, 9 April 1903 in SHAC137.1802-8.

¹⁷ Letter from Postal Secretary Jules A. van Aalst in Bruxelles, France to Inspector General Sir Robert Hart, 7 March 1901 in SHAC137.1802-1.

¹⁸ Shortly after the Guangxu Emperor sanctioned the creation of the Imperial Post Office, Auguste Gerard, French Minister to China, began pestering Hart with letters demanding that French citizens be employed in the new institution. Fu Guijiu, comp., “Ying, Fa, E, Ri deng guo bachi Qingdai youzheng shiliao xuan” (Selected historical documents on the British, French, Russians, and Japanese monopolizing the Qing Imperial Post Office), *Lishi dang'an* (Historical archives) 3 (1984), 24-25. Yin Bin, “Faguo yu jindai Zhongguo youzheng shulun” (A discussion of France and the modern Chinese postal service), *Xinyang shiyuan xuebao* (Xinyang teacher's institute journal) 21: 2 (April 2001), 99.

Coupled with nesting the Post Office inside the Customs, Hart also ordered his early postal secretaries H. Kopsch, F. E. Taylor, and Jules A. van Aalst to pursue a policy of “*festina lente*” (make haste slowly) in postal expansion to keep the Service dependent on the Customs.¹⁹ Hart’s idea was to imitate the tortoise rather than the hare – “I shall proceed quietly, warily, and cautiously, and develop slowly and safely. No hurry!”²⁰ If the Post Office grew too quickly, he feared, it might be subject to the machinations of either the Qing or foreign governments. Hart’s policy, which Postal Secretary Jules van Aalst described ambiguously as “keeping our receipts low in order to keep greedy wolves from swallowing us,” kept the Qing government and the French at bay.²¹

In the late nineteenth century the French carved out their own sphere of influence in southwest China to counter British influence in the Yangzi Valley, but the French were also desirous of having a Frenchman head up an influential Chinese government service to balance Hart’s position in the Customs Administration. Scholars have long held that the French control of the Chinese Post Office after 1901 was the result of negotiations between the French and Qing governments, but this was not the case.²² M. Dubail, Charge d’Affaires of the French Republic, sent a note to the Zongli Yamen on 9 April 1898 requesting the Qing “take account of the recommendation of the French Government in respect to the selection of the [postal] Staff.” Concerned with balancing the interests of the foreign powers, the Qing government acquiesced.²³

¹⁹ Kopsch served as Postal Secretary (郵政總辦) from 29 September 1896 to 31 May 1897; Taylor from 27 May 1897 to 3 January 1899; and van Aalst from 3 January 1899 to 31 October 1901.

²⁰ H. B. Morse, *Postal Development: A Chapter in the International Relations of the Chinese Empire: The Period of Subjection, 1878-1912* (Taipei: The Cathay Philatelic Library, 1961), 65n15; Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1056.

²¹ Letter from Postal Secretary Jules A. van Aalst to I. G. Robert Hart, 29 June 1901 in SHAC137.1802-1.

²² e.g. W. W. Willoughby, *Foreign Rights and Interests in China* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1920), 157; John K. Fairbank, ed., *Cambridge History of China, Volume 12, Part 1: Republican China, 1912-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 189.

²³ “Agreement in regard to a concession to build a railway from Tongking to Yunnan, the lease of Kuang-chou-wan, and the organization of the Chinese postal service – April 10, 1898,” M. Dubail, Charge d’Affaires of the French Republic to the Zongli Yamen and “The Tsung-li Yamen to M. Dubail, &c.” in John V. A. MacMurray, ed. and

When the French approached him, Hart wrote, “they draw back on finding that it is in a dependent and undeveloped condition.”²⁴ Hart went so far as to admit pushing postal development in a “half-hearted way knowing the French want it as soon as it is on its legs and independent.”²⁵ Hart’s go-slow policy had kept the Post Office in such a rudimentary state the French decided not to trouble with it. Although Hart’s go-slow policy preserved the Post Office’s administrative integrity, his decision to isolate post offices in the treaty ports, use unenthusiastic customs commissioners, and shape the Post Office “along Western lines,” was starting to restrict its development and make it a target of anti-foreign sentiment.²⁶ Facing numerous internal criticisms by his commissioners and seeing the Customs increasingly entangled in conflicts between the foreign powers and the Qing government, Hart turned over day-to-day operations to the Frenchman A. Théophile Piry as the new postal secretary.²⁷ What Hart turned over was only the beginnings of a real national postal service – there were only 176 post offices in the entire empire with less than 1,000 employees handling only 10 million articles of mail matter in 1901.²⁸ Piry’s promotion was not the result of French pressure, however, but stemmed from Hart’s decision to “act sharply” against van Aalst who disobeyed one of Hart’s

comp., *Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894-1919, Vol. 1: Manchu Period (1894-1911)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), 124-125. None of the various notes passing between the French and Qing government ever mentioned French control of the Post Office or even a French head of the service.

²⁴ Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1160.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 1175.

²⁶ On Hart following “Western lines,” in postal development, see: Inspector General’s Circulars, Postal Series, No. 7, Robert Hart, 9 April 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1; on anti-foreign sentiment directed at the Post Office, see: Letter from Postal Secretary Jules A. van Aalst in Bruxelles, France to Inspector General Sir Robert Hart, 7 March 1901 in SHAC137.1802-1 and Unnumbered S/O, Letter from A. Hyland to Postal Secretary Van Aalst, 25 July 1901 in SHAC137.1813-2.

²⁷ On the increasing conflict over the Customs and internal criticism of Hart within the Customs, see: Richard S. Horowitz, “The Ambiguities of an Imperial Institution: Crisis and Transition in the Chinese Maritime Customs, 1899-1911,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36: 2 (June 2008): 275-294.

²⁸ Yearly Postal Results: Comparative Table for the years 1901-1906 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

direct orders – something happening with greater frequency in Hart’s last years.²⁹ As late as 1906, Hart was still recommending to the Qing government not give France control over the Post Office for fear all the foreign powers would scramble for similar rights.³⁰

Théophile Piry’s appointment as postal secretary transformed the Post Office.³¹ Under Piry’s guidance, the postal service began a fifteen-year period of restructuring and rapid development. Piry was considered, even by his critics, “an exceedingly clever and capable postal expert, and could invariably decide the most complex postal question at the shortest notice.”³² Key to his success was gradually pulling the Post Office away from Customs protection. Piry understood the initial necessity of slow, careful development, but saw Hart’s policy as keeping the Post Office from attaining its full potential. To reach that potential, Piry would have to create a new Post Office “to meet national ideas and customs and to suit the requirements of a Chinese Administration.”³³ Emboldened by his vision, Piry slashed postage rates, rapidly expanded the number of offices, and quickly extended the postal network. In only three years, the Post Office grew to 1,319 establishments handling 66 million articles over a network of 33,000 miles. Along with rapid expansion, Piry also began re-organizing districts and postal routes to “suit Chinese ideas of jurisdiction” in 1909.³⁴ Instead of Treaty Ports, Piry moved all Head Offices to provincial capitals and divided districts into sub-sections. When Piry

²⁹ Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1284-85. Van Aalst had countermanded one of Hart’s orders to the postmasters. The two men had a long-term tempestuous relationship. Hart honored van Aalst for his musical ability – Hart being a music aficionado – but considered van Aalst “morbid and suspicious” because he was self-made. *Ibid.*, 556, 1228.

³⁰ Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1527.

³¹ Alexandre Théophile Piry (1851-1918) followed his father, Pierre Piry, in joining the Imperial Maritime Customs Service in 1874. He initially served as professor of French at the Tongwenguan and then worked his way up the Customs hierarchy, but usually serving in some capacity as Chinese secretary. By 1896, he attained Commissioner rank and was appointed to Lappa, returned to Beijing in 1900 as Chinese Secretary, and was then appointed Postal Secretary on 31 October 1901, a position he held until May 1911 when he became Postmaster General. Piry retired on 31 March 1917 and died a year later in France. SHAC137.1793-48-2.

³² L. C. Arlington, *Through the Dragon’s Eyes: Fifty Years’ Experiences of a Foreigner in the Chinese Government Service* (London: Constable & Co., 1931), 180.

³³ *RWCPO, 1907*, 1.

³⁴ Mr. Piry’s Note, 17 April 1910 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

completed the redistricting in 1910, he was administering a postal service of 5,357 offices transmitting 355 million pieces of mail over 120,000 miles of routes.³⁵ After a decade at the helm of the Post Office, Piry announced: “Everything that an honest and intelligent foreign administration, carefully adapted to Chinese ideas, methods and conditions of transport...could do has been done with, it may be said, complete success.”³⁶

The successful creation of a modern-style Post Office capable of being separated from the Customs increasingly made it the target of New Policies reformers attempting to reorganize and bureaucratically rationalize the Qing government. In 1901, the Qing began to transform its central government structure into a ministerial system with the reorganization of the Zongli Yamen into the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Five years later, the government replaced all the traditional Boards with modern ministries and created several new ones, including a Ministry of Posts and Communications (郵傳部).³⁷ The new Ministry’s administrative portfolio theoretically gave it oversight of all steamship, railroad, telegraph, and postal affairs, but the ad hoc nature in which modern communications industries had been organized in the nineteenth century forced the Ministry into conflicts with numerous quasi-government agencies or other government institutions over the question of administrative control.³⁸ The Ministry saw control of the Imperial Post Office as a natural extension of bureaucratic rationalization, but the Post Office was housed in the newly-established Department of Customs Affairs (稅務處) under the

³⁵ *RWCPO, 1910*.

³⁶ Mr. Piry’s Note, 17 April 1910 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

³⁷ On the transformation of the Qing government into a ministerial system, see: Richard S. Horowitz, “Breaking the Bonds of Precedent: The 1905-6 Government Reform Commission and the Remaking of the Qing Central State,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37: 4 (2003): 775-797. The best work on the Ministry of Posts and Communications is: Su Quanyou, *Qingmo youchuanbu yanjiu* (Research on the late Qing Ministry of Posts and Communications) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2005).

³⁸ Administrative control over railroad, telegraph, and steamship enterprises was scattered between the central, provincial, and local governments, usually under the direct control of one of the powerful provincial viceroys, and usually funded either by private merchants or foreigners. The Ministry also had to negotiate with older government bureaucracies such as the Board of War for control of the traditional postal relay system.

Customs Service. Piry recognized the Ministry's logic, and thought the move would take place sooner or later, but began "to entertain certain forebodings" about what the Ministry meant by rationalization. In December 1908, Piry had his answer when Minister Chen Bi (陳璧), notorious for his anti-foreignism, put forth eight proposals that included reducing Piry to an advisor and replacing the entire foreign staff. Chen's proposals, wrote Piry, would have seen foreign control of the Post Office "go to atoms."³⁹ What Piry and his advisors demanded in exchange for moving into the Ministry was to retain foreign control and keep the Post Office above politics. Particularly feared was the kind of political in-fighting and corruption that led to Chen's dismissal in February 1909, which brought an end to the Ministry's attempted takeover.⁴⁰ Piry saw continued foreign control of the post office as absolutely essential to its administrative integrity; being taken over by the Ministry without iron-clad assurances of administrative independence was unthinkable in the bureaucratic wars consuming Beijing as the New Policies continued going forward.

In 1910, the new Minister of Posts and Communications, Xu Shichang (徐世昌), launched a more vigorous effort to negotiate for control over all forms of communications in the empire, including the Post Office.⁴¹ He pressured Piry by establishing a postal school with some 600 students and sent 20 of them to Austria to study postal administration.⁴² Although Xu wanted to eliminate foreign control, he was also willing to compromise if the Ministry achieved at least nominal oversight. Throughout late 1910, Piry and Officiating Customs Inspector

³⁹ Mr. Piry's Note, 17 April 1910 in SHAC137.679(6).1296. For the text of Chen Bi's proposals, see: *North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, 30 January 1909.

⁴⁰ Chen Bi was one of many high officials brought up on corruption charges by the new Regent after the death of the Empress Dowager in 1908. All, except Chen, were eventually exonerated. "The Rulers of China," *Journal of the American Asiatic Association* 9: 11 (December 1909), 336-337. Although noted for packing the Ministry with his fellow provincials, Chen's main crime was skimming from foreign railway loans made to his Ministry. On Chen Bi's corruption, see: Su, *Qingmo youchuanbu yanjiu*, 67-68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 170-80.

⁴² Xu Shichang, *Tuigeng tang zheng shu* (Essays from the Hall of Fallow Land) (reprint: Taipei: Wenhai chubanshe, 1968), 1686-1690, 1720-1722.

General Francis Aglen discussed the implications of the separation of the Posts from the Customs. Piry saw separation as an opportunity for the Post Office to become a true postal service, staffed by experts, and run entirely on its own lines, but wanted to ensure foreign control after transfer to the Ministry.⁴³ Aglen, too, would use his influence to secure Piry's position, but he also wanted the Ministry to repay the Customs for all postal costs dating back to 1896.⁴⁴

In early 1911, Piry, Aglen, and the new Minister, Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣懷), negotiated the transfer. The three agreed the Customs and Posts would be separated on 28 May and the Post Office would become part of the Ministry. The Ministry would have a Chinese Director, but Piry would retain absolute control as postmaster general.⁴⁵ Except for a small hiccup over repayment to the Customs for postal outlays, the transition went smoothly.⁴⁶ Over the next ten months the only changes Piry introduced were in the nature of window-dressing: the Post Office was now styled the Directorate General of Posts (郵政總局) and the official designations for all postal employees and offices were changed in accordance with Ministry practice. Before issuing an important circular, Piry liked to acknowledge the Emperor by submitting it for "Imperial

⁴³ Postal Secretary's Memo, Piry, 15 November 1909 in SHAC679.18749; Mr. Piry's Note, 17 April 1910 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

⁴⁴ Memo, Re: Separation of Posts, H.G.C. Perry-Ayscough, 4 May 1911 and Taking Over: Conditions, D(ewall) 5 May 1911 in SHAC137.1762.

⁴⁵ Postal Circular No. 262, Postmaster General Piry, 31 May 1911 in SHAC137.2023-3. Li Jingfang, the nephew of Li Hongzhang and former Minister to England, held the position of Director General of Posts from 31 May-11 December 1911 when he was replaced by Liang Shiyi (梁世詒) (11 Dec-17 May 1912), the famous leader of the Communications Clique, during the 1911 Revolution. The full text of the agreement may also be found in: Zhongguo jindai jingji shi ziliao congkan bianji wenyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo haiguan yu youzheng* (Chinese customs administration and the postal service) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 195-196.

⁴⁶ In June 1911, Piry and Aglen signed a joint statement indicating the Ministry owned the Customs 1.8 million taels to be repaid in five yearly installments. Piry later claimed the joint statement was simply a record rather than an agreement to repay the debt. In 1919, after Piry retired, Co-Director General Destelan agreed to repay the debt out of the postal surplus, which took until 1926. For the extensive correspondence over this issue, see: SHAC679.18749.

Sanction,” but this was a mere formality.⁴⁷ When the Qing government abdicated nine months later, Piry’s negotiated settlement with Minister Sheng effectively saved the Post Office.

A “Mephitic Atmosphere”: The Post Office in the 1911 Revolution

The outbreak of the October 1911 Revolution posed numerous challenges for Postmaster General Théophile Piry and the Post Office. Piry’s successful defense of foreign control of the Post Office, considered essential for preserving its administrative integrity, placed the Directorate in an anomalous position during the Xinhai Revolution. As an official branch of the Qing government, the Post Office became a target of anti-Manchu armed rebels in the south who threatened the territorial integrity of the Service.⁴⁸ Once the armed phase of the revolution gave way to a struggle amongst the revolutionaries and military strongmen for control of the new government, the Post Office faced new threats to its administrative integrity as different “government” representatives tried to take over the Post Office. Throughout the conflict, Piry employed a number of strategies to protect the Post Office as an institution of the internationally-recognized Chinese government, but he also treated the Post Office as a semi-colonial institution that could stand aloof from domestic conflicts when necessary. Nothing epitomized Piry’s approach more than his unusual declaration of the Post Office as “provisionally neutral”

⁴⁷ e.g. Circulars No. 271 and 278, Postmaster General Piry, 8 September and 21 October 1911 in SHAC137.2023-3.

⁴⁸ The first recorded instance of interference with the territorial unity of the Post Office actually came during the Boxer Rebellion when the Inspectorate was cut off from the rest of the Service between October and December 1900. Unfortunately, most of the postal archives were lost during the Siege of Beijing prohibiting a reconstruction of those events. I am aware of only one postal employee who has a surviving record of the events during the siege. Nigel Oliphant, *A Diary of the Siege of the Legations in Peking: During the Summer of 1900* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1901). A second, transitory incident occurred during the Russo-Japanese War when the Japanese took over the transmission of IPO mails in the warzone in order to ensure censorship, but the threat ended with the Japanese withdrawal after the Portsmouth treaty. S/O No. 34, Niuzhuang Acting Deputy Commissioner Edward Gilchrist to Postal Secretary Piry, 28 March 1905 in SHAC137.1817-1.

(臨時中立) during the conflict over control of the republican government after the Qing abdication in February 1912.⁴⁹

During the armed phase of the revolution, from October 1911 to February 1912, Piry and the postal staff pursued two strategies to maintain the territorial unity of the Post Office. When rebels in radical hotbeds like Changsha and Wuhan objected to the physical symbols of Qing authority related to the Post Office, the foreign postmasters willingly lowered the Qing flag, removed the words “Great Qing” (大清) from the signs and lintels of the Post Offices, and destroyed all postal cancellers mentioning the Qing.⁵⁰ By assuaging local anger, Piry hoped the pliant attitude of the Post Office would keep the rebels from pressing additional demands. The policy was partially successful, but the rebels also wanted postmasters to surrender their seals of office and to install censors in post offices. While Piry willingly removed unimportant offensive symbols, he absolutely refused to tacitly or legally recognize the rebels by allowing postmasters to hand over the symbols of office or allow censorship. When the rebels continued pressing for censorship, Piry threatened to close the post offices to cut the revolutionaries off from the outside world.⁵¹ Every postal commissioner succeeded in putting off the revolutionaries, except L.C. Arlington in Changsha who became a “turncoat” when he signed an agreement with the revolutionaries to refuse censorship from both sides thereby recognizing the legitimacy of their demands.⁵² Arlington, as we will see below, also played a significant role in another attempt to dismember the Post Office in 1930. Overall, the Post Office weathered the early months of the Revolution with great success – soldiers did take a few offices by force, some districts became

⁴⁹ *RWCPO, 1911*, 3.

⁵⁰ S/O No. 103, District Postal Commissioner Hyland to Postal Secretary Piry, 13 October 1911 in SHAC137.1806; S/O No. 33, Sub-District Postmaster Beytagh to Postmaster General Piry, 21 October 1911 in SHAC137.1806-2.

⁵¹ No. 105, District Postal Commissioner Hyland to Postal Secretary Piry, 17 October 1911 in SHAC137.1806.

⁵² S/O No. 10, Changsha Sub-District Postmaster L. C. Arlington to Postmaster General Piry, 27 October 1911 in SHAC137.1807-3; S/O No. 125, District Postmaster Hyland to Postmaster General Piry, 9 November 1911 in SHAC137.1806.

isolated for a few months, a few suspended operations, and the foreign postmaster of Xi'an was wounded.⁵³ Looking back, Piry proudly wrote: "The Post Office...stood its ground and, to the advantage of the Service and public alike, all parties shortly realized the inexpediency of interference." Key to the Post Office's success, Piry believed, was his cautious approach and decision to remove the symbols of Qing identity thus showing the Post Office was a "national institution" that could be "everywhere treated as neutral."⁵⁴

In the Qing dependencies of Tibet and Mongolia, by contrast, the Post Office became entangled in the larger struggle of the Qing/Republican states to maintain control over these areas. In both places, the Post Office had only recently begun operations in concert with the efforts of the newly-established Ministry of Dependencies to re-assert imperial suzerainty in the face of British and Russian intervention. In Tibet, the establishment of post offices came in the wake of Imperial Commissioner Zhang Yintang's (張蔭棠) new tripartite treaty with Tibet and England recognizing Chinese suzerainty. In 1909, Postal Secretary Piry secured the agreement of the Indian Postmaster General to route mail from China through Hong Kong, Calcutta, and Siliguri on the Indo-Tibetan border to Yadong in Tibet. Postal connections to Lhasa and several other cities opened in early 1910 followed by the opening of an arduous overland route from Batang in Sichuan to Chamdo in early 1911.⁵⁵ Piry also began postal operations in Outer

⁵³ No. 638/771, Zhejiang Acting District Postmaster Tweedie to Postmaster General Piry, 18 December 1911 in SHAC137.2994; for a broad overview of the difficulties experienced by the Post Office during the 1911 Revolution, see the Inspectorate weekly reports collected in: Ding Jinjun, comp., "Xuantonq san nian Youchuanbu youzheng baogao san jian" (Three reports on the Post Office by the Ministry of Posts and Communications, Xuantonq 3 [1911/12]), *Lishi dang'an* (Historical archives) 4 (2011): 31-32; *RWCPO, 1911*, 2.

⁵⁴ *RWCPO, 1911*, 1-2, 12.

⁵⁵ Lu Ping, "Qingmo Minguo shiqi de Xizang youzheng" "The Postal Service in Tibet before 1949," *Minguo dang'an* "Republican Archives" 3 (1999): 27-31; Deng also opened post offices in Gyantse/Jiangzi (江孜), Gyanda/Jiangda (江達), Phagri/Pakeli (帕克里), Chamdo/Chamuduo (察木多), and Shigatse/Xigezi (西格孜). The initial spellings are the official postal place names for Tibet. In 1910, the Post Office only handled 24,000 letters from Tibet, which Piry explained by writing, "the natives are entirely self-centered, and have no wish or desire to correspond with the outside world." *RWCPO, 1910*, 11; *RWCPO, 1911*, 11

Mongolia in 1909 with a route from Zhangjiakou (Kalgan) on the Great Wall through Urga and thence to the Chinatown (maimaicheng) on the Mongolian side of Kiakhta.⁵⁶

The impact of the 1911 Revolution was quickly felt in both Tibet and Mongolia. In Tibet, the Manchu amban was ousted and the Chinese postal staff had to “run for their lives.”⁵⁷ The Post Office tried to reopen connections in 1912 and 1913, after Tibetan lamas requested service, but continued warfare in their “wide, remote, and scarce-civilised regions” kept Piry from making much effort.⁵⁸ In Mongolia, a group of nobles formally declared independence from China in December 1911 when they installed Jebtsundamba Khutukhtu as the Holy Emperor (Bodg Khan) of a new Buddhist theocratic state.⁵⁹ Despite a few incidents in which the Mongols forcibly ejected postal personnel, the Post Office was able to maintain some operations in Mongolia during this period, including the extension of a 4,400 mile route from Beijing through the Ordos region to Xinjiang.⁶⁰

In February 1912 the Qing emperor in Beijing abdicated and the chaos of the first months of the Revolution began to settle down as the republicans started to form their new government. When the dynasty collapsed, Piry acknowledged the new state of affairs by adopting the solar calendar, eliminating all terminology related to the imperial order, changing the name of the Imperial Post Office of the Great Qing (大清郵政) to the Chinese Post Office (中華郵政), and

⁵⁶ Muping Bao, “Trade Centres (Maimaicheng) in Mongolia, and their Function in Sino-Russian Trade Networks,” *International Journal of Asian Studies* 3: 2 (2006): 211-237. *RWCPO, 1910*, 4.

⁵⁷ *RWCPO, 1911*, 11.

⁵⁸ After 1913, the Post Office occasionally reopened the Batang-Chamdo route, but the inability of the Beijing and Nanjing governments to exert their influence over Tibet left the Post Office without the political support necessary to maintain its presence. As late as 1919, the Chinese Post Office’s was maintaining the Batang-Chamdo connection. Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhonghua youzheng yutu* (Postal atlas) (Beijing: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1919).

⁵⁹ Thomas Ewing, “Ch’ing Policies in Outer Mongolia, 1900-1911,” *Modern Asian Studies* 14: 1 (1980): 145-157.

⁶⁰ *RWCPO, 1913*, 5.

issuing two commemoratives celebrating the Revolution and the establishment of the Republic.⁶¹ Despite acknowledging the new state of affairs, Piry still took a cautious approach to the republicans with good reason. Sun Zhongshan, the provisional president of the Nanjing government, soon began negotiations with Yuan Shikai, who virtually everyone recognized as the only leader capable of holding together the country, to assume the presidency. During the negotiations, however, members of the Nanjing and newly-established Beijing government under Yuan began engaging in a series of political struggles over control of various state institutions. In the midst of these struggles, New Army generals, old bureaucrats, and new-style liberal administrators sought to re-establish the central power of the state, but there was also a powerful trend towards “boisterous provincialism” and agitation for a confederate political system.⁶²

Théophile Piry saw the republicans as lacking a legitimate central government, deplored the independent action and lack of cooperation among the confederates, and sought to keep the Post Office above republican politics until a single authority emerged. In the spring of 1912, it was not armed soldiers who threatened the Post Office, but “upstarts dressed in swallow-tail coats and bowler hats – looking for all the world like gollywogs” who began trying to bluff postal commissioners into surrendering their authority to the newly-established, but unrecognized Nanjing government.⁶³ In Shanghai, Hangzhou, and Nanjing, various “postal secretaries,” “Postal Commissioner Generals,” and “Postmaster Generals” suddenly appeared announcing they had been appointed to take over the Post Office.⁶⁴ The reigning chaos was no

⁶¹ Circular No. 280, Postmaster General Piry, 16 February 1912; Circular No. 296, Postmaster General Piry, 11 November 1912 in SHAC137.2023-3.

⁶² Ernest P. Young, *The Presidency of Yuan Shih-k'ai: Liberalism and Dictatorship in Early Republican China* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1976), 31.

⁶³ Arlington, *Through the Dragon's Eyes*, 198.

⁶⁴ Confidential, from Nanjing District Postmaster Rouse to Postmaster General Piry, 7 February 1912 and S/O No. 78, District Postmaster of Nanjing Rouse to Postmaster General Piry, 18 March 1912, both in SHAC137.2182-2; S/O No. 48, Zhejiang District Postmaster Tweedie to Postmaster General Piry, 9 February 1912 in SHAC137.2184-5.

longer on the battlefield, but in the halls of Nanjing, Beijing, and the provincial capitals as the republicans fought amongst themselves for control over various government institutions. Not wanting to endanger the administrative integrity of the Post Office, Piry declared it “provisionally neutral.”⁶⁵ Until there was a legitimate republican government, Piry continued acting as though the Qing still existed: “There is only one Government,” he wrote in March 1912 after the Qing abdication, “only one Board of Communications and one Chief of the Postal Service and their seat is Beijing.”⁶⁶ Until more than a modicum of stability was achieved between the Nanjing and Yuan Shikai’s Beijing government, Piry refused to join the new Ministry of Communications (交通部).

In early April 1912, the reigning confusion among the Nanjing and Beijing governments began to resolve itself. During the transition between the Nanjing and Beijing provisional governments, three Ministries of Communications existed simultaneously – the Nanjing Ministry of Communications, the Beijing Ministry under Tang Shaoyi (唐紹儀), who would soon become Prime Minister, and the old Qing Ministry of Posts and Communications continued to operate under Liang Shiyi (梁世詒), who simultaneously held the sinecure post of Director General of Posts.⁶⁷ By the end of April, only the new Beijing Ministry of Communications was still operating under Shi Zhaoji (施肇基), the newly named Minister of Communications. Once the mess between the ministries was resolved, Piry began recognizing the new Beijing Ministry in his circulars in late April. Piry had succeeded in preserving both the territorial and

⁶⁵ Circular No. 282, Postmaster General Piry, 22 February 1912 in SHAC137.2023-3.

⁶⁶ S.O. No. 17, Piry to Shanghai Postal Commissioner Tollefsen, 12 March 1912 in SHAC137.2183.

⁶⁷ Tang Shaoyi (1860-1938), an American-educated bureaucrat, began serving with Yuan Shikai in Korea and cooperated closely with him from 1885 to 1912. In 1912 he briefly served as Minister of Communications (30 March 1912-8 April 1912) before becoming Prime Minister under Yuan, but political differences quickly drove them apart. Tang recruited Liang Shiyi into Yuan’s coterie of talented officials in 1903. Liang became a specialist in railway management, established the Bank of Communications in 1907, and would go on to lead the so-called Communications Clique during Yuan’s presidency. He held the position of Director General of Posts from 11 December 1911-17 May 1912.

administrative integrity of the Post Office in its most challenging hour. “When the mephitic atmosphere stirred up by the Revolution was dissipated,” he wrote, “the Service was found...in good working-order, firm-set on the rock of its customary and long accepted rules and regulations and looking to the one central authority in Beijing for guidance.”⁶⁸

In late 1912, Yuan’s financially-strapped government was undoubtedly tempted to interfere with the Post Office, but he was already having enough trouble with the foreign powers who were aggressively snapping up additional rights during the chaos of the revolution. In the initial military clash, Inspector General of Customs Francis Aglen ordered his foreign commissioners to take over the collection of customs duties, something the Customs had never done under Hart, and deposit them in foreign banks. The Qing government approved this policy in January 1912, to protect their own revenue, but Aglen retained these rights after Yuan set up his government.⁶⁹ The Salt Gabelle, another lucrative source of government funds, was also quickly snatched from Yuan’s grasp. In the immediate aftermath of the revolution, Yuan had to rely on international funding for his government because the provincial governors refused to remit taxes to Beijing. Yuan turned to the International Banking Consortium for a large loan, but the Consortium wanted Yuan’s government to allow foreign experts to reorganize and manage the Salt Gabelle in exchange for what became known as the Reorganization Loan of April 1913.⁷⁰ Confronted by internal dissention caused by Yuan’s complicity in the assassination of Nationalist Party parliamentary leader Song Jiaoren and the strength of pro-Nationalist

⁶⁸ *RWCPO, 1921*, 10.

⁶⁹ Stanley F. Wright, *The Collection and Disposal of the Maritime and Native Customs Revenue since the Revolution of 1911* (Shanghai, 1927), 1-9.

⁷⁰ In the final loan agreement, Yuan’s government was allowed to borrow 25 million pounds sterling in exchange for, among other things, allowing foreigners to reorganize the Salt Gabelle, establish an Auditing Bureau, and takeover the National Loan Department.

provincial governors, Yuan decided to accept the Consortium's demands and lost control of the Salt Gabelle revenue.

The relationship between Yuan Shikai's Ministry of Communications and Piry's Directorate General of Posts remained distant. The Ministry created its own Director General of Posts, and several other postal sinecures, but they simply rubberstamped the foreign postmaster's decisions.⁷¹ While the Ministry's officials took their ease, Piry concentrated on postal expansion.⁷² In 1913, he reorganized and introduced new types of post offices creating a clear administrative hierarchy among them. Head Offices now oversaw First, Second, and Third-Class Offices in urban areas as well as Town and Rural Box Offices (城邑信櫃/村鎮信櫃) and Rural Stations (村鎮郵站) in the countryside.⁷³ When Piry did recognize Ministry authority, it was only over petty matters such as renaming post offices or carrying out censorship against banned publications.⁷⁴ When there were conflicts between the central government and regional forces, such as during the Second Revolution in 1913 or the Protect the Constitution War of

⁷¹ From 1912 to 1927, the position of Director General of Posts was remained a sinecure. For a list of Directors General of Posts, see: Liu Shoulin, et al, ed., *Minguo zhiguan nianbao* (Chronological table of officials in the Republic of China) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1995), 50-53.

⁷² L.C. Arlington, the Chinese Secretary of the Beijing Directorate, described the Ministry's postal officials: "Over the Co-Director General was the Director-General – a Chinese who was simply a figurehead, and had no more to say about staff or other matters than the man in the moon. The post was created for no other purpose than, as far as one could see, to multiply the channels of communication, to draw pay, and to spy on the foreigners. In addition to the Director-General there was a Deputy Director General, also a Chinese, who had even less to say than the Director-General himself. The amount of work expected from the Director-General may be gauged from the fact that his usual office hours were 11 a.m. to noon, and 3 to 4 p.m. There was further a postal chief in the Ministry, serving as an intermediary between the Directorate-General and the Ministry – which department had some sixty employees, mostly sitting in their offices all day reading novels; though when the spirit moved them they would stroll about the Directorate gardens and enjoy the fragrance of the flowers." *Through the Dragon's Eyes*, 220.

⁷³ After 1913, there were only a few readjustments to districts: in 1922, Destelan divided Manchuria into Fengtian and Ji[lin]-Hei[longjiang]districts and split Sichuan into Eastern and Western districts; in 1929, Guangdong was divided into Shantou and Guangdong districts, but this split only lasted about 18 months; in January 1931, the Jiangsu and Anhui districts were amalgamated into the Su-Wan district, but separated again in 1935. For the relevant circulars on these divisions and amalgamations, see: SHAC137.288-2, -9, -11, and -59.

⁷⁴ Circulars No. 317 and 335, Postmaster General Piry, 3 June and 24 November 1913 in SHAC137.2023-3.

1915, the Post Office retained both its territorial and administrative integrity through its well-known policy of being an “impartial” government institution.⁷⁵

*“Disciplined Vitality and the Power of Resistance”: The Directorate in the Warlord Era*⁷⁶

Although remaining administratively independent in the early Republic, once the Post Office started showing a profit it came under increasing pressure from the Ministry of Communications and physical attacks by warlord soldiers and local bandits who found postal surpluses an enticing source of plunder. In May 1915, Piry handed over control of the Directorate General of Posts to Henri Picard-Destelan (1878-?), who then became Associate Director General (總辦), the new English designation for Postmaster General.⁷⁷ Although Destelan was considered by some to be “an enigma” fascinated by postal details, but lacking in vision and simply “following a rut,” he presided over the only sustained profitable era in Chinese postal history.⁷⁸ Between 1915-1926, the Directorate turned record profits every year and funneled most of the money back into postal expansion.⁷⁹ By 1921, there were 11,032 major establishments in cities and towns with an additional 24,427 minor establishments in rural areas for a total of 35,459 post offices linked together by roughly 230,000 miles of mail lines. In almost every area of postal activity business more than doubled during this period.

⁷⁵ *RWCPO, 1913, 2.*

⁷⁶ The quote comes from *RWCPO, 1918, 1.*

⁷⁷ Henri Picard-Destelan was born in Paris in 1878. He joined the Customs Revenue Department, London Branch, in 1896 before arriving in China in 1897. He played a prominent role as assistant to Piry during the early years of the Post Office, but remained in the Customs Service until 1913. In 1913, Piry asked Destelan to join the Post Office with the understanding he would be groomed to take over once Piry retired. Destelan served as a Postal Commissioner from 1913-1915, Acting Associate Director from 1913 to 1917, and then Co-Director General from 1917 to 1928. Destelan’s Service Record can be found in SHAC137.1793-17.

⁷⁸ Arlington, *Through the Dragon’s Eyes*, 222.

⁷⁹ Postal surpluses in Mexican silver dollars, calculated as revenue minus expenses, during this period were: 302,592 (1915), 937,403 (1916), 1,422,518 (1917), 1,907,313 (1918), 2,440,535 (1919), 2,212,068 (1920), 2,826,244 (1921), 3,844,361 (1922), 4,456,824 (1923), 4,350,617 (1924), 3,950,852 (1925), 3,010,102 (1926). For these figures, see the relevant *RWCPO*.

Out in the provinces, the warlord era was a challenging time for the Post Office. On the one hand, warlord soldiers were often a financial boon to the Post Office. Soldiers might rob and loot offices on occasion, but they also relied heavily on them for either remitting their pay or sending their spoils back home.⁸⁰ In 1918, for example, a warlord conflict engulfed Changsha, but in the following weeks post offices throughout the city were “simply packed from early morning to after three o’clock with soldiers demanding money orders.”⁸¹ Explaining this phenomenon, Destelan credited the Post Office’s reputation as “an institution unconcerned with party strife” working for “the general good of the country.”⁸² On the other hand, rural bandits thriving during the chaos of the warlord era frequently targeted isolated post offices and rural couriers. The Directorate’s yearly reports during this period are filled with stories of brigandage, robbery, piracy, looting of offices and the wounding, kidnapping, maiming, or murder of postal staff by bandits or highway robbers. In 1915, for example, bandits murdered 11 couriers and robbed several hundred others in the performance of their duties. Things were worse the next year when brigands killed 25 couriers and robbed more than 400.⁸³ Despite the attacks, Destelan felt the Post Office held the country together during these tumultuous times: “It is impossible to conceive to what extent the course of the country’s history during the past decade would have varied,” Destelan wrote, “had not the National Post existed in such a state of development....The unifying influence of the National Post is undeniable.”⁸⁴

⁸⁰ S/O No. 5, Letter from Mr. Kierkegaard, Postmaster at Yichang to Postmaster General Piry, 5 May 1914 in SHAC137.2187.

⁸¹ S/O No. 274, Changsha Sub-District Postmaster Newman to Co-Director General Destelan, 5 April 1918 in SHAC137.2188-11.

⁸² *RWCPO, 1918*, 16.

⁸³ The worst time for rural post offices and couriers was during the Northern Expedition (1926-28) as bandits and defeated warlord soldiers fled before the National Revolutionary Army. Rag-tag soldiers and bandits saw post offices as a quick source of travelling funds. During this two year period, bandits murdered 19 couriers, wounded 47, and robbed 411 while incinerating 21 post offices and looting 577 others. *RWCPO, 1928*, 4-5.

⁸⁴ *RWCPO, 1921*, 12.

The unifying influence of the Post Office was not undeniable in Outer Mongolia. In 1915, the Post Office had once again begun to spread in Mongolia after Beijing government representative Chen Lu (陳籛) negotiated a tripartite treaty with Mongolia and Russia recognizing Chinese suzerainty. By 1919, the Mongolian economy was in a shambles forcing the Holy Emperor to fully rejoin China.⁸⁵ The next year, however, White and Red Russian forces brought their civil war into Mongolia. Most Chinese post offices had to close down in 1921 with the victory of the Reds, but the Directorate continued using its route through southern Mongolia until 1924. When the Mongolian People's Republic was established in November 1924, the Post Office closed this southern route. The Post Office was the last Chinese state institution to withdrawal from Outer Mongolia.⁸⁶

In Beijing, the financial health of the Directorate General of Posts quickly became a target for the central government. As soon as the Post Office started showing profits in 1915, the Minister of Communications "began to flirt" with Destelan hoping he would "grease the palms" of his superiors in the warlord government.⁸⁷ When Destelan refused, the Ministry stopped rubberstamping decisions and started finding fault with petty issues trying to force Destelan to hand over part of the surplus. Destelan held out for five years, but by 1921 the central and provincial governments were buried in debt to the tune of 364 million Mex. Among central government institutions, the Ministry of Communications remained one of the most financially viable capable of bringing in an estimated profit of 40 million per year, but little

⁸⁵ Thomas Ewing, "Russia, China, and the Origins of the Mongolian People's Republic, 1911-1921: A Reappraisal," *The Slavonic and East European Review* 58: 3 (July 1980): 399-421.

⁸⁶ The independent Mongolian Post Office, created by the Russians in 1925, did very little postally except raise money by printing stamps for sale to European collectors. "Mongolian Post Office," L.I. Vironoff, 3rd Assistant A, 1925 in SHAC137.5289.

⁸⁷ Arlington, *Through the Dragon's Eyes*, 222.

profit reached Beijing because of financial exactions of provincial warlords.⁸⁸ What little did trickle in was quickly consumed by other ministries who turned the Ministry of Communications into a “milch cow.” By late 1921, the Ministry of Communications itself was “dry as a bone” and had to take out some \$24 million in loans against its revenues, which it was then forced to advance to the virtually bankrupt Ministry of Finance.⁸⁹ In the midst of this financial crisis, the Ministry had little choice but to vehemently demand Destelan turn over a significant portion of postal profits. Destelan finally agreed to transfer 40% of the Post Office’s yearly surplus to the Ministry starting in 1921 for “handling postal affairs.”⁹⁰ Now insatiable, the Ministry continued pressing for more and Destelan agreed to 50% in 1923-24. Although Destelan foiled a Ministry scheme to mortgage postal profits for eight million dollars in 1925, he had to agree to raise the Ministry’s administrative fee to 60% of postal profits.⁹¹ The payments to the Ministry certainly had a negative effect on postal development, but it was a trade Destelan was willing to make to retain autonomy over Directorate policy and maintain administrative integrity.

The most serious threat to the integrity of the Post Office during the latter part of the warlord era was not over finances, but provincial warlords catering to public outrage caused by a postage increase. In early October 1922, the Post Office announced a small rate increase on letters and newspapers to outlying provinces to fund expansion.⁹² Over the next two months, newspaper editors, magazine publishers, book sellers, educational institutions, religious groups, and commercial associations filled the press with protests against the rate increase, particularly

⁸⁸ Andrew Nathan, *Peking Politics, 1918-1923: Factionalism and the Failure of Constitutionalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 75-77.

⁸⁹ Hollington K. Tong, “The Crisis of the Chiaotungpu,” *The Weekly Review of the Far East* 20: 1 (March 1922), 6.

⁹⁰ Various petitions to Ministry in SHAC137.2148-1.

⁹¹ For the yearly amounts remitted to the Ministry, see: Cheng No. 17 to the Ministry, 19 January 1926 in SHAC137.5158 or *RWCPO, 1922-1926*.

⁹² Circular No. 521, Co-Director General Destelan, 19 August 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5.

the increase on newspapers.⁹³ Seeking to ally themselves with the public, and the press, numerous provincial warlords entered the fray. Zhang Zuolin of the Three Eastern Provinces, He Fenglin of Shanghai, Chen Jiongming of Guangdong, Zhao Hengti of Hunan, Lu Yongxiang of Zhejiang, and Liu Xiang of Sichuan all demanded an immediate cancellation of the increased newspaper rates.⁹⁴ When the Directorate did not abide their instructions, some of the warlords despatched soldiers to occupy post offices and restore the original tariff at gunpoint. In Sichuan matters looked grim for the survival of the Post Office. The Provincial Assembly began taking steps to assume full control of all post offices to run them as a provincial concern. Zhejiang authorities starting making similar noises. As the protests and warlord pressure reached its crescendo, the Directorate backed down because the situation had become “critical for the maintenance of the Post Office as a national service.”⁹⁵ Destelan and the foreign postal commissioners could not understand why a small rate increase had engendered public and warlord protests of a “political character,” but when warlords threatened to “ruin the national service by splitting it up into several provincial services” the Post Office acquiesced to their demands.

Although warlords never demanded funds from provincially-based Head Post Offices, Destelan had ready-made plans for stymieing their efforts that proved effective against Sun Zhongshan’s Guangzhou Government. If warlords approached post offices to seize funds, postal commissioners were to stress two points: first, that the nature of the postal service as a national institution meant there were no funds for local post offices to turn over; second, that any

⁹³ Yue Qianhou and Tian Ming, “Yulun chuanmei, shehui dongyuan yu quanyi boyi: 1922nian Beijing zhengfu youzi jiajia fengbo zhi kaocha (Public opinion, social mobilization, and the chess match over rights and interests: An examination of the storm over the Beijing government’s postage increase in 1922) *Anhui shixue* (Anhui historical studies) 2 (2008): 49-57.

⁹⁴ Mimeographed copy of Cheng No. 486 to Ministry of 21 December 1922 in SHAC137.2186-2.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

interference with the Post Office would inevitably involve international complications not only because postal commissioners were foreigners, but because China handled a significant amount of international mail.⁹⁶ When Sun Zhongshan's representatives approached the Guangzhou Head Post Office in the fall of 1923, Destelan's policy worked to perfection. As head of the cash-starved Guangzhou Government, Sun Zhongshan was desperate for new sources of funding to reorganize his party, build a military force strong enough to challenge local warlords who kept ousting him, and strengthen the overall Nationalist movement. Having signed the Sun-Joffe Agreement in January, Sun also began taking a more aggressive posture towards foreign imperialism, particularly against the Customs Administration, Salt Inspectorate (formerly Salt Gabelle), and Post Office. By late 1923, the Guangzhou government had already demanded and received the province's share of revenue from the Salt Inspectorate and now Sun began demanding Guangdong's share of the Customs revenue. During the ensuing controversy between Sun and the various foreign powers who sought to protect the integrity of the Customs Administration, Sun also despatched Chen Youren (陳友仁 Eugene Ch'en), one of his foreign affairs advisors, to the Guangzhou Head Post Office. Chen began a series of negotiations with F. B. Tolliday, the Guangdong postal commissioner, for the province's share of the postal surplus. Chen threw numerous arguments at Tolliday: Tolliday must recognize the divided nature of the "national" government and deliver up his surpluses to the local authorities, the foreign powers were unconcerned with the Post Office since its profits play no part in servicing China's foreign debt, and the Post Office was a subordinate institution of the Guangdong government and must obey its commands. Knowing Destelan's probable answer, Chen also suggested Tolliday need not report these demands to the Directorate in Beijing since it was merely a local matter.

⁹⁶ Confidential Circular S/O, Co-Director General Destelan, 28 November 1922 in SHAC137.2188-3.

Tolliday, following the Directorate's playbook for such situations, explained that although Guangdong's postal accounts might show a surplus, these funds were already earmarked for payment to contract carriers, secretarial and statistical work in Beijing, stamp printing in Shanghai, and other shared expenses, and so could not be separated from the overall postal budget. Frustrated by Tolliday's arguments, Chen simply fell back on the demand that the surpluses not be remitted to Beijing. Tolliday eventually agreed and, taking a page from Customs Inspector General Aglen during the 1911 revolution, simply deposited the surplus in a Hong Kong bank under his own name.⁹⁷ Shortly thereafter, the foreign powers intervened threatening Sun's government with gunboats if he continued harassing the Customs Administration. Sun backed down and Tolliday sent his funds to Beijing.⁹⁸

"Adjusting the Machinery of Administration": The Nationalistization of the Post Office, 1927-37

Prior to its contact with the Nationalists during the Northern Expedition (1926-1928), the Post Office had portrayed itself an "impartial" institution known for its rational bureaucracy, innovative services, efficient administration, and public service orientation. Central to the Post Office's prior success was its corporate ability to show "discretion in act and word" and remain "absolutely non-political."⁹⁹ As a "non-political" institution, the foreign and Chinese postal staff all felt they were serving the collective interests of the country rather than any particular political regime. During the Northern Expedition, the Post Office, like the Customs and Salt Inspectorate, would find itself facing a united front of Nationalist and Communist parties professing a strongly

⁹⁷ Huo Xixiang, "Huiyi Guomindang shiqi de youzheng" (Remembering the postal service of the Nationalist Party era), *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* 65 (1979): 155-197; reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL: YDSL*, 85-86.

⁹⁸ On the history of this incident with the Customs, see: Donna Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone in China: The Chinese Maritime Customs Service, 1854-1949* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 54-65.

⁹⁹ Confidential Circular S/O, Co-D. G. Destelan, 28 November 1922 in SHAC137.2188-3.

political anti-imperialist ideology that viewed the triumvirate of semi-colonial, foreign-controlled institutions as representing China's national humiliation.

To weaken individual foreign postal commissioners, United Front agents fostered dissention through anti-imperialist rhetoric, orchestrated public protests, funded and created postal workers' labor unions, and instigated strikes against foreign control of the Post Office. During the first months of the Expedition, Nationalist and Communist agents organized some twenty to twenty-five local postal labor unions. Many of the unions demanded immediate recognition by the postal authorities, increases in pay, and shorter hours, but most of the agitation was political rather than economic in nature. In Changsha, Nationalists and Communists held numerous marches against foreign control of the Post Office shouting anti-foreign slogans and likening the postal staff to pimps and whores.¹⁰⁰ Strikes broke out in Changsha, Hankou, Jiujiang, and Suzhou against foreign control of the Post Office.¹⁰¹ In concert with internal dissention, the Nationalists also interrupted Directorate finances by threatening to seize postal funds, confiscated them, or disrupted their remittance to Beijing.¹⁰² Finally, the Nationalists and Communists also used a number of political strategies and diplomatic ploys to flummox postal commissioners into legally recognizing the Nationalists or surrendering their offices. The Nationalists tried to re-appoint foreign commissioners thereby giving the Nationalists control of those districts, tempted various commissioners with promises of making them the new co-director general, and negotiated with Destelan trying to get his agreement to the establishment of

¹⁰⁰ S/O No. 583, Changsha Postal Commissioner Maurias to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 13 November 1926 in SHAC137-2188-5.

¹⁰¹ "Unnumbered S/O from Jiujiang First-Class Postmaster Penther to Jiangxi Postal Commissioner Gwynne, 25 January 1927 in SHAC137-2465-3; Suzhou Postal Strike (Sorters and Postmen), 13 demands presented in SHAC137.5160; Confidential S/O, Co-D.G. to Hangzhou Postal Commissioner Doodha, 26 February 1927 in SHAC137.2184-1.

¹⁰² D.G. Cheng No. 53 to the Ministry, 18 February 1927 in SHAC137.5165; S/O No. 950, Kuan Ching Chu, for Jiangsu Postal Commissioner, to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 29 March 1927 in 137.2460-2; *NCH*, 2 April 1927.

a Southern Directorate with authority over the Nationalist-occupied districts.¹⁰³ While the labor agitation and financial interference had their effect, Destelan and the postal commissioners simply stonewalled the Nationalists refusing to recognize any external authority.

In November 1927, the newly-established National Government created its own Ministry of Communications headed up by Wang Boqun (王伯群).¹⁰⁴ Minister Wang immediately appointed a postal secretary (郵政司長) within the Ministry to oversee national postal affairs and created a Southern Directorate General of Posts.¹⁰⁵ To the post of director general, Wang appointed Liu Shufan (劉書藩), who had previously been a commissioner in Co-Director General Destelan's Beijing-based Directorate. With the Nationalists occupying all the southern postal districts, and with his own Directorate, Liu Shufan began pressuring Destelan to open negotiations for joint control of postal affairs throughout the country. Destelan refused to negotiate directly with his former subordinate, but did appoint a representative who worked with Liu over a three month period to produce an agreement for joint control of all postal districts, which was signed on 6 February 1928.¹⁰⁶ During the period of joint administration, Destelan remained in control of the daily affairs of postal districts throughout the country, but all his

¹⁰³ S/O No. 1008, Jiangsu Postal Commissioner Ritchie to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 1 August 1927 in SHAC137.2460-2; No. 6193, Cheng No. 330 sent to Ministry by D.G. of Posts, Beijing, 21 October 1927 in SHAC137.5184; Yao Yong, comp., "Beifa qijian nanbei youzheng jiaoshe shiliao yizu" (Historical materials on northern and southern postal negotiations during the Northern Expedition), *Minguo dang'an* (Republican archives) 4 (2004): 3-9.

¹⁰⁴ Wang Boqun (1885-1944) was a native of Daxingyi, Guizhou. After studying political economy in Japan for six years, he returned to Shanghai in 1912 working against Yuan Shikai as part of Sun Zhongshan's Revolutionary Party. He eventually joined Sun Zhongshan's Guangzhou Military Government in 1920 as Minister of Communications. Shortly thereafter, Wang and his younger brother, Wang Wenhua (王文華), fought for control of Guizhou with their uncle. After the brothers were victorious, Boqun became civil governor of Guizhou in 1921. During this period, Wang also joined the Nationalist Party. When the National Government was established in April 1927, Wang became the first Minister of Communications of the National Government, a post he held until 1932.

¹⁰⁵ As it turned out, the Postal Secretary had little real power. The position was held by Chen Runtang (陳潤棠) (11 July 1927-20 Oct. 1927), Liu Shufan (20 Oct. 1927-31 Jan. 1931), Long Dawen (龍大文) (31 Jan. 1931-4 June 1932), Lin Shi (4 June 1932-28 April 1934), and Huang Naishu (28 April 1934-1935). The Ministry eliminated the position when it reorganized itself in 1935. On the creation of the Southern Directorate and their earliest internal orders, see SHAC137.288-1.

¹⁰⁶ Its official title was: "Agreement for the Joint Control of Postal Affairs throughout the Country by the Southern and Northern Directorates General of Posts" (南北郵政總局共同管理全國郵政事務款) in SHAC137.7490.

decisions had to be countersigned by Liu. Recognizing the agreement meant an end to foreign control of the Post Office, the powers protested, but were unwilling to intervene.¹⁰⁷ Destelan decided he could not work with the Nationalists and soon left the country and retired. In June 1928, the Beijing government collapsed and the Nationalists' Ministry of Communications closed the Northern Directorate.¹⁰⁸ All authority now resided in the Nationalists' Chinese Directors General.¹⁰⁹

With Liu Shufan's appointment, the Nationalists began the process of politicizing the Post Office. Although Liu had been a member of the Post Office since 1898, becoming the first Chinese postal commissioner in December 1915, his appointment represented the worst kind of Nationalist personalism. While commissioner of Guizhou, Liu maintained friendly relations with Civil Governor Wang Boqun, their children had married each other, and when Wang was made minister of communications he immediately appointed Liu.¹¹⁰ Liu, whom the Chinese staff derisively called "the Postal Emperor," immediately undertook a number of changes to Directorate policy. He forcibly retired a significant number of foreigners declaring there would be no new hires, but those remaining could leave of their own accord.¹¹¹ He also eliminated more than 1,000 of the Chinese staff.¹¹² Liu then instituted a number of cost-cutting measures

¹⁰⁷ On the powers' 1928 protests, see: *North China Herald*, 24 March, 6 October 1928.

¹⁰⁸ Telegram from the Nanjing Directorate, 12 June 1928 in SHAC137.5280.

¹⁰⁹ The position of Director General was held by Liu Shufan (1 Nov. 1927-13 May 1930), Lin Shi, Acting Director General (15 Feb. 1929-13 May 1930), Wei Yifu (韋以馱) (13 May 1930-2 Feb. 1931), Qian Chunqi (2 Feb. 1931-23 May 1932), Huang Naishu (23 May 1932-4 Dec. 1933), Tang Baoshu, acting D.G. (4 Dec. 1933-16 May 1934), Guo Xinsong (16 May 1934-21 Dec. 1942), Xu Jizhuang (21 Dec. 1942-27 February 1947), Huo Xixiang and Gu Chunfan (Feb. 1947-Sept. 1949).

¹¹⁰ S/O No. 970, Jiangsu Postal Commissioner Ritchie to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 7 June 1927 in SHAC137.2460-2. Huo Xixiang and Lou Zupei, "Youzheng chujin huiye ju jianwen" (Information on the postal savings and remittance bureau), *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* 65 (1979): 198-214; reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL: YDSL*, 124-25.

¹¹¹ There were 127 foreigners in the Post Office in 1926, 108 in 1927, 80 in 1928, and 63 in 1929. By the Civil War, there were only about ten foreigners left in the Post Office. Statistics on the number of foreigners in the Service from 1912-1935, broken down by nationality, can be found in SHAC137(2).1098. For the number of foreign staff from 1936-1943, see the relevant *RWCPO*

¹¹² Ministry of Communication, D. G. of Posts, Circulars Nos. 581, 584, 14 August and 21 December 1928 in SHAC137.2251-1.

such as reducing the amount of leave, decreasing compassionate allowances, and replacing retirement pensions with lower annual gratuities. In a nod to his new political masters, Liu revised the in-house civil service examinations to reflect Nationalist Party ideology, required all postal supplies to be made of national products, and declared Chinese the official Service language.¹¹³

Liu was clearly the Nationalist's man, but he quickly got caught up in one of the great contradictions between Nationalist ideology and practice. During the Northern Expedition, the Nationalists and Communists organized postal labor unions throughout the country to agitate against foreign control of the Post Office. Once the Nationalists carried out the anti-communist White Terror, they began the process of "yellowing" the labor movement by corporatizing it. Labor unions were purged of communist elements, workers had to attend party indoctrination classes, and the government held new union elections in which they ensured pro-government leaders took control. The Nationalists specifically targeted the postal workers' unions because of their size, strength, and distribution throughout the country.¹¹⁴ In the Shanghai Postal Workers' Union, the Nationalists appointed sympathetic elements to organize a purge committee in early 1928, which then forcibly reorganized the union. The new union leaders, all Nationalists, were almost immediately forced out by underground communist elements who physically threatened them. In their stead, the membership elected a "non-political" leader named Shen Tiansheng.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, Circular No. 590, 6 February 1929 in SHAC137.2251-1. "Post Office Regains Language Autonomy," *China Weekly Review* 48: 7 (April 13, 1929): 278.

¹¹⁴ For a more detailed discussion of the corporatization of the postal workers' unions, see: Rao Jingying, "The Shanghai Postal Worker's Union: Sample of a Yellow Union," translated by Zhu Hong, *Chinese Studies in History* 27: 1-2 (1993): 148-161; on the phenomenon of yellow unionism in China, see: Walter E. Gourley, "Yellow Unionism in Shanghai: A Study of Kuomintang Technique in Labor Control, 1927-1937," *Papers on China* 7 (1953), 103-34.

¹¹⁵ Shen Tiansheng, "Huiyi yijiuerqi nian dao san'er nian de Shanghai youwu gonghui," (Remembering the Shanghai postal workers union, 1927-32) in Shanghai gongren yundong shiliao weiyuanhui, ed., *Shanghai youzheng zhigong yundong shiliao (1922-1937)* (Historical materials on the Shanghai postal service labor movement (1922-1937) (Shanghai: n.p., 1986), 78-80.

In the summer of 1928, Shen presented a list of sixteen demands to Liu Shufan.¹¹⁶ When Liu continued ignoring the demands, more than 2,000 purportedly deradicalized members of the Shanghai postal workers' union struck demanding increased wages, benefits, and Liu's job. A reporter for the North China Herald gleefully declared the strike, "the first serious threat to [Nationalist] power which has been attempted." The strike was not only a test of the Nationalists' new labor policy, but also one between Liu Shufan and the postal workers.

On the second day of the strike, the union was holding a rally on the grounds of the Shanghai Head Post Office in the International Settlement. While the Settlement's riot squad kept an eye on the rally, the Municipal Council requested the National Government send representatives to the Post Office. A short time later, a truckload of Chinese soldiers arrived with "business-like Mauser pistols" to disperse the striking workers. The government's strong-arm tactics played right into the workers' hands. The union immediately issued a manifesto charging Liu with using the Settlement police, "the claws and teeth of the imperialists," against a pro-Nationalist union. Having revealed Liu's "conspiracy with the imperialists," the workers asked the Shanghai Branch of the Nationalist Party to remove him. The Party Branch, not knowing Liu had personal connections with Minister Wang Boqun, agreed to Liu's dismissal.

As the strike entered its third day, no less a figure than Jiang Jieshi stepped in to end it. Jiang gave a speech in which he stated unequivocally that public sector unions were forbidden from striking against the government. Any such strikes, ipso-facto, must be led by communists since the Nationalist Party had proven itself sympathetic to labor. While Jiang's thinly-veiled threat worked from above, Minister Wang Boqun worked from below promising a small wage increase. Wang also negotiated with the local Party Branch to withdraw their agreement to Liu's dismissal. On October 6, four days after the strike began, the workers went back to work. The

¹¹⁶ The quotes in this paragraph and the following two come from NCH, 6 Oct. 1928.

October 1928 postal workers' strike was a pivotal moment revealing the Nationalist Party-State in the midst of its transition to a corporatist labor system. The union, still inspired by Nationalist rhetoric and promises during the Northern Expedition, expected vastly improved conditions once Chinese took over the Post Office, but soon found that Nationalist politicization and control of the labor movement was their goal. In the months that followed, the union was re-yellowed with the ardently pro-Nationalist Lu Jingshi (陸京士), a close associate of Green Gang leader Du Yuesheng, appointed as leader.

Liu Shufan escaped the strike with his job intact, but decided to take an extended trip to the London Conference of the Universal Postal Union. Before leaving, Liu selected Lin Shi (林實), a councilor in the Ministry with no postal experience, to serve as acting director general.¹¹⁷ Personalism was again behind the appointment. Not only were Liu Shufan and Lin Shi fellow townsmen, but Lin also had the political support of Wang Jingwei's Reorganization Faction and Zhang Qun in the Political Science Clique. Lin, a purported opium smoker, rarely appeared in the Directorate.¹¹⁸ Lin's ineptitude and absences left control of the Directorate to the upper-level executive staff. While the staff struggled internally to maintain its administrative integrity against the politicization of the Nationalists, two new territorial threats emerged.

The success of the Nationalists in taking over the Post Office encouraged two similar attempts in succeeding years by local warlords and their civil counterparts. Immediately after the collapse of Zhang Zuolin's Beijing government in May/June 1928, many of its members fled north to Manchuria. Zhang's assassination by the Japanese in early June, led these newly arrived and out-of-work bureaucrats to begin jockeying for positions in Zhang Xueliang's government.

¹¹⁷ Ju yu di 220 hao, youzheng zongban Liu Shufan, daili huiban Xilesi (Directorate instruction no. 220, D.G. Liu Shufan, acting Co-D.G. Shields), 15 February 1929 in SHAC137.288-1.

¹¹⁸ Huo, "Huiyi Guomindang shiqi," 93-94.

Since there were pre-existing provincial governments in the three northeastern provinces, many of the new arrivals began scheming to take over existing institutions like the post office outside the provincial government's control. The attempted takeover of the two Manchurian postal districts was spearheaded by several high-level officials of the former Beijing Ministry of Communications, particularly Li Yuhua (李毓華), the former Director General of Posts and new Superintendent of Posts for the Three Eastern Provinces, and Chang Yinhuai (常蔭槐), a former deputy director of the Ministry and recently appointed civil governor of Heilongjiang. In the fall of 1928, Li and Chang began making a series of demands to Mukden Postal Commissioner F. Poletti, including a monthly subsidy to the Fengtian government and space in the Head Office for Li and his staff. Poletti refused and Chang threatening to fire the two northeastern postal commissioners. Poletti reported the threat to Nanjing where the Nationalists and Zhang Xueliang were negotiating for union of the country.¹¹⁹ When the union was made in January 1929, Zhang Xueliang ordered Chang and Li to stop harassing the Post Office. Having been stymied in his effort to take over the Post Office, Li now focused on the introduction of a new parcel post tax that would, he told his superiors, provide significant sums to the provincial treasury. After another series of confrontations, Li finally forced his way into the Head Office with a police escort and forcibly took control of some rooms for the new parcel post tax offices. A few days later Li Yuhua requested a conference with Poletti to discuss how much money the new tax would raise. When Poletti reported a yearly total of only \$500,000, Chang Yinhuai's representative exclaimed "is that all!"¹²⁰ Shortly thereafter, Zhang Xueliang executed Chang Yinhuai, fired Li Yuhua, and abolished the parcel post tax. Chang was not executed for his

¹¹⁹ "S/O Nos. 20-23, Mukden Postal Commissioner Poletti to D. G. Liu Shufan, 1, 4 December 1928 in SHAC137.2481-3.

¹²⁰ S/O Nos. 28, 29, 31, 35, Mukden Postal Commissioner Poletti to D. G. Liu Shufan, 11, 14, 21, 29 December 1928 in SHAC2481-3.

interference with the post office, but it was portrayed by Zhang Xueliang as one factor in Chang's efforts to block the unification with the Nationalists.

The second challenge to the territorial unity of the postal service came in the spring of 1930 when the warlords Yan Xishan and Feng Yuxiang were building a coalition of Anti-Jiang Jieshi political and military forces. Joined by the leftist Reorganizationist and rightist Western Hills factions, Yan and Feng formed the Enlarged Conference of the Guomindang with its seat of government in Beijing to challenge Jiang's Nationalist Government for control of China in what would become the Anti-Jiang War of 1930.¹²¹ In the run-up to the military showdown, Yan seized most Nationalist government offices in his provinces, the telegraph and telephone exchanges, and shut down pro-Nationalist newspapers. He also wanted to seize the customs houses and post offices in north China. In late April 1930, Yan and Feng, assisted by the British adventurer Bertram L. Simpson (Putman Weale) and former postal commissioner L.C. Arlington, the "turncoat" who recognized the Republican revolutionaries back in 1911, began negotiations to take over the Customs House. When Hayley Bell, the customs commissioner, bungled the negotiations Simpson took the Tianjin Customs House establishing an independent customs administration.¹²² In this midst of these events, Yan Xishan also despatched a delegation to negotiate with Beiping Postal Commissioner F. A. Nixon for control of the Beiping and Tianjin post offices. Unlike Bell, who simply abandoned his post, Nixon wore down Yan's representatives with his arguments. Nixon hammered on the standard arguments against dividing postal districts emphasizing that no single district could actually produce a surplus because of the overlapping fiscal responsibilities shared by all. "Any break in any part of the scheme," Nixon explained, "throws the whole machine out of gear." Nixon also suggested that

¹²¹ James Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-hsiang* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1966), 265-67.

¹²² For a detailed discussion of the Tianjin Customs takeover, see: Brunero, *Britain's Imperial Cornerstone*, 119-31.

the Post Office would continue to function as usual no matter who ruled the local area, “it has always been the policy of the Service to be absolutely non-political, and to carry out its work under one or half a dozen governments under one central administration, which keeps entirely clear of politics.”¹²³ In the face of such resistance, Yan’s representative agreed that dividing the postal administration was unnecessary.

Having fended off two attempts to divide the Directorate, the foreign and Chinese postal suddenly found themselves facing the return of Liu Shufan to the Directorate in early 1930. Upon returning from his “research trip,” Liu and Minister Wang Boqun attempted to dismantle the financial foundation of the Directorate. In December 1929, Wang Boqun had politically maneuvered himself into the presidency of the China National Aviation Corporation and would soon sit on the Board of Directorates Eurasia Aviation Corporation, where he was joined by Liu.¹²⁴ The two relatives not only guaranteed lucrative airmail contracts to the airlines, but also substantial subsidies directly from the Post Office to the airline companies.¹²⁵ More damaging to the Directorate, Liu orchestrated the creation of a new Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks (郵政儲金匯業總局) in February 1930, to which Wang appointed him Director General.¹²⁶ The new D.G. of P.R. & S.B.’s sole purpose appeared to be to siphon off savings and remittance funds while requiring the Directorate General of Posts to actually handle all transactions. It was generally understood by the postal staff that Liu and Wang’s move was designed to circumventing the Post Office’s independent system of accounting allowing them

¹²³ “S/O No. 93, Beijing Postal Commissioner Nixon to D. G. of Posts, 26 May 1930 in SHAC137.2478-1.

¹²⁴ Wang and Liu’s relationship with the aviation companies is discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

¹²⁵ On the relationship between the Post Office and the airline industry, see Chapter 4.

¹²⁶ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongyu di 328 hao, di 331 hao, daili youzheng zongban Lin Shi, youzheng huiban Duofusen (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, Circular instruction nos. 328 and 331, acting D.G. Lin Shi, Co-D.G. Tollefsen), 27 February and 13 May 1930 in SHAC137.288-2.

access to postal funds.¹²⁷ When postal employees criticized Liu for stealing postal funds, he had a histrionic nervous breakdown, but managed to recover in time to take over the new Directorate. As a later Director General wrote, Liu “lost a bone, put picked up some fatty meat.”¹²⁸

Frustrated with the financial impact of the airline contracts and subsidies and the creation of the Directorate General of Postal Remittance & Savings Banks, the upper- and lower-level postal staff launched the “protect the postal foundation” movement (鞏固郵基運動). Both Director General Liu Shufan and Minister Wang Boqun quickly resigned their positions before the movement reached its crescendo in May 1932.¹²⁹ The movement’s organizing committee demanded the abolition of the D.G. of P.R. & S.B., the cession of all airline subsidies, enforcement of the original postal civil service examination system, and that the Ministry only use postal funds for postal purposes. When movement representatives were rebuffed by the Ministry, the Shanghai Postal Workers’ Union and Postal Employees’ Association both declared a strike on 22 May 1932. In the days following, postal workers struck in dozens of cities across the country.¹³⁰ The postal workers’ strike lasted five days and paralyzed communications throughout the country. The magnitude of the strike and the unusual demands by the workers called for a strong government response. Qian Chunqi (錢春祺), who had been named Director General of Posts to replace Liu, and Long Dawen (龍達文), postal secretary in the Ministry of Communications, were both immediately fired and detained for “instigating” the strike. After a series of negotiations, the government agreed to the formation of a special Postal Economic System Research Committee made up of civil leaders and Nationalist Party heavyweights, which

¹²⁷ Huo and Lou, “Youzheng chujin huiye ju jianwen,” 125-26.

¹²⁸ On Liu’s breakdown, see: *North China Herald*, 9 September 1930; Huo, “Huiyi Guomintang shiqi,” 93-94.

¹²⁹ Wang and Liu both resigned in January 1932.

¹³⁰ The sources on the 1932 postal workers’ strike are numerous. The best at situating it within the larger postal workers movement is: *Shanghai youzheng zhigong yundong shi* (The history of the Shanghai postal service labor movement) (Beijing: Zhonggongdang shi chubanshe, 1999). In English: *North China Herald*, 24 & 31 May 1932.

eventually recommended amalgamating the two Directorates, which occurred in March 1935.¹³¹

The protect the postal foundation movement and the May 1932 strike shows the postal workers had internalized the desire to be “free from and above politics,” meaning free from the politics of the National Government, seeing it as vital to showing there were “men of repute” running the Post Office.¹³²

The strike had been widely seen as embarrassing to the National Government since it shut down communications across the country and required a star-studded negotiating team to resolve it. Not only were strikes by public workers forbidden by law, but Lu Jingshi and the other Nationalist union leaders in the Post Office, who were supposed to support the government, sided with the workers to defend the administrative and financial integrity of the Service. Although Liu Shufan appeared to have resigned in the nick of time, the Nationalists allowed a corruption case to go forward against him and his replacement. The Examination Yuan convicted both men of embezzling funds.¹³³ The strike and its aftermath cleaned out the incompetent directors general from both Directorates, the Postal Secretary Long Dawen, and, a few months later, contributed to the cashiering of the Minister of Communications Chen Mingshu.

¹³¹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongyu di 381 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular instruction no. 381, D.G. Guo Xinsong), 20 March 1935 in SHAC137.288-2.

¹³² Schemes put forward by the Postal Workers' Union and the Postal Employees' Association for the strengthening of the Postal foundation, 1 May 1932, submitted to the Minister of Communications, SHAC127(2).741.

¹³³ “Ti he Youzheng chujin huiye zongju qianhou juzhang Liu Shufan Yang Jianping wubi yingsi weifa shizhi an” (The impeachment case against the successive Directors General Liu Shufan and Yang Jianping of the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks for embezzlement and irregularities in the course of their duties), *Jiancha yuan gongbao* (Gazette of the Control Yuan) 8: 20 (August-October 1933): 12-26.

“A Truly Modernized Nation”: Zhu Jiahua, Technocracy, and Postal Reform

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in September 1931 was a watershed in the Nanjing decade. While political favoritism predominated in many government appointments prior to the Mukden Incident, the sudden and immediate threat to the territorial unity of the country pushed the Nationalists to re-evaluate their style of governance. In the months ahead, Jiang Jieshi refocused his policies to achieve internal unity and military-industrial development in preparation for a full-scale war against Japan. Purely political ministerial and high-level government appointees were eschewed in favor of more well-qualified technocrats who could undertake the reforms necessary to modernize the country.¹³⁴ Within the Ministry of Communications, this new policy led to the appointment of Zhu Jiahua (朱家驊), a German-educated polymath technocrat as Minister of Communications.

Upon his appointment as Minister of Communication in November 1932, Zhu Jiahua faced a crisis in the Post Office. The politicization of previous directors general, their inept leadership and corrupt practices, coupled with massive floods along the Yangzi, and the loss of the Manchurian districts to the Japanese in 1931/32 resulted in unprecedented postal deficits of 5.8 million in 1931 and 4.1 million in 1932. To tackle these crises, Zhu appointed Xu Changcheng (徐昌成), an exceptional postal expert, to the position of deputy director general, the Frenchman A.M. Chapelain to the vital position of Shanghai Postal Commissioner, and promoted a number of highly-trained foreign and Chinese postal commissioners.¹³⁵ In the

¹³⁴ This is an underlying argument of William Kirby's *Germany and Republican China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), but a more succinct version can be found in his "Technocratic Organization and Technological Development in China: The Nationalist Experience and Legacy, 1928-1953," in *Science and Technology in Post-Mao China*, edited by Denis F. Simon and Merle Goldman (Cambridge: The Council on East Asian Studies, 1989), 23-43.

¹³⁵ Xu held the post of either acting or full Co-Director General from June 1932 until sometime during the latter part of World War II. The appointment of A. M. Chapelain to the important postal commissionership of Shanghai, a

directorship, Zhu appointed two old friends in succession, Huang Naishu (黃乃樞), an experienced, if colorless, postal administrator and Tang Baoshu (唐寶書), one of Zhu's classmates from Germany.¹³⁶ Although Huang and Tang were essentially political appointees, Zhu himself directed the reforms in the Post Office aided by the technical postal staff while Huang and Tang did very little themselves.

During his tenure as Minister from 1932-1935, Zhu Jiahua overhauled the Ministry of Communications through a series of far-reaching reforms. He expanded all communications industries, particularly steam navigation, civil aviation, and telecommunications.¹³⁷ To counteract mounting postal deficits, Zhu immediately ordered a policy of strict retrenchment in postal spending, the retirement of some 1,300 employees, and significant budget cuts in all offices. Zhu also renegotiated contract rates with common carriers, expanded carriage by airmail and motor coach, and shut down the Minxinju private postal firms. Having drastically cut the budget, Zhu extended some postal routes, opened new, cheaper postal establishments, and introduced a wide variety of new services to increase revenue. By the end of 1933, Zhu's policies succeeded in producing a surplus of 1.5 million yuan for the Post Office. Having reversed postal economic trends despite the total loss of the Manchurian districts, Zhu convened a National Postal Conference in 1934 looking for additional ways to expand business.¹³⁸ After

post he continuously held until 1943, may have been the result of an informal agreement between the Directorate and the French government when the foreign Co.-D.G. was eliminated.

¹³⁶ Huang Naishu joined the Post Office in 1902 working his way up to Secretary of General Affairs in the Directorate. He had retired sometime in the early 1930s and was brought back to stabilize the Directorate. Huang had a solid, if unremarkable record as D.G. In December 1933 he attended the Universal Postal Union Congress being temporarily replaced by Tang Baoshu, of the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. Tang and Zhu Jiahua had a close relationship from their time together in Germany. Upon returning, Zhu Jiahua tried to appoint Huang to the position of Postal Secretary, but Huang retired. Tang Baoshu held the directorship with an acting appointment for a few months.

¹³⁷ For Zhu's reforms, see his: *The Ministry of Communications in 1934* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1935) and *China's Postal and Other Communications Services* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937).

¹³⁸ Guomin zhengfu jiaotong bu youzheng si, ed., *Youzheng huiyi huibian* (Collection on the postal conference) (Nanjing: Jiaotong bu, 1934).

the Conference, Zhu introduced a small packet service, ordinary expresses, postage stamp booklets for collectors, started selling newspapers, magazines, and books through the Post Office, and secured an agency contract for the sale of revenue stamps through postal establishments. To reduce the role of the future Directors General, Zhu also empowered all postal commissioners with greater local authority and, shortly thereafter, changed their title to Postal Director (郵政管理局局長) to represent this change.¹³⁹

Having secured the health of the Post Office, Zhu appointed Guo Xinsong (郭心崧) as the new director general in May 1934. Zhu Jiahua and Guo had a personal history together, but Zhu's technocratic leanings led him to select Guo for his expertise in economics, his probity, and loyalty.¹⁴⁰ During his tenure in the Directorate, Guo cultivated excellent relations with the upper-level staff and proved a more than capable administrator during the tumultuous years of World War II in China holding the position of director general until 1942. Guo brought a steady hand to the Directorate and focused on knitting the country together through inland extension. The Northern Expedition and a general decline in the postal economy had slowed inland development to about 800 new offices a year in the late 1920s and early 1930s, but in 1934, Guo launched a new rural expansion movement, particularly to border areas.¹⁴¹ No longer would post offices need to be self-supporting, but extension would occur in poor rural areas so that those places might “develop culturally and commercially” by being linked through the state.¹⁴²

Between 1934 and 1937, the Post Office opened a record number of new rural offices each year:

¹³⁹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling di 706 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, D.G. Guo Xinsong, circular no. 706), 27 April 1935 in SHAC137.288-1.

¹⁴⁰ The two met while on the faculty at Zhongshan University in Guangdong in the late 1920s. In 1930, Guo had moved to National Central University in Nanjing. In November, Zhu was appointed Chancellor of the university. When student protests broke out against Zhu, Guo defended Zhu and was instrumental in defusing the protests. After retiring from the Post Office, Guo held several academic positions finally taking a professorship at Tokyo University after 1949. He died in Tokyo in 1979.

¹⁴¹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1600 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular memo no. 1600), 27 June 1935 in 137.6284-2.

¹⁴² *RWCPO, 1934/35*, 1.

3,609 in 1934, 5,106 in 1935, and an all-time high of 18,413 in 1936. Coupled with its new rural offices, the Post Office also introduced rural free delivery across the country so that “all places in China are finally drawn into the postal net.”¹⁴³ On the eve of World War II, there were 72,690 post offices tied together through a network of 400,000 miles of routes.

The Post Office’s non-political identity, bureaucratic efficiency, and public service orientation helped provide administrators and lower-level staff members with enough corporate solidarity they were able to resist the effects of the Nationalists’ politicization. The Post Office’s carefully constructed identity as a non-political “impartial” institution working above politics was partially tarnished by the Nationalists appointment of a series of incompetent party representatives who threatened the financial stability of the Directorate. Concentrated resistance by upper-level staff and two strikes by purportedly corporatized postal labor unions, however, defended the postal base. The Post Office did not recover complete bureaucratic autonomy in the early 1930s, but after weathering a series of crises, the appointment of one of the most well-known technocrats of the Republican era, Zhu Jiahua, brought much needed stability to the Directorate, which was carried on into World War II by Director General Guo Xinsong.

*“The Post Office Alone Retained Her Integrity”: The Chinese Post Office and Japan*¹⁴⁴

From the Mukden Incident in September 1931 to the victory in the War of Resistance in 1945, the Directorate’s primary goal was to preserve some semblance of territorial integrity in the face of constant Japanese aggression. One of the keys to the Directorate’s success during this period was using foreign postal directors, protected by extraterritoriality and international law, as a

¹⁴³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1486 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular memo no. 1486), 21 January 1935 in SHAC137.6284-1; Directorate General of Posts, *Postal Compendium* (Shanghai: Supply Department of the Directorate General of Posts, 1936) in SHAC127.6223.

¹⁴⁴ *RWCPO, 1931/32*, 1.

brake on Japanese aggression. The success of the Post Office in maintaining control in Manchuria longer than any other Nationalist institution significantly contributed to a major policy shift by the Nationalist Government. During the Manchurian crisis, the Nationalists suddenly abandoned negotiations to abrogate the Unequal Treaties, which had been moving forward successfully up to 1931. After 1931, the Nationalist pursued an unstated policy of using foreign-controlled international settlements, concessions, and even individual foreigners as “islands” of economic strength and resistance to Japanese aggression.¹⁴⁵ In concert with using foreigners and their settlements against the Japanese, the Post Office, like the Nationalist Government in general, also pursued a policy of negotiated settlements with Japan in Manzhouguo and during World War II. This combination allowed the Directorate to maintain postal connections with Manzhouguo from 1935 to 1941 and with the Japanese occupied zones during World War II from 1937 to 1943.

The Japanese invaders of Manchuria in the fall of 1931 almost immediately took over most Nationalist government offices and institutions, but could not dislodge the two foreign postal commissioners in Manchuria. Protected by extraterritorial privilege, the postal commissioners defended the Post Office from Japanese military forces allowing the Nationalist Directorate to maintain control over postal affairs. The Japanese harassed and murdered some postal employees, but hesitated to seize the post offices because of their concern over the international implications of arresting or executing the foreigner commissioners. Although every other Nationalist government institution had withdrawn from Manchuria by the time the Japanese formally established the state of Manzhouguo on 1 March 1932, the Chinese Post Office continued to exist. The Manzhouguo Ministry of Communications eventually notified the

¹⁴⁵ W. R. Fishel, *The End of Extraterritoriality in China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1952), 197, 216.

foreign commissioners that Manzhouguo would take control of the post offices on 1 April.¹⁴⁶ The commissioners responded by secretly sending all funds, stamps, archives and other valuable items south of the Great Wall through foreign companies and banks, but they refused to leave by the deadline. Japanese and Manzhouguo authorities fell back on all the old schemes trying to trick the commissioners into recognizing the new government or physically intimidate them, but their efforts all failed.¹⁴⁷ The foreign commissioners were still operating all post offices in Manchuria in July 1932 when the Ministry decided continued operations were untenable. Later that month, the Directorate ordered the closure of some 2,800 post offices in the Northeast. Shortly thereafter, the Nanjing Ministry of Communications announced a postal blockade of Manzhouguo.

In the months prior to the postal blockade, Jiang Jieshi and Wang Jingwei began pursuing a policy of negotiated settlements with the Japanese.¹⁴⁸ Over the next five years, the Nationalists would sign an armistice ending the Shanghai War (1932), the Tanggu Truce (1933), and the He-Umezu (1935), and Qin-Doihara Agreements (1935). The least known of these settlements was the reopening of postal communications with Manzhouguo. The impetus for lifting the postal blockade came in mid-1934 when the Universal Postal Union, the international governing body for postal issues, decided to allow the transmission of mail between Europe and East Asia on the Trans-Siberian Railroad, which passed through northern Manzhouguo thus breaking the Nationalists' postal blockade.¹⁴⁹ After the Postal Union made its decision, the League of Nations passed its own resolution allowing mail to pass through Manzhouguo, but clearly indicated that

¹⁴⁶ *NCH*, 12 April 1932

¹⁴⁷ *NCH*, 28 June 1932.

¹⁴⁸ So Wai Chor, "The Making of the Guomindang's Japan Policy, 1932-1937: The Roles of Chiang Kai-shek and Wang Jingwei," *Modern China* 28: 2 (April 2002): 213-252.

¹⁴⁹ During the postal blockade of Manzhouguo, international mails from East Asia were sent on the slower Suez Canal route. You Yu, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Dongbei hui fu tongyou" (History of the Chinese postal service: The re-opening of the Northeast to postal communication), *Youzheng yanjiu* "Postal Research Quarterly" 55 (March 1994): 168-69.

postal relations did not violate the international non-recognition policy. The National Government protested the decision, but Jiang Jieshi also realized the League had given him political cover to reopen postal relations with Manzhouguo.¹⁵⁰

In mid-August 1934, Jiang met with Huang Fu (黃郛), the chairman of the Beiping Political Affairs Council who had negotiated the Tanggu Truce, to design an approach towards Japan on the postal issue. Although there is no record of their conversation, they apparently agreed to use one of Wang Jingwei's newest protégés, Gao Zongwu (高宗武), to be their political front man.¹⁵¹ Gao, barely out of college, had come to Jiang's attention with a series of articles on Japan published in the Nationalists' *Central Daily* (中央日報). Although invited to be one of Jiang Jieshi's personal secretaries, Gao preferred to work with Executive Yuan President and Foreign Minister Wang Jingwei, who was crafting China's broad policy towards Japan. With Wang's recommendation, Gao became acting head of the Asia Bureau in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the most important post for dealing with Japan. Gao's first mission was as political representative on the negotiating team for establishing postal relations with Manzhouguo while Yu Xianglin (余翔麟), a commissioner with great experience in complex postal issues, was the Directorate's representative.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Wu Dongzhi, ed., *Zhongguo waijiao shi: Zhonghua minguo shiqi, 1911-1949* "The Diplomatic History of China: The Period of the Republic of China, 1911-1949 (Henan: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1990) , 312-15; *NCH*, 18 May 1934.

¹⁵¹ Gao was born in Yueqing, Zhejiang, in 1905. In 1931 he graduated from Kyūshū Imperial University and returned to China to take up a professorship at the Central Political Academy. Known for his writing on Japanese affairs, Jiang Jieshi chose Gao to serve as a commissioner with the National Defense Planning Committee in November 1932. In May 1934, Gao transferred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as acting head of the Asia Bureau of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as well as Japanese Section Chief. In May 1935 he became the official head of the Asia Bureau. He took part in many negotiations with the Japanese throughout the mid to late 1930s. In November 1938 Gao became the leading Chinese negotiator meeting with Japanese officials to orchestrate the defection of Wang Jingwei. In 1940, realizing that Wang's Peace Government would fail, Gao fled to Chongqing with the terms of Wang's agreement with the Japanese.

¹⁵² Yu Xianglin served as an acting postal commissioner during the Destelan years, joined the Southern Directorate during the Northern Expedition, and then became one of the Nationalist Directorate's main postal experts.

The negotiations started on late September in Beiping and would last until early January 1935. The two sticking points in the talks were the nature of the relationship between the Directorate and its Manzhouguo counterpart and whether the name “Manzhouguo” would be allowed on postage stamps and other postal ephemera sent into China. Not wanting to recognize the legality of Manzhouguo in any way, Gao Zongwu adamantly pushed for a private third-party business to handle mail exchanges between the two administrations. The Japanese, however, remained steadfast in their demand for direct relations.¹⁵³ On 30 October, Jiang Jieshi fearing the negotiations might break down left his forward headquarters in his fifth bandit suppression campaign against the Communists to fly to Beiping to meet with Gao and Yu. Jiang ordered them to abandon the idea of using a third party. On 7 November, Jiang’s National Defense Committee passed the “New Scheme for the Postal Connection Negotiations” (通郵談判新方案) formally rejecting the use of a special business organization to handle postal exchanges. Wang Jingwei and Gao Zongwu, who both understood the Japanese better than Jiang, ignored Jiang’s directive and continued pressing for an ambiguous institution like a privately-run postal agency (郵務代辦所) with a name such as the Oriental Minxinju (東方民信局). They believed such an institution might satisfy the Japanese because it was part of the Directorate’s postal network, but privately owned. A week later, Jiang flip-flopped approving the idea.

The negotiations reconvened in mid-November. The Chinese side presented their postal agency idea, but the Japanese continued demanding direct relations between the two postal administrations. Negotiations broke down once again. Three days later, both sides appeared more flexible. The Japanese agreed to the establishment of a third-party postal agency, if its name did not appear in any official records of the negotiating sessions. Gao, however, feared

¹⁵³ Shen Yunlong, *Huang Yingbai xiansheng nianpu changpian* (Chronicle of Mr. Huang Yingbai [Huang Fu]) (Taibei: Lianjing chuban shiye gongsi, 1976), 802-03.

that without the agency's name in the official record, the Japanese would later claim direct relations between the two states had been established. At this point, Huang Fu intervened ordering the Chinese negotiators to accept the Japanese demands, but the negotiators hesitated unsure who gave Huang Fu permission to change policy. Jiang had ordered the change, but had asked Wang Jingwei to inform Huang to distance himself from the negotiations. To strengthen his control over the negotiations, Wang also despatched another of his protégés, Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Tang Youren (唐有壬), to carry on the talks.¹⁵⁴ On 23 November, both sides held the final talks.¹⁵⁵ Tang ultimately compromised allowing the record of minutes to state that postal connections would be between the postal administrations of the two sides through “exchange offices” (轉遞機關). The Japanese, however, pressed for a clearer statement on direct relations. After a grueling all-night session, the two sides reached an unusual compromise. The official records of the negotiations kept by both sides would be purposefully inconsistent – the Chinese records could show relations through a third-party intermediary while the Japanese version would stress direct relations. Both sides agreed to show their respective governments their own record of the talks, but not to make any of the records public.¹⁵⁶ On 25 November Tang Youren gave the Chinese version of the agreement to Wang Jingwei for presentation to the Political Conference of the Central Executive Committee and the National Defense Conference, both of which accepted the agreement.

From the postal perspective, the agreement represented a victory. The Directorate was not forced into direct relations with the Manzhouguo postal administration, but had the Tianjin Head Post Office sign a contract with a retired postal employee named Huang Zigu (黃子固),

¹⁵⁴ Tang Youren, a native of Liuyang in Hunan, was a Japanese-educated bureaucrat. He was the son of the famous late Qing revolutionary martyr Tang Caichang (唐才常). Tang Youren was assassinated by an unknown assailant on 25 December 1935.

¹⁵⁵ Wu, *Zhongguo waijiao shi*, 313-15.

¹⁵⁶ Shen, *Huang Yingbai xiansheng nianpu*, 810-15.

who was authorized to open exchange offices (匯通轉遞局) in Shanhaiguan and Gubeikou for transferring mails to and from Manzhouguo. Huang would not be an official employee, but would receive a commission on the amount of mail handled like other postal agencies. Both sides also agreed that Manzhouguo would only use stamps without the word “Manzhouguo” or any derivation thereof; postal cancellers would use the English rendering of place names; and, documents exchanged between the two administrations would use Gregorian calendrical dates.¹⁵⁷ On 10 January 1935 postal connections started and continued smoothly until 1941.

Lonely Islanders: Foreign Postal Directors and Occupied Postal Districts, 1937-1945

In the months following the Marco Polo Bridge Incident on 7 July 1937 that started World War II in Asia, the Directorate began crafting a policy based on the initial experience of the foreign postal directors in Manchuria and the use of intermediary institutions in the negotiated settlement to reopen postal connections with Manzhouguo. As the Japanese invasion began, the Directorate ordered most employees in the northern and eastern postal districts to flee inland, but reopen operations in the nearest free area adjacent to the occupied zones. In each of the occupied postal districts, the Directorate had left behind a skeleton staff controlled by a foreign postal director. As in Manchuria in 1931/32, the Japanese did not arrest or execute foreign postal staff for fear of involving the other foreign powers.¹⁵⁸ With foreigners in control of occupied postal districts, the

¹⁵⁷ Confidential S/O No. 1 (Special) Tianjin, Letter from Guo Xinsong to V. W. Stapleton-Cotton, Commissioner, Tianjin, 31 December 1934 in SHAC137.2583 ; Draft Circular Memo No. 11 (Translation): Mail Matter and parcels for the Three Eastern Provinces and Jehol to be accepted from 10th January and 1st February 1935 respectively and transmitted through Hui T’ung Transport Bureau, directing in SHAC137.2251-18.

¹⁵⁸ The foreign postal directors who maintained territorial control over their districts from July 1937 to the early 1940s were F. Poletti (Beiping), E. Nordstrom (Ji’nan), J. McLorn for the P.R. & S.B. (Shanghai), W. Stapleton-Cotton (Hangzhou), E. Caretti (Tianjin), V. Smith (Hankou), A. M. Chapelain (Shanghai), W. O. Murray (Hong Kong), J. Jouvelet (Haiphong), J. N. Greenfield at the Supply Dept. (Shanghai), C.E. Molland (Guangzhou), H. S. Kierkegaard (Fuzhou), W. W. Ritchie (Nanjing), and F. L. Smith (Shanxi).

Directorate was able to retain most of its control and keep mail moving between the occupied zones and Free China throughout most of the war.

The Japanese and collaborator governments, including Wang Kemin's North China Provisional Government in Beijing and Liang Hongzhi's Reformed Government in Nanjing, would not remove foreign postal directors, but did everything in their power to harass and interfere with their work. Wherever possible the Directorate had shifted the location of Head Offices in the occupied zones into foreign-administered concessions or settlements to reduce interference, but the collaborator governments still had enough reach to force the foreign directors to adjust postal policy to suit Japanese desires, make them accept Japanese deputy directors, and frequently cut off communications and the flow of funds between the occupied districts and the Directorate.

When the Japanese and collaborator governments strenuously objected to the postal directors constantly referencing the Directorate when sensitive questions arose, the Kunming Directorate, it had moved in June 1938, authorized the creation of "General Affairs Offices" (辦事處) in every occupied postal district in March 1939. The General Affairs Offices usually existed only on paper and served as an intermediary between the Head Post Offices in the occupied zones and the Kunming Directorate. When the Japanese pressed postal directors of Head Post Offices on certain changes in policy, the foreign directors then contacted the Kunming Directorate through the General Affairs Offices. The General Affairs Offices, with its purposefully ambiguous name, also served as links between postal districts in the occupied zones. In Shanghai, the Directorate appointed postal director A.M. Chapelain as the director of the Shanghai General Affairs Office to oversee postal operations in Japanese-occupied areas of

Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Anhui.¹⁵⁹ From the Beiping General Affairs Office, Director Poletti administered the districts of Beijing, Shanxi, and West Henan. The Directorate also named Hebei Postal Commissioner Caretti as director over East Henan, Shandong, and Hebei. In other cases, such as in Guangdong and Fujian, the General Affairs Offices were physical places established in nearby free areas serving as exchange offices between the head offices in occupied Guangzhou and Fuzhou and the Kunming Directorate.¹⁶⁰

From these General Affairs Offices, the foreign directors tried to maintain as much control for the Kunming Directorate as possible while still maintaining cordial relationships with Japanese authorities through the regular Head Post Offices. For example, in December 1939, Chapelain signed an official agreement with the Japanese Field Post Office for the mutual exchange of mail, used commemorative postal daters celebrating the establishment of Wang Jingwei's government, flew the flags of Manzhouguo, the Empire of Japan, and the Peace Government over post offices, and officially referred to the occupied zones as the "peace area."¹⁶¹ In exchange, many of the Head Post Offices in the occupied zones received subsidies for working expenses from local Japanese military authorities.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongdaidian di 457 hao (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular mail telegram no. 457), 8 February 1939 in SHAC137.6275-2; S/O No. 1, Shanghai Banshichu Director Chapelain to Kunming D.G. Guo Xinsong, 2 March 1939 in SHAC137.5705. A.M. Chapelain (1884-1944) joined the Post Office in April 1905. He thrived in the Postal Supply Department, where he served from 1916-1923, as an expert in mechanical production. After serving as an acting postal commissioner in several districts, he was appointed to Shanghai as postal commissioner in 1931, a position he continuously held until 1943. He was forced from office by the Japanese in late June 1943 and died in Shanghai in 1944. Chapelain's Service Record can be found in SHAC137.1793-34.

¹⁶⁰ Liang Bujun and Tan Shouyang, "Qujiang xian youdian shihua" (Historical stories about telecommunications in Qujiang county) in *QGGJZXWSZL: YDSL* III: 1295-1301.

¹⁶¹ Circular S/O No. 15, Letter from D. G. of Posts (Shanghai Banshichu), Chapelain, 23 December 1939 in SHAC137.2251-20; Youzheng zongju zhu Hu banshichu gonghan di 11 hao, Zhapeilin (Circular letter no. 11 from D.G. of Posts, Banshichu, Chapelain), 26 March 1940, Youzheng zongju zhu Hu banshichu gonghan di 38/278 hao, Zhapeilin (Circular letter no. 38/278 from D.G. of Posts, Banshichu, Chapelain), 6 May 1941, and Youzheng zongju zhu Hu banshichu gonghan di 62/575 hao, Zhapeilin (Circular letter no. 62/575 from D.G. of Posts, Banshichu, Chapelain), 29 November 1941, both in SHAC137.5683.

¹⁶² Letter from Acting Hankou Postal Director Tao Gongchen to Elmer C. Ling, Manager of the P.R. & S.B., Shanghai, 16 January 1943 in SHAC137.5619; S/O No. 311, Hankou Banshichu Director Dao Kong Zung to Shanghai Banshichu Director Chapelain, 15 December 1942 in SHAC137.5720.

To maintain connections with the outside world, the Directorate established two special offices. In the British crown colony of Hong Kong, the Directorate created the Hong Kong Sorting Office of the Guangzhou Post Office (廣州郵局駐港分信處) under the administration of W. D. Murray, a British subject, in early 1939. The office was in charge of transmitting mails and funds from abroad into Free China and received mails from within China and exchanged them with the Hong Kong Post Office for transmission abroad.¹⁶³ When Hong Kong fell to the Japanese in late December 1941, the Kunming Directorate opened a new international route through French Indo-China by creating an Exchange Office in Haiphong (海防郵件轉運處), controlled by the Frenchman J. Jouvelet, which served the same functions of the Sorting Office until early 1943.

In March 1940, Wang Jingwei returned to Nanjing and established his new Nationalist “Peace” Government, which incorporated the other two collaborator governments. Although Wang envisioned that his new government would have actual power, the Japanese who had sponsored its creation hesitated to allow Wang’s government to actually undertake administration in the occupied zones. Although both Wang Kemin and Liang Hongzhi’s governments had their own Directorates General of Posts, they failed as actual administrative bodies. Wang’s new government continually pressed the Japanese for the establishment of a new Nanjing-based Directorate. In August 1940, the Japanese Embassy in Shanghai, which had been acting as a “buffer state” between Chapelain and Wang’s Nanjing government, met with Shanghai Postal Director Chapelain asking him to accept an appointment from the Nanjing Ministry of Communications, if it established a Directorate, and accept its orders. Chapelain accepted the terms understanding that he would be now serving two masters, but considered

¹⁶³ D.G. Mail Telegram, No. 580, D. G. Guo Xinsong to Guangzhou H.O., 28 December 1938 in SHAC137.5033; Notes signed by Kan Wen-sheng, for the International Secretary, undated in SHAC137(5).2635.

maintaining personal control of the eastern districts to have been the essential point.¹⁶⁴ To have refused to work with the Nanjing government “would be suicidal,” he wrote, but suggested the two sides agree that there would be no public evidence of the change and it would be considered an internal affair.¹⁶⁵ In response to the Japanese move, the Kunming Directorate strengthened Chapelain’s authority by creating a new post for him styled “Foreign Deputy Director General” (外副局長) in recognition of his virtually independent control of the east coast districts.

Chapelain’s new post allowed him greater latitude in negotiating with local Japanese authorities and Wang’s Nanjing government.¹⁶⁶ Despite securing Chapelain’s agreement, the Japanese still refused to grant Wang’s government the power to create its own Ministry of Communications and Directorate General of Posts.¹⁶⁷

Four years into the war, the foreign postal directors began questioning their continual isolation.¹⁶⁸ Cut off from communications with the Kunming Directorate, and with little connection to Chapelain in Shanghai, they felt “actual prisoners” of the Japanese and collaborator governments. Director General Guo Xinsong continued pressing them to “remain at your posts as long as possible” to preserve the territorial unity of the Post Office.¹⁶⁹ Despite Guo’s wishes, some of the foreign postal directors in North China had had enough. In April 1941, they wrote a letter stating their case: “We have been struggling heart and soul to save the

¹⁶⁴ S/O No. 44, Shanghai Banshichu Director Chapelain to Kunming D. G. of Posts Guo Xinsong, 14 September 1940 in SHAC137.5705.

¹⁶⁵ S/O No. 26, Shanghai Banshichu Director Chapelain to Kunming D.G. Guo Xinsong, 22 November 1939 and Confidential S/O No. 53, Shanghai Banshichu Director Chapelain to Kunming D.G. Guo Xinsong, 30 November 1940, both in SHAC137.5705.

¹⁶⁶ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongdaidian di 1361 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts circular mail telegram no. 1361, D.G. Guo Xinsong), 21 October 1940 in SHAC137.6275-8.

¹⁶⁷ Gerald E. Bunker, *The Peace Conspiracy: Wang Ching-wei and the China War, 1937-1941* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 236.

¹⁶⁸ Letter from Beiping Postal Director Poletti and Tianjin Postal Director Caretti to Yu Xianglin, 21 September 1938 in SHAC137(5).2832.

¹⁶⁹ Memorandum written by Postal Directors Poletti, Wu Tao, and A.O. Hyland to Director General Guo Xinsong, 24 February 1941 and Letter from Director General Guo Xinsong to Postal Directors Caretti, Poletti, and Nordstrom, 1 April 1941, both in SHAC137(5).2832.

Service and maintain it united,” but “we have reached the very end of our tether” because of “the inferno in which we are compelled to work.”¹⁷⁰ With no end to the war in sight, some of the foreign postal directors began retiring in the summer of 1941, others shortly after the outbreak of the broader Pacific War in December, but a few stayed on and continued to fight.

For the foreign directors still at their posts in early 1943, external events soon forced them from office. In the fall of 1942 American and British representatives met to decide how to sustain Nationalist resistance to Japan while also giving the Chongqing government a public relations victory. The Americans and British announced they would be abrogating the Unequal Treaties in January 1943. Before the formal signing, Wang Jingwei’s Nanjing government officially declared war on the United States and Great Britain and announced its own compact with the Japanese for the rendition of all Japanese and other foreign settlements and concessions in China. Shortly thereafter, Mussolini’s Italy and Vichy France also began the process of abrogating their Unequal Treaties as well. With the Unequal Treaties abolished, Wang’s Nanjing Government and the Japanese no longer had to worry about violating the extraterritoriality of the foreign postal directors. In March 1943, the Nanjing Ministry of Reconstruction (南京建設部), which oversaw the newly-established Nanjing Directorate General of Post, fulfilled the agreement made with Chapelain in 1940 to issue its own appointments to all the remaining foreign postal directors in the occupied zones.¹⁷¹ The Nanjing Government then ordered Chapelain and the others to take formal control of all postal districts in the occupied zones. Once that was accomplished, the Nanjing Government dismissed all the

¹⁷⁰ Letter from E. Caretti, F. Poletti, E. Nordstrom, E. A. Cavaliere, A. O. Hyland, J. McLorn, and V. L. D’Alton to D. G. Guo Xinsong, 29 April 1941 in SHAC137(5).2832.

¹⁷¹ Nanjing jianshebu jian zong zi di 446 hao xunling (Instruction no. 446, Nanjing Ministry of Reconstruction), 5 March 1943 as enclosure to Youzheng zongju zhu Hu banshichu gonghan di 234/1858, zhuren Zhapeilin (Shanghai banshichu circular letter no 234/1858, Shanghai Banshichu Director Chapelain), 29 March 1943 in SHAC137.5684.

foreigners from their positions in June 1943.¹⁷² Having lost control to the Japanese, the Chongqing Directorate, having moved from Kunming in late 1942, ordered the General Affairs Offices closed in December 1943 thus breaking all postal ties with the occupied areas.¹⁷³

The sudden and unconditional surrender of Japan in mid-August 1945 caught the Directorate by surprise. Chongqing postal administrators quickly threw together a number of rules and regulations pertaining to the takeover of postal districts in the “reoccupied areas” (收復) controlled by Japan since 1943 as well as the “recovered” (光復) districts in Manchuria and Taiwan.¹⁷⁴ Most of the east coast and northern districts were retaken in September and October 1945.¹⁷⁵ The Directorate returned to Nanjing in November and began operations on Taiwan that same month. On Taiwan, the Directorate worked through a new administrative organ, the Committee for Administering Posts and Telecommunications (郵電管理委員會), which itself simply took over a well-functioning postal service built by the Japanese since 1895.¹⁷⁶ In Manchuria, however, the Directorate divided the region into four new postal districts (Liaoning, Jinzhou, Jilin, and Heilongjiang), but had to contend with de facto control of most of

¹⁷² Youzheng zongju zhu Hu banshichu gonghan di 111 hao, Zhapeilin (D.G. of Posts, Shanghai banshichu circular letter no. 111, Director of banshichu Chapelain), 7 April 1943 in SHAC137.5880.

¹⁷³ Liao Dexiu, “Kangshi xianqu youzheng de weichi yu kanghou jieshou gaikuang” “Wartime Postal Service in Japanese-Occupied Areas and Their Postwar Takeover,” *Jindai Zhongguo* “Modern China Bimonthly” 90 (August 1, 1992), 66.

¹⁷⁴ Jieshou shoufuqu ji guangfuqu youzheng banfa (Method for taking over the posts in the reoccupied and recovered areas); Jiefu lunxianqu youzheng zhaoji cuoshi banfa (Urgent methods for the recovery of the occupied area postal services); Jieshou lunxianqu youzheng buchong banfa (Method for taking over the posts in the occupied areas); Huifu jiefuqu ji guangfuqu ji houfang youyu banfa (Method for resuming postal transportation between the rear areas and reoccupied and recovered zones), all in SHAC137.5584

¹⁷⁵ For the official dates the various districts were reoccupied, see: SHAC137.5366.

¹⁷⁶ For the history of the Japanese Post Office on Taiwan, see: Cao Qian, *Zhonghua youzheng shi Taiwan bian: Zhonghua minguo jianguo qishi nian jinian* (Taiwan collection of the history of the Chinese postal service: The seventieth anniversary of reconstruction in the Republic of China) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1981); Kong Fanmou, “Taiwan Ri ju chuqi youzheng zhi fazhan,” (Postal development on Taiwan during the Japanese occupation) *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) (October 2000, July 2001, and December 2001); Chen Youxin, “Ri zhi qianqi Taiwan youzheng de jianli (1895-1924): Yi youwu yunzuo wei zhongxin,” (The establishment of the Taiwan Post in the early years of the Japanese occupation (1895-1924): With a focus on mail transport) (M.A. thesis, Guoli Taiwan shifan daxue Taiwan shi yanjiusuo, 2009).

the rural areas in Jilin, Liaoning, and Jinzhou by the Communists as well as the total loss of Heilongjiang.

Postal Connections (通郵): The CCP-Held Areas and the Nationalist Post Office

The Directorate circumvented the problem of the occupied zones during WWII by using foreign postal directors and general affairs offices. During the Civil War with the Communists the Directorate was also at the forefront of negotiations to reopen “postal connections” to re-integrate and maintain the territorial unity of the Chinese nation-state. During the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Directorate had made a series of ad hoc mail exchange agreements with the various governments of the Communist base areas thereby recognizing de facto territorial division.¹⁷⁷ One of the important questions for the Directorate as it recovered the post offices in the former Japanese occupied zones was future postal arrangements with Communist-held areas. The Directorate, as with most of the public, assumed the Nationalists would win the Civil War and began pursuing their usual policy of maintaining postal connections between the two sides by relying on their reputation as a “non-political” institution. The gradual breakdown of peace talks and the outbreak of the full-scale war in June 1946, however, created increasing chaos for post offices in the warzone.

During the first year of the Civil War mails continued passing between the two sides with heavy censorship by both governments. Post offices in north and northeast China changed hands many times.¹⁷⁸ In the midst of the see-saw struggle, the Communists captured many members of the postal staff and their offices. Once captured, postal employees were usually sent for “re-

¹⁷⁷ Yuan Wuzhen, “Minzhu geming shiqi Guo-Gong liangqu tongyou de qiyuan jiqi yanbian” (The origin and evolution of postal connections between the Guomindang and Communist areas during the democratic revolution,” *Xi’an youdian xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of Xi’an telecommunications university) 7: 4 (September 2002): 11-12.

¹⁷⁸ For examples of offices changing hands between the belligerents in the Northeast, see: SHAC137(5).8025.

education” through short courses at special schools designed to convert technical personnel into Communist agents. Once re-educated, the employees were sent back to rejoin the Post Office and to begin working for the Communists from the inside of the Post Office.¹⁷⁹ The Communists also stripped the captured post offices of all valuables in case they were retaken by the Nationalists.¹⁸⁰ In reaction to such tactics, the Nationalists ordered a complete communications and economic blockade of Communist-held areas in August 1947. If and when the Communists captured postal staff in the future, they could only be re-employed once their “thinking was checked to ensure its purity.”¹⁸¹ To avoid such incidents, the Directorate ordered all postal staff in areas approached by the Communists to pack up everything of value – stamps, archives, liquid funds – and evacuate.

As the Communists expanded their control over the north and turned the tide of the war in mid-1948, the public began protesting the communications blockade. With public pressure mounting, the Directorate petitioned the Ministry of Communications in early January 1949 arguing that as a “pure service institution” not involved in politics, the Post Office should “meet the needs of the public” by reopening postal connections with the Communist-held areas.¹⁸² A few days later, Jiang Jieshi announced his retirement allowing Acting President Li Zongren to reopen peace talks. During the talks, the Executive Yuan ordered that postal connections could be experimentally made with the Communists. In response, the Directorate ordered all Head Post

¹⁷⁹ Letter from Mr. Kao Chin-tang, employee of Qingdao Post Office to Lieutenant General Albert C. Wedemeyer, 6 August 1947 in SHAC137(5).8019.

¹⁸⁰ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tonghan rentong di 286 hao, daili juzhang Huo Xixiang (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular letter, personnel matters, no. 286, acting D.G. Huo Xixiang), 11 April 1949 in SHAC137.6349.

¹⁸¹ Youzheng chujin huiye ju mihan ren jia tongzi di 154/36258 hao, juzhang Gu Chunfan (D.G. of P.R. & S.B., confidential circular letter, personnel, series 1, no. 154/36258, D.G. Gu Chunfan), 1 October 1948 in SHAC137.5508.

¹⁸² Wang Yuwen, “Jiefang qianxi Guo-Gong liang qu tongyou banli gaikuang” (Mail exchanges between the Communist and Nationalist areas on the eve of liberation), *Lishi dang'an* “Historical Archives” 1 (1989), 120.

Offices to open negotiations with the local Communist postal representatives.¹⁸³ The first connections were made in early February in Jiangsu, Anhui, and Shanghai. Other connections were then made at Beiping, Hebei, Gan-Ning-Qing, Shaanxi, Hubei, and Shanxi.¹⁸⁴

In March 1949, the Directorate despatched a Postal Connections Representatives Team (通郵代表團) to Beiping to negotiate a broader agreement on mail exchanges with the North China Telecommunications Directorate (華北郵電總局), the Communists governing body for postal and telecommunications industries. After several weeks of talks, the two sides produced the “Postal Connections Agreement of the North China Telecommunications Directorate and the Shanghai Directorate General of Posts” (通郵協定).¹⁸⁵ On 27 April, the two negotiating teams officially signed the agreement, which allowed mail exchanges along the entire front and officially reunified China as a single postal area.¹⁸⁶ That same day, however, the Executive Yuan passed a resolution to break off all postal, communications, and remittance exchanges with the Communists.¹⁸⁷ The National Government’s sudden shift resulted from the collapse of the peace talks and the Communists crossing of the Yangzi on April 21. With the Communists approaching Shanghai, the Directorate along with most of the National Government fled to

¹⁸³ Youzheng zongju tongling di 2092 hao, daili juzhang Huo Xixiang (D.G. of Posts, circular no. 2092, acting D.G. Huo Xixiang), 3 February 1949, reprinted in Yuan Fenghua and Lin Yumei, “1949nian Guo-Gong shuangfang juban tongyou tonghui dang’an ziliao xuan” 1949 (Selections of archival material on the handling of mails and remittances between the Guomindang and Communist areas in 1949), *Minguo dang’an* “Republican Archives” 3 (1988), 28.

¹⁸⁴ Youzheng zongju tongling, daili juzhang Huo Xixiang (D.G. of Posts circular, acting D.G. Huo Xixiang), 5 March 1949; Youzheng zongju zhi gequ youzheng guanliju mihan (D.G. of Posts confidential letter to all district head post offices), 10 March 1949, both in Yuan and Lin, “1949nian Guo-Gong shuangfang,” 28-29. For an example of one of these agreements, see: Wang, “Jiefang qianxi Guo-Gong, 121.

¹⁸⁵ Mei Yifan zhi Song Ningyuan han, (Letter from Mei Yifan to Shen Ningyun), 13 April 1949 reprinted in Yuan and Lin, “1949nian Guo-Gong shuangfang, 40.

¹⁸⁶ Tongyou xieding huanwen (Exchanged notes on the Postal Connection Agreement), 27 April 1949; Huabei youdian zongju Shanghai youzheng zongju tongyou xieding (Postal Connection Agreement between the North China Telecommunications Directorate General and the Shanghai Directorate General of Posts) 27 April 1949, both in Yuan and Lin, “1949nian Guo-Gong shuangfang,” 42-44.

¹⁸⁷ Youzheng zongju zhi Jiaotongbu micheng, daili juzhang Huo Xixiang (Confidential petition from the D.G. of Posts to Ministry of Communications, Acting D.G. Huo Xixiang), 3 May 1949; Huo Xixiang zhi Shen Ningyuan han (Letter from Huo Xixiang to Shen Ningyun), 12 May 1949, both in Yuan Fenghua and Lin Yumei, “1949nian Guo-Gong shuangfang,” 44-45.

Guangzhou in late May and then crossed the strait into Taiwan in August. In case the Nationalist forces rallied, the Directorate despatched a single employee, Huang Jiade (黃家德), to Chongqing in October. Huang's duty was to open a small post office and continue printing stamps, which he did until 6 January 1950 when he too fled to Taiwan. With Huang's flight, the Directorate's 54-year effort to maintain the territorial integrity of the country ended.¹⁸⁸

Conclusion

The almost unanimous agreement among scholars that the various states of the late Qing and Republican period were weak, if they existed at all, needs to be revised. The transition from a multiethnic empire to a fledgling Republic dominated by warlords and bandits, to a revolutionary, but conservative Nationalist state controlling only a handful of provinces did mean there was little time for a single state to establish itself, develop its administrative system, and create efficient functional laws. By examining the role of a semi-colonial institution like the Chinese Post Office as one of the only state institutions that survived as an administrative whole throughout the entire period, however, we can observe some stability in the Chinese state in the first half of the twentieth century.

Postal administrators pursued a series of strategies to insulate, protect, and strengthen the institution and the larger state from external disruption and territorial division. By promoting the Post Office as a non-political or impartial institution known as being innovative, efficient, service-oriented, and trustworthy, Théophile Piry and Henri Picard-Destelan helped their

¹⁸⁸ On the moves of the Directorate during the Civil War, see: Xue Pinwen, *Youzheng zuzhi yan'ge* (The evolution of postal service organization) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu, Youzheng zongju, 1966), 7-9. On D.G. stamps bearing 39th Year of the Republic (1950), see: He Huiqing, "Dalu lunxianqu youju yanyong minguo 'sanshijiu' nian youchuo kao" "Postal Daters with the '39th Year of the ROC' Used in Some Communist-Occupied Areas," *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) 1 (September 1991): 57-65.

institution retain administrative autonomy under the Qing and early Republican governments. Other central government institutions recognized this special status of the Post Office. Unable to operate outside the small areas controlled by the Beijing or Nanjing governments, other state institutions asked the Post Office to act “in the capacity of an agent” for them to utilize the routes, offices, and employees of the Post Office to expand their own activities.¹⁸⁹ Over the years, the Post Office sold revenue stamps for the Ministry of Revenue (1913-1928, 1934-1949), transmitted telegrams for the Telegraph Administration (1919-1949), conducted census for the Ministry of Interior (1919, 1920, 1925, 1934, 1935), delivered legal writs for the Department of Legal Administration (1936-1949), sold National Salvation Bonds for the National Military Commission, and held funds throughout the country for the National Treasury (1940-1949).

The greatest challenge to the Post Office came in 1927/28 with the establishment of the Nationalist Government in Nanjing. As it turned out, the Chinese postal staff imbued with a non-political corporate identity successfully fought the Nationalists’ attempts to politicize the Directorate when various directors general attempted to utilize postal receipts for external projects such as funding civil aviation or the creation of a second Directorate. In the early part of the Nanjing decade, then, it was not the foreign Co-Director General nor the postal commissioners, but the upper- and lower-level staff who fiercely defended the institutional and administrative integrity of the Post Office against the Nationalists. In 1931/32, the Manchurian crisis shifted the National Government toward appointing technocrats like Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua who undertook wide-ranging reforms to strengthen communications facilities for the looming war with Japan. Although there were a few threats to the Post Office’s territorial unity prior to the Mukden Incident, the Directorate’s use of foreign postal directors, the creation of a unique class of mediating administrative offices, and an

¹⁸⁹ *RWCPO, 1934-35, 2.*

implicit power sharing agreement with the Japanese allowed the Post Office to successfully preserve much of its territorial unity until the foreign powers abrogated the Unequal Treaties in 1943. The Directorate's wartime accomplishments in maintaining its presence in the occupied zones, unmatched by any other Nationalist government institution, should also force scholars to re-evaluate the Nationalists wartime policy towards the occupied areas. Likewise, the smooth negotiations to open postal connections between the Nationalists and Communists during the Civil War raises new questions about the role of "non-political" state contacts between the two belligerents.

Overall, it is hoped that this chapter will invite scholars to re-evaluate the role of semi-colonial state institutions like the Post Office, the Maritime Customs Service, and the Salt Inspectorate. Setting aside the anti-imperialist perspective allows us to understand these three institutions as unique branches of the Chinese state that not only allowed the government to maintain contacts with Manzhouguo and the occupied areas during World War II, but more importantly provided stability, constancy, and their good offices to the idea and reality of the Chinese government in the broader state-making process.

Chapter 2

Stamping Out the Competition: The National Postal Monopoly and the Process of State-Making

The imperial edict establishing the modern Chinese postal service did not grant the new institution a state monopoly over the mail. Hart had “neither the authority, the appropriation, nor the monopoly which [creating a national postal service] would have carried with it in Western countries.”¹ Confronting the infant Imperial Post Office were six separate postal services serving different constituencies – the government-run postal relay (驛站) and post station (舖) systems for all imperial officials, the Wenbaoju (文報局) for overseas Chinese officials, the Minxinju (民信局) serving Chinese businesses and private individuals, the Qiaopiju (僑批局) transmitting letters and money to and from overseas Chinese, the Municipal Council Local Post Offices (工部書信館) handling mail for the foreign settler communities, and the Foreign Post Offices (客郵) connecting foreigners in China with their home countries. The modern Post Office’s claim to a “birthright” of an “inviolable” monopoly not only brought it into direct conflict with the other postal services, but also other state actors.² In the midst of such clashes, the administrators of the modern Post Office were enacting a specific state-making agenda derived, designed, and externally-inspired by the model of the state in Western Europe and the Americas.³ The Post Office’s pursuit of a national monopoly thus provides an opportunity to explore the nature and processes of state-making as the acquisition of autonomy from and supremacy over other postal services, the occupation of the entire geographically-defined territory of China as the postal monopolist, and attainment of international recognition as sovereign in postal affairs.

¹ *RWCPO, 1921*, 7.

² *Ibid.*, 12.

³ Charles Tilly, ed., *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), Introduction.

Steamed and Pressed: Treaty-Port Local Post Offices and the Imperial Post Office

In 1843, the British established a consular postal agency to serve the fifty expatriates living in the newly-opened treaty port of Shanghai. The Consulate handled mails between Shanghai and Great Britain via Hong Kong. In the early 1860s, the number of resident foreigners living in Shanghai rapidly increased. In response, the British-controlled Hong Kong Post established a Packet Agency (領事代辦郵務) in Shanghai staffed by regular postal employees to reduce the heavy burden on the consular staff. The foreign residents of Shanghai were asked to contribute 2,500 pounds a year to the agency. Shortly thereafter, the Municipal Council began complaining of poor, but expensive service. In mid-1863, the Shanghai Municipal Council decided to establish its own Local Post Office. Over the next 35 years, the Local Post Office system served the expatriate community by handling mails between the open treaty ports in China.

Between the early 1860s and the early 1890s, the Shanghai Municipal Local Post Office gradually opened branches in most of the treaty ports. By 1888, there were Local Post Offices in Shantou, Fuzhou, Xiamen, Wenzhou, Ningbo, Shanghai, Qufu, Dagu, Tianjin, Beijing, and Niuzhuang along the eastern seaboard and offices at Zhejiang, Jiujiang, Nanjing, Wuhu, Hankou, and Yichang on the Yangzi River with another established at Chongqing in the early 1890s.⁴ The Local Post operated according to a subscriber system with expatriate firms paying a flat rate of 55 taels and individuals paying 48 taels per year; by the 1880s the subscriber rate had dropped to thirty taels. Starting in 1865, non-subscribers could also send mail through the system by paying a rate of 4 candareens (about 50 cash) per ounce using the first stamps issued in Chinese

⁴ Reprint of LPO guide in You Yu, “Zhonghua youzheng shi: Keyou, Gongbu shuxinguan” (History of the Chinese postal service: The Foreign and Municipal Council Local Post Offices), *Youzheng yanjiu* “Postal Research Quarterly” 48 (June 1993), 49.

history.⁵ By 1870s, the Local Post Office system was handling around 170,000 letters per year, by the 1880s around 500,000, and by the early 1890s the figure reached 850,000 annually.⁶

In its early years, the Local Post Office system almost always ran a deficit. The majority of the debt came from subscribers posting mail free for their Chinese friends. The Local Post Offices eliminated their debts and increased profits in two ways that would make them vulnerable to the machinations of the Imperial Post Office upon its opening in 1897. To transport their mail, the Local Post Offices relied exclusively on accommodating foreign steamer companies who carried their mails for free. The Local Post Offices also enjoyed the free carriage of their mails to outports when the Customs Post (海關撥駟達書信館) opened in 1879. As the revenues of the Shanghai Local Post Office started to swell, the outport Municipal Councils, Citizen Committees, and some foreign businessmen realized the profits to be had by printing and selling postage stamps to speculators and collectors.

Stamp collecting emerged simultaneously with the British Post Office's introduction of the first penny postage stamp in 1840. The first "craze" struck European and American collectors in the 1860s, and then "philatelicmania" swept the Far East in 1890s.⁷ By the 1890s, postal officials around the world realized they could sell commemoratives, surcharges, or other "rare" stamps to the public at large profits since collectors and speculators would never use the stamps. The desire for rare stamps issued by East Asian post offices even resulted in the death of

⁵ On the history of Shanghai Local Post Office stamps, see: Lu Jiafu, "Zhongguo jingnei zui zao de youzheng: Shanghai gongbujū shuxinguan" (The earliest postal service within China's borders: The Shanghai Municipal Council's Local Post Office), *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) 7 (September 1994): 3-29.

⁶ *RWCPO, 1921*, 107.

⁷ The phrase "philatelicmania" comes from: A.C. Jones, "The Chinese Postal Service," *Consular Reports: Commerce, Manufactures, Etc.* 54: 203 (May 1897), 247.

some collectors. In 1891, the Hong Kong Post issued a commemorative for the colony's 50th anniversary. In the rush to purchase the stamp, two people were crushed to death by the mob.⁸

When the outport expatriate councils realized the profits to be had by manipulating the stamp market, they separated themselves from the Shanghai Local Post system and established their own independent Local Post Offices in 1893-94. Citizen Committees or individual businessmen established Local Post Offices in Xiamen, Hankou, Jiujiang, Zhenjiang, Wuhu, Qufu, Yichang, Fuzhou, Nanjing, and Chongqing . Each of these post offices then began rapidly issuing new stamps.⁹ The Jiujiang LPO, for example, issued 100,000 half cent stamps in 1894, but received orders for 150,000 – in less than three months speculators were selling the stamps worldwide for 20 times their face value.¹⁰ As a journalist for the North China Herald wrote, “the philatelic craze has been a godsend to the treaty ports, which have derived a nice little revenue from the pockets of stamp-collectors in Europe and America.”¹¹ Not to be outdone, the Shanghai LPO issued its own commemorative for the foreign settlement's semi-centennial Jubilee. On the first day of sale, well over 200 foreigners “all pushing, hustling, howling, and some swearing” mobbed the stamp sales window.¹² The Zhenjiang and Wuhu LPOs became notorious for manipulating the market by issuing stamps with intentional errors, overprints, and other mistakes to increase their value.¹³

⁸ Li Yimin, *Zhongguo jiyou shihua* (Historical stories about Chinese philately) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), 13.

⁹ On the history of independent Local Post Office stamps, see: William Rosenberg, *Local Post of China: History-Description-Prices, A Study Based Upon Private Collections* (Shanghai: The Willow Pattern Press, 1940).

¹⁰ Ying-wan Cheng, *Postal Communication in China and Its Modernization, 1860-1896* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University Press, 1970), 58.

¹¹ *NCH*, 5 February 1897.

¹² *American Journal of Philately* cited in Richard W. Pratt, *Imperial China: History of Posts to 1896* (London: Christies Robson Lowe, 1994), 360.

¹³ R.I. Fernandez, “Mail Carriers of China,” *The China Journal* 32: 4 (April 1940), 136-37.

The “death-knell” for the Local Post Offices was sounded with the announcement that an Imperial Post Office would be opened in February 1897.¹⁴ Sir Robert Hart considered the “soi-disant” Local Post Offices to be “an infringement of China’s rights and a violation of a fitting and almost universally recognized State monopoly.”¹⁵ To force the Local Post Offices to close, Hart outfoxed them by “collaring” the interport steamers with an enticing mail carriage contract. The Customs Service required all foreign steamer companies to pay for expensive “special permits” (關憑單) when loading or offloading cargo after 6 pm or on weekends. The companies frequently complained to Hart about this onerous burden and lobbied him to eliminate them. Hart then offered a deal – in exchange for the steamers signing an exclusive carriage contract with the Imperial Post Office, he would refund half their special permit fees – “the bait... was swallowed.”¹⁶ The “Legations in arms,” Hart wrote gloatingly, “irritated by my getting Str. Co’s to refuse to carry any but Imperial mails... I have the whiphand however.”¹⁷ In mid-January 1897, the foreign steamer companies notified the Local Post Offices that starting from 2 February – the official opening of the Imperial Post Office – they would no longer carry LPO mail.¹⁸ “Our Local Post Office,” wrote the Yichang correspondent of the *North China Herald*, “has got its death blow.”¹⁹ All the outport Local Post Offices immediately closed, but the Shanghai Local Post Office managed to survive a while longer by handling intra-city mail. In November, the Imperial Post Office absorbed the Shanghai LPO.

¹⁴ *RWCPO, 1921*, 107.

¹⁵ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 767, Inspector General Robert Hart, Postal No. 28, 13 February 1897 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁶ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 754, Postal No. 20, Inspector General Robert Hart, 9 December 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1; Stanley F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast: Queen’s University Press, Belfast, 1950), 676.

¹⁷ Robert Hart, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, edited by John K. Fairbank, et al (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 1100.

¹⁸ *NCH*, 5 March 1897.

¹⁹ *NCH*, 5 March 1897.

In the brief conflict between the Imperial Post Office and the Municipal Council Local Post Office system, Hart relied on a situational tactic designed to undermine his competitors. The Local Post Offices were vulnerable because they relied on the free carriage of their mail by interport steamers. Without the steamers, the LPOs could only rely on manipulating the stamp market for their profit, but in 1896-1897 the Society for the Suppression of Speculative Stamps banned the sale of all LPO stamps.²⁰ In the end, the Local Post Offices realized that competition with an Imperial Post Office controlling the carriage of mail by modern transportation companies would be futile.

“The Yizhan was not Fought, It was Outrivalled”:

*The Imperial Post Office and the End of the Postal Relay System*²¹

The Imperial Postal Relay and Post Station systems constituted a sophisticated communications network. The imperial postal relay system transmitted vital military and government documents at high rates of speed by horse and provided lodgings for travelling officials and foreign dignitaries. The Post Station system was staffed by walking couriers who carried the vast majority of imperial mail. By the late nineteenth century, a combination of rising costs, rampant corruption, and competition from the Imperial Post Office led late Qing officials across the empire to gradually abandon the postal relay and post station systems in favor of the faster transmission rates and better efficiency of the Imperial Post Office. Late Qing officials, however, were not solely motivated by better facilities for their mail, but were also enticed by the opportunities for speculation offered by a switch to the IPO.

²⁰ *Post Office: A Monthly Journal for Stamp Collectors* 5 (1896), 109.

²¹ The quote comes from *RWCPO, 1921*, 9.

The Board of War administered the Qing dynasty postal relay and post station systems. Within the Board, the Bureau of Communications (車駕清吏司) controlled the day-to-day operations of the Imperial Despatch Office (會同館), the postal relay system, and the post station network. It also distributed all postal tallies (符驗, 勘合, 火牌). The privilege to send documents by mounted courier was strictly limited by these postal tallies which the Bureau only distributed to provincial-level officials, members of the royal family, and high-ranking generals. In addition to transmitting important military-related and time-sensitive government documents, the postal relay system was primarily concerned with housing foreign dignitaries, traveling officials, censors on inspection tours, and candidates in the metropolitan examinations.

The arteries of the Qing postal relay system were the mounted courier routes extending from Beijing throughout the provinces. From 1421 until the end of the Qing dynasty in 1911, the courier routes remained fairly stable.²² Along these arterial routes were some 1,950 courier stations during the Guangxu period (1875-1908). A given postal relay station was the responsibility of the local county magistrate, but often directly managed by a Postal Relay Master (驛丞). The Postal Relay Master oversaw a large, varied staff of salaried labor, but the majority of employees were horsemen (馬夫) and boatmen (水夫). An average relay station seems to have maintained between 20-50 horses of different grades to be used carefully depending on the importance of the mail. Those near water kept between 5-10 “red” boats (紅船) and a lesser number of larger station boats (站船).

²² In the Qing period the Ministry of War ordered the compilation and publication of provincial postal route books, which were published in 1751, 1775, 1802, 1822, and the late 1880s. For a complete description of postal relay routes, including the distances between each station, see: Wang Xiqi, *Yizhan lucheng* (Postal relay routes) (Shanghai: Zhuyi tang, 1877). The best such collection is: *Yizhan lu chengbian* (List of post station routes) (Early Qing edition; reprint: Taibei: n.p., 1982).

The Post Station system knit the empire together with its roughly 14,000 offices. Post stations were responsible for handling the day-to-day communications between outlying areas and county seats as well as between counties and higher levels of the government. Almost all documents sent from counties to Beijing were transmitted through post stations and carried by walking couriers.²³ Post stations were usually fairly small, rustic buildings of just a few rooms. They were established approximately every ten *li* (about 3 miles) apart, although sometimes as distant as 30 *li*, on the main roads in each county. A postmaster (舖司) administered the station and oversaw a staff of anywhere from three to ten spear-carrying post station soldiers (舖兵) who were usually local peasants paid for their services. At the prefectural or subprefectural level the post station administrator (舖長司吏) controlled the operation of the entire system.

Documents traveling between two county seats started at a “Head Post Station” (總舖) usually located outside the main gate of the county government offices. The Head Post Office attached a waybill to each letter with a registration number and blank spaces to affix the name of each courier as well as the time when the document reached each station. The courier would sandwich the document between two boards and wrap it with a piece of cloth to protect the letter from inclement weather and physical damage. When he approached the next station, the courier used a belled-clapper to announce his arrival. The postmaster emerged from the station to receive the letter, affix the time of arrival, and sign the return receipt. The courier then took the return receipt back to his home office.

The imperial postal relay and post station systems were expensive to operate. The Board of Revenue allocated the funds to support to the postal relay system out of the land tax while local governments shouldered the burden of the post station system. In the early nineteenth

²³ Liu, *Zhongguo gudai*, 275.

century, the mounted courier system alone cost roughly 2 million taels out of a total revenue from land taxes of 83 million.²⁴ In the 1880s and 1890s, there was a reduction in allocations to the postal relay system, but its cost was never lower than 1.5 million taels annually.²⁵ By 1902, critics estimated the total cost of the relay and post station systems at 3 million taels a year.²⁶

The traditional postal networks of the Qing dynasty were not only expensive, its critics charged, but painfully slow. Foreign steamers began plying Chinese waters in the 1840s, rapidly increasing the speed information could travel around the country. Railroads and telegraphs were soon introduced as well. Savvy provincial governors and local magistrates living in areas where telegraphs had been established began sending their urgent official correspondence over the wires while others turned to the *Wenbaoju* for faster transmission.²⁷ In the 1880s and early 1890s, Zheng Guanying, Kang Youwei, Li Hongzhang, and Liu Kunyi – all leading reformers at high-levels of the Qing bureaucracy – began proposing the establishment of a national postal service that could utilize such quick means of transport, but supporters of the postal relay system proved too strong. The tipping point for the Qing government was China's defeat in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-95). After the war, the central government established the modern Post Office.

The foreign administrators of the Imperial Post Office knew they faced an uphill battle against entrenched official interest in the postal relay and post station systems. Not only was the budget for the traditional postal systems in the hands of provincial governors and county magistrates – who could spend it as they pleased – but the relay and post station systems also

²⁴ John K. Fairbank and S. Y. Teng, "On the Transmission of Ch'ing Documents" in *Ch'ing Administration: Three Studies*, edited by Fairbank and Teng, 1-35 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 9n.

²⁵ Cheng, *Postal Communication*, 32.

²⁶ Fairbank and Teng, "On the Transmission," 9n.

²⁷ Liu Wenpeng, "Qingdai yizhuan tixi de jindai zhuanxing," "Modern changes in the post route system of the Qing government," *Qing shi yanjiu* "Studies in Qing History" 4 (November 2003), 59.

employed roughly 150,000 workers. Hart's plan was to win the confidence of government officials by developing "along Chinese lines."²⁸ In practice, the idea was to "gradually close the *yizhan* while we expand."²⁹

Starting in the summer of 1898, a small number of reform-minded officials began advocating the absorption of the relay system by the newly-established Imperial Post Office. In his famous 10,000 word memorial, Kang Youwei expressed his belief that the national post office would enrich the country and improve communications for common people.³⁰ Xue Fucheng (薛福成) recommended eliminating the relay stations in concert with railroad development. Li Mengchi (李萌池), assistant Grand Secretary of the Board of Appointments, simply announced that all future documents sent by his Board would be transmitted via the Imperial Post Office – it was simply a matter of "speed." A few governors, such as Yuan Dahua (袁大化) in Xinjiang and Xing Lu (興祿) in Guizhou, understood the significance of the modern post office, but advocated a slow elimination of the relay stations to coincide with the penetration postal facilities into their provinces. Frustrated reform-minded journalists simply asked, "Besides wasting national funds, what other purpose does [the relay system] serve?"³¹ Despite such official protestations, Empress Dowager Cixi refused to eliminate the time-honored postal relay system. The Imperial Post Office represented faster, cheaper, and more efficient service, but who controlled the Imperial Post Office was of grave concern.

²⁸ *RWCPO, 1921*, 6-7.

²⁹ Letter from Postal Secretary Jules van Aalst to I.G. Robert Hart, 20 July 1901 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

³⁰ You Yu, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Cong Haiguan dao Jiaotong bu" (History of the Chinese postal service: From the customs administration to the Ministry of Communication), *Youzheng yanjiu* "Postal Research Quarterly" 52 (June 1994), 143.

³¹ This and the above quotes advocating the elimination of the postal relay system can be found in: Su Quanyou, *Qingmo Youchuanbu yanjiu* (Research into the late Qing Ministry of Posts and Communications) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju), 167-170.

After the disaster of the Boxer Rebellion, Empress Dowager Cixi began the New Policies Reforms. In 1906, the central government reorganized itself creating new Ministries of Posts and Communications (郵傳部), of Foreign Affairs (外務部), and a Department of Customs Affairs (稅務處), among others. The Imperial Post Office followed the Customs Service into the new Department of Customs Affairs, but Postal Secretary Piry began “to entertain certain forebodings.”³² In 1908 and 1909, the Ministry of Posts and Communications made attempts to rent control of the Imperial Post Office away from the foreign-controlled Customs Administration. Both attempts failed, but only delayed what Piry realized was the inevitable. In 1910, the new Minister of Posts and Communications Xu Shichang (徐世昌) began a two-pronged effort to consolidate control over all forms of communications in the country. He battled with the Ministry of War over the postal relay system budget and with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs over Chinese control the Imperial Post Office.³³

While the new Ministry of Posts and Communications jockeyed for control of the Post Office, many Qing officials simply began abandoning the postal relay system. The first territorial officials to shift their correspondence away from the postal relay system did not immediately turn to the Imperial Post Office, but to the Wenbaoju, which will be discussed below. Starting around 1906, the Imperial Post Office began handling all the official correspondence of various newly-established ministries based in Beijing, including the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, of Posts and Communications, of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce (農工商部), and for the Board of Appointments (吏部).³⁴ By late 1910 and early 1911, a number of provincial governors including Zhao Erfeng (趙爾豐) in Sichuan and Feng

³² Mr. Piry’s Note, 17 April 1910 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

³³ Su, *Qingmo Youchuanbu*, 170-80.

³⁴ S/O No. 21/1006, Letter from Postal Secretary T. Piry to Guizhou Postal Commissioner Doodha, 30 November 1910 in SHAC137.1832.

Rukai (馮汝揆) in Jiangxi also decided to send all their official despatches through the Post Office.³⁵ The decision to shift official correspondence to the IPO was not made solely for faster transmission, but also because it provided an opportunity for peculation. In 1911, the Jiangxi Provincial Government drew 75,000 taels from the Board of Revenue for the maintenance of the postal relay system, but then shifted its correspondence to the Post Office where it only paid \$12,000 silver dollars or 8,000 taels in postage.³⁶

While territorial and central government officials started shifting to the Post Office, Minister Xu began the process that would result in nominal Chinese control of the Imperial Post Office. Some Chinese officials like Zhang Zhidong and Liu Kunyi had always been concerned about the foreign control of the Post Office, but not until 1908 when Robert Hart was in semi-retirement did any Chinese government officials take action. In late 1908, Minister of Posts and Communications Chen Bi (陳璧) attempted to place control of the Post Office under his Ministry, but his attempt failed when he became embroiled in a corruption scandal and was cashiered.³⁷ Other Ministers of Posts and Communications made similar rumblings about taking over the Post Office. When Acting Inspector General Sir Francis Aglen decided to separate the Customs and Posts the Ministry seized its chance.

On 28 May 1911, Officiating Inspector General Aglen and Postal Secretary Piry agreed to separate the Posts from the Customs. In concert with the separation, the new Minister of Posts and Communications, Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣懷), petitioned the throne to move the Imperial Post Office into his ministry.³⁸ The throne acceded. The transfer was part of Sheng's larger "Plan of

³⁵ Postal Secretary's Memorandum: Kiangsi Yamen Covers, treatment of, 7 April 1911 in SHAC137.1832.

³⁶ S/O No. 23, Postal Commissioner of Jiangxi District to Postal Secretary Piry, 5 September 1911 in SHAC137.1832.

³⁷ For the text of Chen Bi's proposal to take over the Post Office, see: *North China Herald and Supreme Court and Consular Gazette*, 30 January 1909; on Chen Bi's corruption, see: Su, *Qingmo Youchuanbu*, 67-68.

³⁸ Postal Circular No. 262, Postmaster General Piry, 31 May 1911 in SHAC137.2023-3.

Centralization of the Administrative Services” that included future plans to extend the postal network while the postal relay system was gradually abolished.³⁹ Despite coming under the administration of the Ministry, newly-named Postmaster General Piry was still invested with “plein pouvoir” to direct postal in accordance with his own ideas.⁴⁰

With the Post Office under the nominal control of a Chinese ministry, the absorption of the postal relay and post station system by the new Directorate General of Posts began to progress rapidly. In August 1911, Minister Sheng orchestrated the transfer of the postal relay and post station systems to his ministry to prepare for their abolition.⁴¹ In September, the Ministry established new procedural rules for the postal transmission of official correspondence.⁴² In order to ensure a smooth transition, the Directorate worked with the Quanyedao (勸業道) – provincial representatives of the Ministry of Posts and Communications – to establish postal connections in all locations where there had been a relay station.⁴³ The handover went smoothly until the outbreak of the Republican Revolution in October 1911. Once the dust settled, the Post Office completed the closure of relay stations on 10 April 1913.⁴⁴

The Imperial Post Office “outrivaled” the postal relay system. The deciding issue, however, was not business competition, speed of transmission, or greater efficiency, but nominal Chinese control over the Imperial Post Office. Once the Ministry of Posts and Communications established jurisdiction over the Imperial Post Office, all concerns about eliminating the traditional postal networks disappeared. Late Qing officials had few qualms about strengthening

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Taking Over: Conditions, signed by D(ewall), 5 May 1911.in SHAC137.1762.

⁴¹ S/O Draft from Directorate General of Posts, Postmaster General’s Office, 26 August 1911 in SHAC137.1832.

⁴² Circular No. 271, Postmaster T. Piry, 8 September 1911 in SHAC137.2023-3.

⁴³ Provisional Rules and Regulations Concerning the Transmission of Official Correspondence by the Post Office on the Abolition of the Yizhan in SHAC137.1832.

⁴⁴ No. 330/1150 Letter from A. Ortolani, Acting Sub-District Postmaster for Henan to Postmaster General, 29 March 1913 in SHAC137.1832. For a complete list of when the postal relay stations closed in each province, see: Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jiaotong shi youzheng bian* (History of communications: The Post Office) (Nanjing: Jiaotongbu zongwusi, 1930), I: 30-32.

the state by allowing the more efficient Imperial Post Office to take over all postal business, but wanted to ensure the state-making program represented the central government's own vision.

Mediating the Transition to Modernity: The Wenbaoju and the Chinese Post Office

The Wenbaoju (文報局) or Bureau for Official Despatches originated in the need for a postal system to transmit correspondence between Chinese diplomatic missions abroad and the central government. The original purpose of the Wenbaoju, however, was soon twisted by territorial officials within China. Officials across the empire began establishing domestic Wenbaoju to transmit their correspondence by steamer. These domestic Wenbaoju not only helped provincial officials avoid the inefficiencies and delays caused by the postal relay system, but also allowed them to continue receiving the outlays for the relay stations even while they closed them down. Within a relatively short time, the staff within the Wenbaoju offices without the authorization of their superiors registered themselves with the Post Office as a Minxinju or private mail company. By registering as a Minxinju firm, the Wenbaoju office staff only had to paid reduced letter rates, which allowed them to pocket most of their office budgets and have official despatches transmitted faster. The Wenbaoju thus became a mediating institution for officials between the traditional postal relay system and the modern Imperial Post Office.

To prepare for the arrival of various foreign diplomatic missions, the Qing government established the Zongli Yamen to handle foreign relations in 1861. A number of diplomatic problems crises occurred over the next decade, not the least of which was the Margary Affair in which the British interpreter Augustus R. Margary was killed in Yunnan Province. Margary's death led to the signing of the Chefoo Convention (1876) wherein it was agreed that China should send diplomats abroad. The first such diplomat was Guo Songtao (郭嵩燾) who was

despatched to London as part of an agreement in the Chefoo Convention that a Chinese representative apologize to the British government for Margary's death. Guo Songtao was thus appointed Minister to England and, two years later, Minister to France. To handle his official despatches and family letters, Guo recommended ordering the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company to receive them in Shanghai from foreign steamers. A certain Major Huang Huihe (黃惠和), who had studied for several years in England, was put in charge of creating an office to receive and forward Guo's despatches and letters. Huang then established the first Wenbaoju as an office on the premises of China Merchants. Initially, the Wenbaoju was simply a forwarding agency receiving despatches from abroad and then delivering them to the local postal relay station or receiving despatches from Beijing and forwarding them by foreign steamer to Qing diplomats. In 1878, discussions between the Zongli Yamen, the Superintendents of Trade, and Chinese representatives abroad led to the creation of a Central Bureau for Official Despatches for Diplomatic Missions of the South Seas (南洋出使文報總局) in Shanghai.⁴⁵ Since many foreign steamers also stopped in Tianjin, Superintendent of Trade for the Northern Ports Li Hongzhang also established a Bureau for Official Despatches for the North Seas (北洋文報總局) in Tianjin as well as one in Beijing (京局).⁴⁶

While Li Hongzhang was establishing his Wenbaoju in Tianjin, Fujian Governor Ding Richang (丁日昌), something of a communications specialist, opened a domestic Wenbaoju in Tainan, Taiwan to strengthen his lines of communications with the island province in 1878.⁴⁷ The original intention of the Wenbaoju – to serve foreign missions abroad – was thus

⁴⁵ For the regulations on handling mail matter by the Wenbao zongju, see: Cheng, *Postal Communication*, 80.

⁴⁶ Ma, *Zhongguo gudai*, 154-55.

⁴⁷ You Yu, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Wenbaoju" (History of the Chinese postal service: The Bureaux for Official Despatches), *Youzheng yanjiu* "Postal Research Quarterly" 43 (March 1992), 24. Ding had been intimately involved with several early telegraph enterprises in Fujian and Taiwan.

transformed by Ding Richang. By 1882, the Governors of Guangdong and Fujian also opened domestic Wenbaoju offices in Guangzhou, Shantou, Fuzhou, and Xiamen to improve communications with each other and Beijing.⁴⁸ Not long after, other Wenbaoju were also established in Hankou and Qiongzhou. Such offices obviously handled urgent despatches on important domestic political and diplomatic questions, but they also continued transmitting mail for Chinese diplomats. To increase the efficiency of such despatches coming from Europe, the Qing government also created a Hong Kong Wenbaoju on Shamian Island. By around 1900, then, various central and provincial government officials had started to create a new postal network that remained in Chinese hands, but allowed them to transmit their correspondence on steamers.

When the Imperial Post Office opened in 1897, its administrators were not particularly concerned about the Wenbaoju since such offices appeared to mostly handle despatches between Chinese diplomats and Beijing. Indeed, Li Hongzhang had closed the Wenbaoju offices in Tianjin and Beijing after the opening of the Post Office.⁴⁹ What surprised postal administrators in Beijing was that the Wenbaoju in Guangzhou, Fuzhou, Shantou, and Qiongzhou had registered themselves with the Post Office as private Minxinju letter firms in 1900. The Wenbaoju that registered as Minxinju enjoyed free carriage of their interport mails starting in 1900 and for half the normal letter rate after 1905.⁵⁰ The Wenbaoju office managers realized that by registering as a Minxinju firm they could transmit their mails on steamers and trains through the Post Office, but only pay minimal postage. In 1909, the budget for the Guangzhou

⁴⁸ *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Navigation, Industries, Etc. of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce in China and Corea and the Condition and Development of the Treaty Port Provinces, 1882-1891*, 3 volumes (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1892), III: 573-574. Hereafter, simply *Decennial Reports*.

⁴⁹ Letter from Postal Secretary Jules A. van Aalst to I.G. Sir Robert Hart, 10 June 1901 in SHAC137.1802-1.

⁵⁰ *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, II: 111.

Wenbaoju was 2400 taels, but they only paid the Post Office \$154.98 or about 100 taels to transmit all their mail for the year; the office staff presumably pocketed the difference.⁵¹ The great benefit of switching to the Post Office, however, was that documents reached Beijing five times faster.⁵²

After 1900, the Wenbaoju system developed in two directions. In the central and southern parts of the empire, Wenbaoju usually registered themselves at the Post Office in order to receive discounted postage rates. In the North and West, governors used the Wenbaoju to replace the expensive relay system, but maintained their own relationships with modern transportation companies. In 1907, the Board of War petitioned the throne to abolish the Zhili and Jiangnan Superintendent of Courier Posts (堤塘官) Offices in Beijing and replace them with Wenbaoju.⁵³ Zhili Governor Yuan Shikai and Liangjiang Governor-General Duanfang (端方) had requested the change because the Courier Posts Offices were negligent in handling mail matter and frequently lost letters. The central government approved the creation of these Wenbaoju, who then registered themselves with the Post Office as Minxinju.⁵⁴ In Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang, Governor General Zhao Erxun, and then Governor General Xu Shichang, began the construction of an entire Wenbaoju network relying on the Chinese Eastern and South Manchurian Railways to carry their mail. In the summer of 1906, Zhao established Wenbaoju offices in 13 places in the Three Eastern Provinces.⁵⁵ By 1909, Governor Xu had opened a Central Wenbaoju in Harbin, six Wenbao Branches, and three Wenbao Military Horse Stations

⁵¹ Memorandum: Official Correspondence forwarded through I.P.O. [in Guangdong], Guangdong Postal Commissioner, 28 February 1910 in SHAC137.1843.

⁵² Ding Jinjun, "Qingmo gedi kaishe Wenbaoju shiliao" (Primary sources on the establishment of the Wenbaoju in various places in the late Qing), *Lishi dang'an* (Historical archives) 2 (1990), 59.

⁵³ The Superintendents of Courier Posts were sixteen officials stationed within the Imperial Despatch Office in Beijing who acted as postal agents for their respective provincial governments. They received and forwarded all documents from their provinces while also despatching documents from Beijing. For a more detailed discussion of the Superintendents of Courier Posts, see: Fairbank and Teng, "On the Transmission," 24-25.

⁵⁴ For a copy of Duanfang's original petition, see: Ding, "Qingmo gedi," 55.

⁵⁵ For a list of the offices, see: You, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Wenbao ju," 26.

in Heilongjiang.⁵⁶ By 1910, there were 54 Wenbaoju in Jilin alone. In concert with opening these Wenbaoju, Governor Xu also petitioned the Board of War to abolish the expensive relay stations in the Northeast.⁵⁷ Of course, Xu made sure to mention that the entire budget for the postal relay system should be used to pay for the Wenbaoju. Over the next several years, the governors of Kulun (Inner Mongolia) and Guangxi made similar requests to abolish their postal relay stations in favor of Wenbaoju, which the government granted.⁵⁸

By 1910, most of the Wenbaoju were little more than forwarding agencies. Except in Manchuria and Inner Mongolia, where postal extension lagged, all other Wenbaoju relied on the Imperial Post Office to transmit their mail. Some Wenbaoju transmitted official correspondence through the Post Office as regular mail while others preferred registering themselves to enjoy the discounted rates. In most cases, the staff of the Wenbao received a sizeable budget from their provincial government, paid a pittance for mailing letters at the Post Office, and pocketed the remainder. The Nanyang Wenbaoju in Shanghai had a yearly budget of 4,000 taels in 1910, but only paid the Post Office \$600.00 silver dollars or 450 taels in postage – Postal Commissioner Erik Tollefsen declared “The Manager must therefore find it quite a lucrative business.”⁵⁹ In May 1911, even the Heilongjiang Wenbaoju signed an agreement with the Harbin IPO for the carriage of all its mails to order to enjoy the cheap postage.⁶⁰

By May 1911, when the Imperial Post Office came under the nominal Chinese administration of the Ministry of Posts and Communications, it had captured almost all

⁵⁶ Jiang Tao, “Qingmo Minju Heilongjiang sheng fei yi she You jiankuang” (A simple overview of abandoning the Post Stations and establishing the Postal Service in late Qing and early Republican Heilongjiang) in *Heilongjiang wenshi ziliao* (Heilongjiang literary and historical materials) 24 (1988): 128-140; reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, I: 2.

⁵⁷ For copies of Xu Shichang’s petitions, see: Ding, “Qingmo gedi,” 55-57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵⁹ No. 685/1461, Letter from E. Tollefsen, Postal Commissioner to Postal Secretary T. Piry, 3 February 1910 in SHAC137.1843.

⁶⁰ Working Rules for Heilongjiang Wenbaoju Mails, E. Caretti, Acting Deputy Postmaster, Harbin Sub-District, 1 March 1911 as enclosure to Mukden Despatch No. 690/1034 of 1911 in SHAC137.1845.

Wenbaoju postal business. Later that year, the Directorate decided to institute a new comprehensive policy for handling government correspondence in concert with the abolition of the postal relay system. In future, all government correspondence would pay full tariff rates, including all mails sent by the Wenbaoju.⁶¹ Once the Imperial Government fell in October, most of the Wenbaoju ceased to exist, except in Manchuria. In Manchuria, the Wenbaoju had a larger network and access to rail carriage and managed to hold out until 1914. Having extended the postal network in the Northeast, the Directorate then negotiated the surrender of all Wenbaoju business in Manchuria in September 1914.⁶²

The Wenbaoju were an important intermediary organization between the postal relay system and modern Post Office. Although the Wenbaoju were started in order to send and receive correspondence from Chinese legation officials abroad, they quickly became a way for officials within China to shut down the slow and expensive postal relay system and establish a modern-style post office. In the struggle between the Imperial Post Office and the Wenbaoju, then, the agency lay with the various governors general who took the initiative to make the change, but they did so recognizing the superiority of a modern-style postal system.

Sovereignty, Diplomacy, and Equality: The Surrender of the Foreign Post Offices

Starting in the 1840s and extending throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, many of the colonial powers established post offices in China.⁶³ The right to establish such foreign post offices was not mentioned in any treaty thus directly violating Chinese sovereignty. Upon his arrival in Guangzhou in 1834, Lord Napier established a free mail service for British

⁶¹ Circular No. 271, Postmaster T. Piry, 8 September 1911 in SHAC137.2023-3.

⁶² *RWCPO, 1914*, 7.

⁶³ The standard work on the alien post offices is: Peng Yingtian, *Lieqiang qin hua youquan shi* "Foreign Post Office in China: A Historical Survey" (Yangmingshan: Huagang chuban youxian gongsi, 1979).

merchants that represented the first organized foreign postal office in China – the Portuguese in Macao transmitted mail to and from Lisbon, but never had an organized service as such. Sir Henry Pottinger then opened the Hong Kong Post Office on 15 April 1842 after the Opium War. Over the next eighty years, the various foreign powers would establish some 269 post offices in China. Since these post offices held no formal right to exist on Chinese soil, they remained under the administration of their home postal services leading the Chinese to euphemistically refer to them as the “Alien Posts” (客郵).

By establishing foreign post offices on Chinese territory, the colonial powers were doing nothing new. It was not unusual for imperialist countries to open post offices either in colonies or in semi-colonial empires such as the Ottoman where foreign post offices were established on the basis of the capitulations. In 1718, the Austrians were the first to open a foreign post office on Ottoman land. They were succeeded by the Russians (1799), the French and British (1812), the Greeks (1834), the Italians (1869), and the Germans (1870) – by the end of the century there were 97 foreign post offices in the Ottoman Empire. In the 1860s, the Sublime Porte began applying political pressure on the foreign post offices and then lodging diplomatic protests when the Empire joined the Universal Postal Union in 1874, but both strategies failed. The Ottoman Post Office, like the Chinese a few decades later, then turned to direct business competition trying to undercut the economic viability of the foreign post offices. The Ottoman Post Office achieved some success, but the ease of steamer communication with the major cities in the empire allowed the foreign post offices to stay open until they were abrogated in the Treaty of

Lausanne in 1923.⁶⁴ The British (1859), French (1865), and United States (1867) also had post offices in Japan, but they closed when Japan entered the Universal Postal Union in 1878.⁶⁵

The British were the only country to have postal facilities in the Qing Empire until the 1860s. In 1843, British Postmaster General Lord Lowther ordered the opening of packet agencies in the treaty ports to improve communications between the expatriate communities and London. These consular packet agencies were opened in Guangzhou, Shanghai, Ningbo, Xiamen, and Fuzhou in 1844 and in Shantou in 1860.⁶⁶ In the early 1860s, the Hong Kong Post Office became independent and then took over the administration of the consular packet agencies in 1868.⁶⁷ The Hong Kong postmaster general then decided to open a fully-functioning post office in Shanghai. Over the next several decades, the British established new foreign post offices in Hankou (1872), Quanzhou (1873), and Tianjin (1883).⁶⁸

The French, Americans, Japanese, Russians, Germans, and Austro-Hungarians followed the British lead in establishing foreign post offices in China. The opening of foreign post offices usually followed the arrival of regular steam communication with China. The French Post Office in Shanghai opened after the Compagnie Messageries Imperiales started regular steam service to China in 1862. President Abraham Lincoln ordered the establishment of a mail steamship service to Shanghai on 17 February 1865. In 1867, the Pacific Mail Steamship

⁶⁴ The information from this paragraph comes from: Aysegul Okan, "The Ottoman Postal and Telegraph Services in the Last Quarter of the Nineteenth Century," (M.A. thesis, Ataturk Institute for Modern Turkish History, Bogazici University, 2003), 32-37, 79-94.

⁶⁵ Li Narangoa and Robert Cribb, "Appendix: Postage Stamps and Japanese Imperialism," in *Imperial Japan and National Identities in Asia, 1895-1945*, edited by Narangoa and Cribb (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003), 320; on the closure of the FPOs in Japan, see: Shigenobu Okuma, *Fifty Years of New Japan*, English version edited by Marcus M. Huish (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1909), 410-11.

⁶⁶ Cheng, *Postal Communication*, 53.

⁶⁷ Ordinance No. 8 of 1862, "An Ordinance to provide for the Management and Control of a Post Office for the Colony of Hongkong [3 May 1862] in *The Ordinances of Hongkong* (London: George E. Eyre and William Spottiswoode, 1866), 244-251.

⁶⁸ You Yu, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Keyou, Gongbu shuxinguan" (History of the Chinese postal service: The Guest Post Offices and Municipal Council Local Post Offices), *Youzheng yanjiu* "Postal Research Quarterly" 48 (June 1993), 27-28.

Company delivered the first mail to the American Consul in Shanghai, which then established the Shanghai Postal Agency under the control of Postmaster General Alexander Randall in Washington. The Shanghai Postal Agency only delivered mail within the International Settlement and signed mail agreements with the other foreign powers to deliver its mail to other treaty ports.⁶⁹ In 1875 the Japanese Mitsubishi Mail Steamship Company purchased the U.S. Pacific Mail line between Yokohama and Shanghai, which allowed the Japanese consulate in Shanghai to establish its own foreign post office. The German *Nordeutscher Lloyd* Company offered steam service to China starting in 1885 and the first German Post Office in China opened in 1886. Russia was the exception in that it relied on rail transport across Siberia for its mails and opened its first Post Office in Beijing in 1870 and then followed with offices in Kalgan, Urga, Tianjin, and Shanghai.⁷⁰ By 1897, when the Imperial Post Office opened its doors, there were a total of 25 foreign post offices in China led by the British with 8, the Japanese with 7, the Russians with 5, the French and Germans with 2, and the Americans with 1.⁷¹

In the years prior to the establishment of the Imperial Post Office, the foreign postal establishments were a necessary adjunct to the emergence of Western expatriate communities in China. The Qing government did not provide a domestic mail service for its subjects and saw no need to provide one for foreigners. Although the foreign post offices initially handled only diplomatic correspondence they quickly morphed into a general postal service for the entire foreign community, which in these early years still primarily consisted of foreign representatives and the employees of a few business firms. Over the course of the late nineteenth century as

⁶⁹ On the history of the Shanghai Postal Agency, see: Peter L. Koffsky, *The Consul General's Shanghai Postal Agency, 1867-1907* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1972).

⁷⁰ S.V. Prigara, *The Russian Post in the Empire, Turkey, China and the Post in the Kingdom of Poland*, translated by David M Skipton (N.p.: Rossica Society of Russian Philately, 1981).

⁷¹ Yi Weixin, "Luelun wan Qing 'Keyou'" (The 'Guest Post' of the late Qing dynasty), *Yiyang shizhuan xuebao* "Journal of Yiyang Teachers College" 21: 2 (March 2000), 85.

more foreigners settled in the treaty ports and missionaries began moving inland, the foreign post offices continued expanding to serve this new customer base.

The foreign post offices offered a number of services to the foreign public. In addition to bringing mail and newspapers from home, they also transported parcels, money orders, and, in the Russian and Japanese offices, offered savings bank facilities. Since these foreign post offices were part of their home administrations, all stamps sold to the public in China were domestic stamps overprinted with some indication of their being used in China. For example, US stamps sold in Shanghai were overprinted with “US Postal Agency” or simply “Shanghai” while British stamps were overprinted with “British Post Office” and “Chungking” or whichever office sold the stamp. Stamp sales and other business at the foreign post offices were brisk – in no small measure due to their popularity with philatelists. In 1886, the British Post Office in Shanghai sold \$17,259 silver dollars worth of stamps and earned a net profit for the year of around \$6,500. British Postmaster Machado of Shanghai estimated that the total profit of all the foreign post offices in Shanghai at around \$60,000 silver dollars a year.⁷² By 1907, the British Post Office in Shanghai alone was selling around \$115,000 in stamps per year.⁷³

When the Imperial Post Office opened in 1897, it held an ambivalent position on the foreign post offices. The Qing government pressured Robert Hart to join the Universal Postal Union immediately, but Hart felt “demand for full adhesion to the Union and for haste generally” to be premature when the Qing was unwilling to accept full international responsibilities.⁷⁴ Until China signaled its readiness to accept those responsibilities by entering the Universal Postal

⁷² Despatch No. 150, Ningbo Commissioner Kopsch to Inspector General Robert Hart, 12 January 1886 in SHAC137.5277.

⁷³ Arnold Wright, ed., *Twentieth Century Impressions of Hongkong, Shanghai, and Other Treaty Ports of China* (London: Lloyd’s Great Britain Publishing Co., 1908), 133-34.

⁷⁴ Hart to Postal Secretary H. Kopsch, 12 August 1896 quoted in Hosea B. Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918), III: 68.

Union, the IPO had to cooperate with the foreign post offices.⁷⁵ That compromise, however, did not mean the Imperial Post Office would allow the foreigners an open field. Hart and the other postal administrators started using what in hindsight appears to have been a three-part strategy to weaken the foreign post offices. First, the Imperial Post Office would create a domestic legal system restricting the operations of the foreign post offices through the promulgation of internal postal regulations and sponsored government laws defining the national postal monopoly; second, the Post Office would focus on internal development and expansion in preparation for entering the Universal Postal Union; and third, the Imperial Post Office would sign exclusive mail carriage contracts with most of the modern transportation companies to limit the territorial reach of the foreign post offices.

The three-part strategy to undermine the viability of the foreign post offices would take twenty years to have its effect, but Hart started working on the problem before the IPO even opened for business. Hart saw the interport carriage of mails by foreign steamers as the weak point in their network, but also realized the success or failure of the IPO depended signing an exclusive contract with those same steamers. In 1896, Hart wrote to Postal Secretary H. Kopsch, who was handling negotiations with the steamer companies, “Take care how you handle this, for, if the companies get to thinking we are in their clutches, they may prove hard to deal with, and either squeeze us for their consent or refuse consent – in which latter case we would be in a very bad fix indeed.”⁷⁶ As discussed above, Hart made the steamer companies agree that in exchange for a refund of half their special permit fees the steamer companies would refuse to carry any mail except for the Post Office. The foreign legations were “in arms,” Hart wrote, but “having

⁷⁵ Memo Concerning Exchange of Mails in China and Carriage of Closed Mails for Union Offices, 1 February 1897 as enclosure to Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 767, Postal No. 28, Inspector General Robert Hart, 13 February 1897 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁷⁶ Hart to Postal Secretary Kopsch, 6 November 1896 quoted in Morse, *The International Relations*, III: 69.

established *the principle*, I shall ease off *in practice* – we cannot *force* Govts. to withdraw their P.O. and we shall *let* them live, and carry their mails for them *for a consideration*.”⁷⁷ A week later, Hart wrote to Postal Secretary Kopsch in one of his patented rhymes: “The steam negotiation has caused some indignation – Legations think that they have been insulted! – but if we had shown our hand, we’d have lost what’s ours – command, and that’s the reason they were not consulted.”⁷⁸ A few years later, Hart also worked out a contract with the railroad companies giving the IPO a monopoly on rail transport⁷⁹ With these two contracts, Hart had nearly monopolized the carriage of mail by modern transport for the Imperial Post Office.

Postal Secretary Piry also began undermining the competitive edge of the foreign post offices by signing postal agreements with their home governments. In order to compete with the Imperial Post Office, many of the foreign post offices made an “energetic move” in 1901 by lowering their postage rates hoping thereby to attract Chinese customers. Piry responded by lowering the rates of the Post Office though he understood a rate war might “inflict permanent injury” on the Post Office.⁸⁰ While keeping his rates low, Piry also began signing international postal agreements with the foreign powers. In these agreements, signed with France in 1902, Germany in 1906, and Japan in 1910, Piry made sure to insert the clause “It is understood that the [foreign] Administration will not apply to mail matter exchanged between its own Offices in China taxes lower than those adopted by the Chinese Administration.”⁸¹ Piry clause ensured rate

⁷⁷ Hart, *The I.G. in Peking*, 1100.

⁷⁸ Hart to Postal Secretary Kopsch, 25 Jan. 1897 quoted in Morse, *The International Relations*, III: 63-64n10.

⁷⁹ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 1076, Postal No. 61, Inspector General Robert Hart, 16 April 1903 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁸⁰ Postal Secretary’s Report on the year 1902, 7 April 1903 in SHAC137.5277.

⁸¹ For the French treaty, see: Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 55, Postal Secretary Piry, 17 December 1901 in SHAC137.2023-1; for the German treaty, see: Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 132, Postal Secretary Piry, 5 December 1905 in SHAC137.2023-1; and the Japanese treaty, see: “Agreement Setting Forth the Relations Established between the Imperial Postal Administration of Japan and the Imperial Postal Administration of China, 9 February 1910,” printed in entirety in *Treaties and Agreements With and Concerning China, 1895-1919*, compiled and edited by John V.A. MacMurray (New York: Oxford University Press, 1921), I: 598-99.

wars would not interfere with the continued expansion of his administration, but did not cover rates between the foreign post offices and their home countries. The foreign post offices always maintained domestic rates for international mail sent from China in violation of UPU regulations, which the Imperial Post Office “for political reasons, consistently protested, and must continue to protest, as an infringement of her rights as an independent State.”⁸²

Despite efforts to restrict the foreign post offices, their number continued to grow after 1900. By 1906, the British had 9 post offices in China, the Germans 14, the French 14, the Japanese 16, the Russians 5 and the Americans 1 (Table 1).⁸³ After 1910, it was the Japanese Post Office in China that developed most rapidly – they grew from 16 offices in 1906 to 129 in 1913 and peaked at 208 in the early 1920s. The continued expansion of the foreign post offices, Postal Secretary van Aalst argued, shows “foreign countries have secret designs of snatching Chinese sovereign rights in postal matters.”⁸⁴ The American Minister to China, Edwin H. Conger, could not but agree: “The foreign Post Offices are being established principally for political reasons... Their establishment materially interferes with and embarrasses the development of the Chinese postal service [and] is an interference with China’s sovereignty.”⁸⁵ The Post Office believed the foreign powers continued to increase the number of foreign post offices in China for two reasons. First, the foreign powers tacitly winked at smuggling through their post offices.⁸⁶ On 21 December 1918, the *North China Herald* broke the story that the Bank of Japan was financing the importation of opium into China, but “the chief agency in the

⁸² *RWCPO, 1907*, 9.

⁸³ Postal Circular No. 155, Postal Secretary Piry, 22 December 1906 in SHAC137.2023-2.

⁸⁴ Mr. Van Aalst’s Note on the Imperial Post Office, 1901 in SHAC137.5277.

⁸⁵ Mr. Conger to Mr. Hay, 30 April 1902 in *Papers Relating to the Foreign Relations of the United States, 1902* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1903), 225.

⁸⁶ *New York Times*, 26 November 1921.

distribution of morphia in China is the Japanese post office.”⁸⁷ Second, the foreign powers wanted to avoid Chinese censorship on foreign mail matter.

Table 1: Foreign Post Offices in China, December 1906

British	German	French	Japanese	American	Russian
Shanghai	Shanghai	Shanghai	Shanghai	Shanghai	Shanghai
Tianjin	Beijing	Beijing	Beijing		Beijing
Qufu	Tianjin	Tianjin	Niuzhuang		Tianjin
Hankou	Qufu	Qufu	Tianjin		Qufu
Ningbo	Ji’nan	Chongqing	Tangku		Hankou
Fuzhou	Qingdao	Hankou	Qufu		
Xiamen	Yichang	Ningbo	Chongqing		
Shantou	Hankou	Fuzhou	Shashi		
Guangzhou	Nanjing	Xiamen	Hankou		
	Zhenjiang	Guangzhou	Nanjing		
	Fuzhou	Qiongzhou	Suzhou		
	Xiamen	Beihai	Hangzhou		
	Shantou	Longzhou	Fuzhou		
	Guangzhou	Mengzi	Xiamen		
			Shantou		
			Guangzhou		

In September 1914, the Directorate General of Posts officially joined the Universal Postal Union by adhering to the Union’s 1906 Rome Convention.⁸⁸ The Directorate intended to protest the existence of the foreign post offices at the upcoming Madrid Congress of the UPU scheduled for September 1914, but the outbreak of World War I led to its cancellation. Director General of Posts Liu Fucheng (劉符誠) then sent a communication to the Universal Postal Union on 18 March 1915 indicating that China no longer considered the foreign post offices on its soil to have “a legal existence.” Liu’s case was:

Article 1 of the Universal Postal Convention lays down this fundamental principle – that the Postal Union is composed of the totality of *adhering countries* (and not of postal administrations)...There can therefore be no warrant...without violation of the principle laid down by Article 1 of the convention, for offices maintained by Union countries in other Union countries....China [also] protests against the

⁸⁷ *North China Herald*, 21 December 1918.

⁸⁸ Circular No. 349, Postmaster General T. Piry, 14 February 1914 in SHAC137.2023-3.

maintenance, by the majority of the foreign post offices operating upon its territory, of tariffs lower than those fixed by Article 5 of the Rome convention.⁸⁹

China recognized it was an inopportune time to negotiate the elimination of the foreign post offices during World War I, but wanted to state for the record that continued cooperation did not imply legal recognition of their right to exist. The war did allow the Directorate to close down all German Post Offices in April 1917 and Russian Post Offices after the Whites lost the civil war.⁹⁰ As soon as the war ended, the Chinese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference demanded the immediate withdrawal of all foreign post offices, but French Prime Minister Clemenceau refused to allow any discussion of issues not pertaining directly to a peace treaty.⁹¹

When the cancelled Madrid Congress finally met in late 1920, Chinese delegates began informal negotiations with the American, French, and British governments about their post offices in China.⁹² The British Government recommended against raising the issue at the formal sessions of the Congress arguing that the elimination of the foreign post offices in China was “purely a political question which could not be decided by the Postal Congress.”⁹³ Internally, however, the British were prepared to abolish their offices in China on several conditions: (1) that all the powers remove their offices simultaneously; and (2) that Britain retained the right to reopen its offices should the Chinese Post Office prove inadequate. British representatives then

⁸⁹ Quoted in full in MacMurray, ed., *Treaties and Agreements*, I: 585-588.

⁹⁰ On the closure of the German and Russian post offices, see: Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jiaotong shi*, IV: 1325-30.

⁹¹ Robert T. Pollard, *China's Foreign Relations, 1917-1931* (1933; reprint: New York: MacMillan, 2008), 69-70. For China's statement at the Paris Peace Conference demanding the abolition of the foreign post offices, see: Chinese Delegation to the Paris Peace Conference, *The Shantung Question: A Statement of China's Claim Together With Important Documents Submitted to the Peace Conference in Paris* (San Francisco: Chinese National Welfare Society, 1919), 158-61.

⁹² I have been unable to ascertain whether the Chinese delegation held any informal conversations with the Japanese delegates at the Madrid Congress, but no other postal historians have found such documentation either.

⁹³ Doc. 172 [F 2876/2876/10] “Extract from Appendix to the Report of the British Delegates of the Madrid Postal Congress, entitled ‘Political Aspects of the Congress.’ – Communicated by Post Office, August 2, 1921” in *British Documents on Foreign Affairs: Reports and Papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, Part II, From the First to the Second World War; Series E, Asia, 1914-1939, Vol. 25: China, June 1921-October 1921*, edited by Ann Trotter (Frederick, MD: University Publications of America, 1994), 117-18.

approached Co-Director General of Posts Destelan to ascertain his attitude toward such conditions. Destelan replied that France had almost the same stipulations, but he also recommended securing some guarantee against censorship. When the Chinese delegation spoke informally with the Americans, the Americans expressed “high appreciation of the...efficiency and excellence of the postal service of the Chinese government...[and] the sympathy of the United States with the desire of the Chinese Government that all of the foreign post offices should be withdrawn from its territory.”⁹⁴ With such positive verbal statements, the Chinese delegation formally raised the issue of abolition at the Madrid Congress, but the question was considered outside the purview of the Union. If China wanted to abolish the foreign post offices, it would have to negotiate directly with the foreign governments involved.

The opportunity for China to negotiate directly with the foreign powers came at the Washington Conference on the Limitation of Armaments held from November 1921 to February 1922. In preparation for the Conference, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially notified the American, British, French, and Japanese Consulates in Beijing that the Chinese government would be demanding the withdrawal of all foreign post offices in China.⁹⁵ A month before the conference began, the Beijing Government passed the Postal Law granting the Chinese Post Office a state monopoly in order to bolster the government’s position.⁹⁶

At the Conference, Minister to the United States Alfred Sze (施肇基), the head of the Chinese delegation, presented the Chinese case for abolition. He argued that China possessed an efficient and trustworthy postal service covering the entire country that legally held a postal

⁹⁴ Letter from Otto Prager, Sub-Assistant Postmaster General, to Director General of the Chinese Post Office Liou Fou Tcheng (Liu Fucheng), 27 November 1920 quoted in Conference on the Limitation of Armament, *Conference on the Limitation of Armament* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922), 485.

⁹⁵ Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jiaotong shi*, IV: 1331-32.

⁹⁶ The Beijing Government granted the Post Office an official monopoly in October 1921 in the Postal Law wherein Article 1 states “Postal business is exclusively conducted by the government.” For the full text of the Postal Law, see: Postal Law as enclosure to Circular No. 507, Officiating Co-Director General, temporarily C. Rousse, 1 November 1921 in SHAC137.2023-5.

monopoly; that the existence of foreign post offices deprived the Chinese Post Office of its rightful revenue; and that the foreign post offices are not expressly mentioned in any treaty and are therefore a violation of Chinese sovereignty. Sze described the strategy of the foreign post offices as to “skim the cream of the postal business” by situating themselves in the busiest cities and using postage rates so low they violated UPU regulations. The Chinese delegation also repeated the *North China Herald* story that the foreign post offices were used to smuggle significant amounts of illegal drugs and other contraband into China. Finally, Sze stressed the Powers’ previously sympathetic statements on abolition.⁹⁷ After allowing Mr. Sze to respond to a few questions, the Sub-Committee moved to draft a statement on the abolition of the foreign post offices. While there was general agreement on the conditions, the Japanese Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs Masanao Hanihara warned he could not commit his government to an immediate abolition of the offices concerned. Setting aside the Japanese concerns, the sub-committee then drafted a formal statement on the abolition of all foreign post offices in China, but placed the date of withdrawal eleven months in the future to allow time for a special conference between the Chinese and Japanese governments. The full text of the “Resolution Regarding Foreign Postal Agencies in China,” adopted by the Washington Conference on 1 February 1922, stated:

- A. Recognizing the justice of the desire expressed by the Chinese Government to secure the abolition of foreign postal agencies in China, save or except in leased territories or as otherwise specifically provided by treaty, it is resolved:
 1. The four Powers having such postal agencies agree to their abandonment subject to the following conditions:
 - a. That an efficient Chinese postal service is maintained;
 - b. That an assurance is given by the Chinese Government that they contemplate no change in the present postal administration so far as the status of the foreign Co-Director General is concerned.

⁹⁷ Statement by Alfred Sze quoted in *Conference on the Limitation of Armament*, 480-85.

2. To enable China and the Powers concerned to make the necessary dispositions, this arrangement shall come into force and effect not later than January 1, 1923.⁹⁸

The resolution on the withdrawal of the foreign post offices in China was a great diplomatic victory for the Chinese Post Office, but the important question of Japan's "special" stipulations remained to be negotiated.

In August 1922, Chinese and Japanese delegations met in Beijing at the Ministry of Communications building for the Sino-Japanese Postal Conference (中日郵政會議). The conference delegates had two main items on their agenda: (1) a series of technical postal agreements that would ensure an efficient service for Japanese mails in China; and (2) the status of Japanese post offices in the South Manchurian Railway Zone.⁹⁹ After several weeks of intensive negotiations, the two sides resolved the technical questions in four agreements on the exchange of correspondence, money orders, parcels, and insured letters.¹⁰⁰ During the negotiations, however, the Japanese delegation continued inserting clauses stipulating that any and all postal agreements reached at the conference did not include Japanese post offices in the South Manchurian Railway Zone.¹⁰¹ As the conference moved towards a discussion of the railway zone issue, the Japanese suddenly and adamantly refused to discuss the issue at all.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ "Resolution Regarding Foreign Postal Agencies in China," *The American Journal of International Law* 16: 2, Supplement: Official Documents (April 1922): 77-78. The resolution also contains a section B permitting Chinese Customs authorities to search any parcel sent through the Foreign Post Offices that might contain contraband.

⁹⁹ Minute No. 2, Beijing, 1 September 1922, Joint Commission on Withdrawal of Japanese Post Offices, Second Meeting in SHAC137.7465.

¹⁰⁰ The four agreements were: Agreement for the Exchange of Correspondence (中華民國日本帝國互換郵件協約), Agreement for the Exchange of Postal Parcels (中華民國日本帝國互換包裹協約), Agreement for the Exchange of Insured Letters and Boxes (中華民國日本帝國互換保險信函及箱匣), and Agreement for the Exchange of Money Orders (中華民國日本帝國互換匯票協約). Cheng wen (Petition [to the Ministry of Communications], 2 December 1922 in SHAC137.7465.

¹⁰¹ Cheng wen (Petition [to the Ministry of Communications]), 9 November 1922 in SHAC137.7465.

¹⁰² There was considerable controversy within the Japanese government over the direction of China policy in the early 1920s. The postal agreements with China occasioned a small political incident between Count Miyoji Ito and his conservative colleagues and the Kato cabinet, which supported the postal agreements. For a more detailed

The conference then ground to a halt. The two sides decided to refer the discussion of the railway zone issue to their respective foreign ministries.¹⁰³

The question of the status of the Japanese Post Offices in the South Manchuria Railway Zone was never resolved. There were some discussions of the issue, but the two sides continually differed on the interpretation of a phrase in a secret treaty signed between China and Russia in 1896 – a treaty whose rights passed to Japan in the Portsmouth Treaty ending the Russo-Japanese War in 1905.¹⁰⁴ In the secret treaty, the Qing government granted Russia the “absolute and exclusive right of administration in the territories attached to the railway.” While the Chinese side admitted the existence of this treaty, they contended that no “special” right had been granted to establish post offices while the Japanese side argued that the “right of administration” implicitly included services like post offices. At loggerheads, the two sides decided on a provisional settlement to maintain the “status quo” of the Japanese post offices in the railway zone as originally agreed upon in the 1910 postal treaty between China and Japan.¹⁰⁵ From 1922 until the Mukden Incident in September 1931, then, Japan continued to maintain some 95 post offices in the railway zone.¹⁰⁶

The treaty powers all closed their post offices in China in accordance with the Washington Conference resolution.¹⁰⁷ Since its establishment, the Imperial Post Office had

discussion of this controversy, see: Tatsuji Takeuchi, *War and Diplomacy in the Japanese Empire* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1935), 239-40.

¹⁰³ Zhong-Ri youzheng huiyi Zhongguo weiyuanhui wei huiyi baozhong (Final report of the Chinese delegation to the Sino-Japanese postal conference), 5 December 1922 in SHAC137.7465.

¹⁰⁴ W.W. Willoughby, *Foreign Rights and Interests in China* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins Press, 1920), 311.

¹⁰⁵ M. Royama, “The South Manchuria Railways Zone: And the Nature of Its Administration,” *Pacific Affairs* 3: 11 (November 1930), 1028.

¹⁰⁶ You Yu, “Zhonghua youzheng shi: Jiu-yi-ba yu dongbei youzheng” (History of the Chinese postal service: September 18th and the Northeastern postal service), *Youzheng yanjiu* “Postal Research Quarterly” 54 (December 1994), 94.

¹⁰⁷ The British Post Offices closed were at Xiamen, Guangzhou, Yantai, Fuzhou, Hankou, Qiongzhou, Ningbo, Beijing, Shanghai, Shufu (in Kashgar), Shantou, and Tianjin; the French urban offices closed were at: Xiamen, Guangzhou, Yantai, Chongqing, Fuzhou, Hankou, Qiongzhou, Mengzi, Beihai, Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, and Kunming and their Indo-China offices at: Guangzhou, Chongqing, Qiongzhou, Mengzi, Beihai, and Kunming; the

taken as its mission the creation of a national postal monopoly, but in so doing understood that it would be necessary to demonstrate its supremacy in domestic postal affairs and independence from foreign interference. At the conclusion of a twenty-five year struggle with the foreign post offices, the international community recognized China as the sole possessor of internal sovereignty over its postal affairs. In achieving this recognition, the Post Office helped the Chinese government take another step towards regaining its national sovereignty.

*“They Will Die Hard”: The Minxinju and the Post Office*¹⁰⁸

In the mid-Qing period, small shops in Beijing and other important communications centers began carrying letters, small parcels, and sycee for the general public who were forbidden access to the Imperial Postal Relay system. The public referred to such private letter shops as Minxinju (民信局). Over the course of the nineteenth century, the Minxinju network(s) grew in size spreading itself across parts of the empire. The strength of the Minxinju business model was a sophisticated combination of a high-level of personalized customer services, rapid transmission and delivery, and a flexible set of inter-firm relationships allowing interconnection between their networks. These strengths coupled with their concentration in the Yangzi Valley and along the coast, made the Minxinju a strong competitor for postal business in these lucrative areas.

Most popular and academic histories date the founding of the Minxinju to the Yongle (1402-1424) period in the Ming dynasty. High officials travelling throughout the empire, such accounts continue, had in their retinues a laofuzi (老父子) who acted as both advisor and correspondence secretary – laofuzi was the official name of the more well-known *muyou* (tent

American office closed was in Shanghai. For a full list of the 66 Japanese offices closed, see: Circular No. 530, Co-Director General Destelan, 23 March 1923 in SHAC137.2023-6.

¹⁰⁸ *RWCPO, 1902*, xlvii

friend)(幕友) or private secretaries hired by officials to assist with correspondence.¹⁰⁹ Sending letters between high officials, these Ningbo and Shaoxing-born secretaries gradually formed small private letter companies in alliance with merchants from their hometowns.¹¹⁰ While the story appears a likely explanation for the rise of the Minxinju, and the crucial role Ningbo merchants played in the industry, it rests not on historical evidence, but on the speculation of Deputy Postal Commissioner H. Kirkhope who authored the official history of the Chinese Post Office published in the *Working Report* for 1921.¹¹¹ There were private messengers who carried mail throughout the entire imperial period, but the origins of the Minxinju industry was in the mid-Qing.

The Minxinju emerged in the latter half of the prosperous eighteenth century along with Shanxi banks and Shanghai exchange shops.¹¹² These three institutions, all established within a few decades of each other, grew together to serve as the main communications, remittance, and banking networks throughout the nineteenth century. The first use of the name Minxinju appears in Beijing only in 1751.¹¹³ In that year, the Guangtai (廣泰) Minxinju was established and was quickly followed by three others.¹¹⁴ Each of these Minxinju handled letters, remitted money, and

¹⁰⁹ Kenneth E. Folsom, *Friends, Guests, and Colleagues: The Mu-fu System in the Late Ch'ing Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 48.

¹¹⁰ The number of popular histories that use the Yongle origin story are too numerous to cite. Academic works repeating Piry's argument, include: Cheng, *Postal Communication*, 36; Xu Xuexia, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng, 1896-1928* (Modern China's postal service, 1896-1928) (Taibei: Sili dongwu daxue, 1992), 67-68; You Yu, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Minxinju" (History of the Chinese postal service: Private letter shops), *Youzheng yanjiu* "Postal Research Quarterly" 44 (June 1992), 62; Zhang Liangren, *Zhongguo youzheng* (The Chinese postal service) 3 volumes (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935-1936), I: 11.

¹¹¹ *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, I: 509; *RWCPO, 1921*, 5.

¹¹² Peng Yingtian cites a few Japanese scholars who argue that the Minxinju must have emerged directly out of the Shanxi or Shanghai banks. Peng Yingtian, *Minxinju fazhan shi: Zhongguo de minjian tongxun shiye* (A history of the expansion of people's letter offices: China's popular communications enterprise) (Taibei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanshu, 1992), 77-79.

¹¹³ Jiaotongbu nianjian bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Jiaotong nianjian* (Communications yearbook) (Shanghai: Jiaotongbu zongwusi, 1935), III: 62. This is a self-proclaimed origin date noted on Guangtai's Minxinju license.

¹¹⁴ They were Fuxingrun (1753), Xiexingchang (1755), and Huwanchang (sometime in the Qianlong period). Beijing shi youzheng ju, ed., *Beijing Minxinju shilue* (Historical outline of the Beijing People's Letter Offices) (Beijing: Beijing shi youzheng ju, 1988), 1-4.

transported small parcels. Shanghai “copper shops” or banks (錢莊) also first appeared in the Qianlong period and rapidly spread throughout the Jiangnan region.¹¹⁵ These “banks,” originally local shops that sold goods and exchanged small amounts of currency, gradually came to specialize in handling southern inter-regional financial transactions through drafts. Shanxi “draft banks” (票號) first appeared in the 1820s and focused on handling large financial transactions for Shanxi merchants and the imperial government.¹¹⁶ None of these industries was particularly “traditional.” Indeed, they barely antedated the arrival of significant numbers of Westerners in the mid-nineteenth century, but foreign observers like Kirkhope projected them backwards in time as part of “immemorial” Chinese economic life.

The origins, development, and relationships of the Minxinju, Shanghai exchange shops, and Shanxi banks share many similarities. Each seems to have emerged from small local shops selling goods and gradually transformed themselves into bona-fide empire-wide business networks. Each industry was dominated by a specific group of regional merchants – Ningbo and Shaoxing men in the Shanghai banks, Shanxi men in the Shanxi banks, and Ningbo merchants in the Minxinju industry. One suspects, though the lack of financial and business records makes such conclusions tentative, that each of these industries started out by handling financial transactions, remittances, and letters and only gradually began focusing on one of these specialties. Shanxi banks were known to have carried letters for merchants just as Minxinju remitted currency, Shanghai banks borrowed large sums from Shanxi banks, and Shanxi or other local banks often sent the business correspondence and even remittances through the

¹¹⁵ On the Shanghai banks, see: Andrea L. McElderry, *Shanghai Old-Style Banks (ch'ien-chuang), 1800-1935: A Traditional Institution in a Changing Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1976) and Zhaojin Ji, *A History of Modern Shanghai Banking: The Rise and Decline of China's Finance Capitalism* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 3-37.

¹¹⁶ Huang Jianhui, *Shanxi piaohao shi* (A history of Shanxi banks) (Taiyuan: Shanxi jingji chubanshe, 1992), 36-39.

Minxinju.¹¹⁷ One scholar goes so far to claim the appearance of the Minxinju was one of the “objective conditions” that allowed the Shanxi banks to emerge.¹¹⁸ Whichever came first, the relationship between the Minxinju and these Shanxi and Shanghai banks was “intimate.”¹¹⁹ Over time the Minxinju left the remittance of larger sums to the banks and focused its efforts on petty remittances and letter carriage. Shanghai banks focused on medium-sized transactions for private merchants and the Shanxi banks specialized in very large remittances for the largest merchant houses and the government. The network structure of these three industries also shared many similarities – the main offices of each network were usually situated within a specific region in the empire, had branches in the larger ports and provincial capitals, and agencies in the smaller provincial capitals and larger market towns.

Although founded in the mid-eighteenth century, the Minxinju network did not began rapidly growing until the mid-nineteenth with the arrival of steamships producing the so-called “steamer Minju” (輪船信局) who then spread quickly to all major provincial capitals, many county seats, and some townships.¹²⁰ The rapid growth of the Minxinju industry came in the wake of foreign steamers, but their organizational model, customer services, and communications network were vital in taking advantage of the steamships to develop their industry. A typical Minxinju office in the late nineteenth century was a rather small affair with a couple of office staff and a few letter carriers. The manager (東家) was often the owner, but occasionally might be hired by several investing partners (股東). Aside from the manager, who often could operate his own shop in small locates, there might be a few shop assistants in the

¹¹⁷ On Minxinju carrying mail for the Shanxi banks, see: Huang Jianhui, *Shanxi piaohao shi* (A history of the Shanxi banks) (Taiyuan: Shanxi jingji chubanshe, 1992); *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, I: 246, 432-33.

¹¹⁸ Huang, *Shanxi piaohao*, 28.

¹¹⁹ Peng, *Minxinju fazhan*, 78.

¹²⁰ Only a few Minxinju are mentioned in local gazetteers prior to the 1850s. Zheng Hui, “Minxinju zhaoshi de lishi beijing he tiaojian” “The Historical Background of Establishing the Minxinju,” *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) 22 (March 2003), 16.

larger firms. Such assistants included book keepers (帳司), shop keepers (管櫃), letter receivers (收信物), porters (挑貨), and deliverymen/couriers (腳夫/送信員/覽信員).¹²¹ The absolutely largest Minxinju only had a staff of 10-15 office workers and couriers, but a more typical large firm seems to have had about 4-5 office staff with at least that many couriers.¹²² At branch offices in smaller cities such as Qufu, there might be an owner, book keeper, and two couriers.¹²³ At agencies, small general stores having an informal contract with a branch Minxinju, the staff was often only a single person who was usually an agent for numerous Minxinju from other ports.¹²⁴ The salaries paid to office staff and couriers varied widely with couriers making around 24 taels or less, shop assistants around 36 taels, and managers of good-sized firms earning 80 taels.¹²⁵ A typical large firm had a working capital of about 5,000-6,000 taels with an expected yearly profit of around 2,000.¹²⁶ Mid-sized Minxinju, by contrast, might only earn several hundred taels a year while the smallest agencies barely made ends meet.¹²⁷

Office procedures of Minxinju firms show great concern for customer service. Letters for outbound mail were almost always collected from businesses and done so late in the evening when the day's business transactions were completed. The clerks then registered the letters – even ordinary letters were considered registered – and then stamped the name of their Minxinju on the cover.¹²⁸ The same procedure was also followed for collecting parcels and remittances. The Minxinju provided full insurance free of charge for any losses either through accident or robbery. The late collection, free registration, and guarantee of any losses were all services that

¹²¹ Peng, *Minxinju*, 97.

¹²² The largest of the Ningbo firms had 10-15 employees in the late 1880s. *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, II: 379-80. More typical firms had only 7-8 staff members. Ningbo Despatch to I.G. No. 88, 2 August 1882 in SHAC679.14907.

¹²³ *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 72-73

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, II: 224.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, II: 379-80. Peng, *Minxinju*, 98.

¹²⁶ *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 154.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, I: 72-73.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, II: 426.

made the Minxinju very popular with business customers. Once enough mail, remittances, and parcels had been collected, a courier from a single firm would be despatched carrying the mail of all the local Minxinju. On his journey, he could often be distinguished by his mail satchel which usually had something like “paper horse” (鈔馬) stenciled upon it.¹²⁹ For routes along small rivers and canals, Minxinju firms sent their couriers on hired post-boats (信劃子/民信班船) whom they paid a set fee per trip.¹³⁰ Upon reaching his destination, the courier would hand the mail to his firm where couriers from other firms could collect it. In the case of steamer Minxinju, the courier would give the mail to the comprador who was paid for handling the mail until its arrival at its next port of call where it was collected by another courier.

The cost of letter postage was based on local conditions, the distance to be covered, the speed of transmission, and the reputation of the Minxinju. Payment for letters and parcels could be made in three ways: the sender paid the entire amount, the sender and receiver each paid half, or the receiver paid the entire amount. The despatching office stamped letters with “wine money paid” (酒資已給) when postage was fully prepaid or “wine money as per tariff” (酒資照例) when the receiver needed to pay the courier.¹³¹ Less important customers paid for each transaction while larger concerns paid on account per month or quarter.¹³² Over short distances by steamer such as between Ningbo and Shanghai, Minxinju firms charged 40 cash (about 3 cents), between Qufu to Shanghai the charge was 80 cash, and Yichang to Chongqing 48 cash.

¹²⁹ Tao Gongchen, “Zhejiang Minxinju shimo ceji” (Sidelights of the whole story of the Zhejiang letter agencies), *Zhejiang wenshi ziliao xuanji* 8 (1964), 71.

¹³⁰ *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 154; Huang Junba, “Youchuan Minxinju huajiu” (Reminiscence on transmitting the post for the People’s Letter Offices), *Taicang wenshi ziliao jicun* (Collection of Taicang literary and historical materials) 1 (1983); reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, I: 527; in eastern China, the Minxin boats were divided into “raised rafts” (排翹) of about 10 tons and “Duck’s Tails” (鴨尾) of around 20 tons. Chen Kuoting, “Luanshi jian de anquan hangxian – youxinban chuan” (A safe boatline in troubled times – The people’s postal boat), *Suqian wenshi ziliao* (Suqian literary and historical materials) 8 (1987); reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, 447-49.

¹³¹ *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 118.

¹³² *Ibid.*, II: 227.

The highest charge in the 1880s and early 1890s was between 400-600 cash for letters from coastal ports to inland, land-locked provinces.¹³³ The Minxinju offered express services (火燒信/羽毛信) to the general public, but they were mostly used by market speculators who needed up-to-date information on fluctuations in pricing throughout the country.¹³⁴

The Minxinju also offered other important services. After letters, the Minxinju mostly carried remittances. On remittances, where the Minxinju seem to have earned the majority of their profits, they charged anywhere from a few tenths of a percent to their more important customers to 3% for petty remittances.¹³⁵ It is impossible to determine the total amount remitted by the Minxinju firms, but the figure was reported in the millions of taels per year.¹³⁶ Aside from letters and remittances, the Minxinju also specialized in transporting parcels. Minxinju firms charged the same postage rates on small parcels as for letters, but if parcels were deemed “heavy” they were required to pay double rates. The Minxinju would carry almost any kind of parcel – in one instance a Customs employee stopped a Minxinju boat near Wuhu and the courier was found to be transporting 110 letters, 7 bundles of newspapers, 22 small parcels, 90 pounds of cotton fabric, 7 pieces of woolen cloth, and 9 bags of sundries.¹³⁷ Finally, the Minxinju also

¹³³ The various postage rates of Minxinju can be found scattered throughout the *Decennial Reports*. For example, these are the rates over different routes offered by Hankou-based Minxinju. Overland routes from Hankou: Jiangxi province, 100 cash; Henan province, 100 cash; Shaanxi province, 100 cash; Anhui province, 50 cash; Yunnan province, 200 cash; Changsha, 24 cash; Shashi, 24 cash; Chongqing, 100 cash; Guizhou, 100 cash; Yichang, 24 cash; and Chengdu, 200 cash; over steam-served routes: Jiujiang, 30 cash; Anqing, 50 cash, Datong and Wuhu, 50 cash; Nanjing and Zhenjiang, 70 cash; Shanghai and Ningbo, 80 cash; Hong Kong and Guangzhou, 100 cash; and Tianjin and Beijing, 200 cash. *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 186.

¹³⁴ Express service was indicated either by burning the corner of the envelope (火燒信) or gluing a small feather to the corner (羽毛信). For images of Minxinju letters with feathers and burnt corners, see: Fernandez, “Mail Carriers of China” 135; *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, I: 31, II: 570.

¹³⁵ Ningbo Despatch to I.G. No. 88, 2 August 1882 in SHAC679.14907; *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 73, I: 116, I: 154, II: 224-25.

¹³⁶ *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, I: 116-17.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, II: 267.

collected subscriptions for and delivered newspapers, escorted travelers and carried their baggage, and even acted as small exchange shops.¹³⁸

By the late nineteenth century, Minxinju firms had created a series of overlapping, but interlocking networks that covered most of the important trading centers throughout the Qing empire. It is impossible to determine the total number of Minxinju in the late nineteenth century – estimates range from around 300 to over 1,000 – but even if we had the total number of shops it would still be a distorted figure. The total number of Minxinju is rather insignificant because of the way they structured their networks – with head offices, branches, and agencies. Instead, we might estimate the total number of independent firms to be around 50 with the remainder being either branches or agencies. Those fifty also maintained informal contractual relationships with each other. To take one example, the Huwanchang Minxinju mentioned earlier as being established in Beijing in the late eighteenth century, and still surviving into the 1930s, also had offices in Tianjin, Chengdu, Chongqing, Shashi, Yichang, Wanxian, Hankou, Jiujiang, Nanjing, Shanghai, Fuzhou, and Ningbo, and thus throughout most of China. Similarly, the Quantaisheng (全太盛) and Senchangcheng (森昌成) Minxinju had offices, branches, or agencies in most of the major cities. When these three Minxinju combined their networks they could reach virtually every important city and county seat in the empire. The total number of Minxinju, then, is less significant than the organization and extent of their network(s).

The late nineteenth century Minxinju network had three important communication hubs: Shanghai-Ningbo, Hankou, and Beijing-Fengtian. The Shanghai-Ningbo network was the most important. It reached down the coast to Guangzhou, up the coast to Tianjin, and penetrated into the heart of the empire by following the Yangzi to Hankou. The Shanghai-Ningbo Minxinju thus

¹³⁸ Ibid., I: 457, II: 570.

handled communications for Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Fujian, Guangdong, Jiangxi, Anhui, and Henan. The Shanghai-Ningbo network connected with the western network at Hankou, but with the Beijing-Fengtian network either through Tianjin on steamer or from Jiujiang north along the Grand Canal to Beijing. From Hankou, western-oriented Minxinju handled mail up the river to Yichang, Wanxian, Shashi, Chongqing, and on to Chengdu. It also branched south to Changsha and on to peripheral southern provinces such as Guizhou and Yunnan and north to Shaanxi and Gansu. The Beijing-Fengtian network encompassed as far south as Qufu in Shandong, but primarily handled communications with Shanxi, Hebei, Fengtian, Jilin, and Heilongjiang. These trunk networks radiating out from Shanghai, Beijing, and Hankou were supplemented with smaller, localized networks penetrating deeper into provinces.

The Minxinju network(s) worked effectively because the separate firms maintained various kinds of informal interrelationships with each other, but also with their branches and agencies. Without internal business documents it is impossible to define the exact relationship between separate firms or even between a firm and its branches and agencies, but external studies provide us with a partial picture. A Head Office (總局/總號) at Shanghai, for example, always had a number of branches (分局/分號). Each branch might be run either by a business associate from the same hometown as the Head Office owner or a blood relative, but might also be a local man hired for the job. This kind of personal network explains the influence of Ningbo men in the Minxinju industry in Jiangsu, Zhejiang, and Fujian. After a Head Office-Branch agreement was made, the Head Office gave the local man a seal for stamping his letters.¹³⁹ Then, once a year or sometimes quarterly, the branch offices would hand over their profit to the Head Office who then paid the branch managers a set fee.

¹³⁹ *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, II: 268

Branches had an identical relationship with agencies (代理店), but agencies do not seem to have had any financial relationship with Head Offices. According to the Customs Commissioner of Jiujiang, when a Minxinju wanted to open a new agency at an inland area, the Minxinju branches jointly selected a common representative in the new town. The agent gave the various branches a surety bond and was then granted provisional status. While under provisional status, the agent paid the various branches a fixed sum debited against his first year's gross income. Once the agent demonstrated his trustworthiness, he became a formal agent assuming the risk of loss and retaining any local profits.¹⁴⁰ In most cases, a single local agent probably represented between 5 and 10 different branches. The inland Minxinju throughout Anhui were all individual representatives of the 17 Wuhu branches of Shanghai-based Minxinju.¹⁴¹ In some cases, agencies appear to have remitted their yearly profits back to their branch managers who then pooled the money and divided it evenly among the agencies - the yearly profit for such an agency was said to be around \$100 silver dollars.¹⁴²

The individual Minxinju head offices worked together to form their own “postal union.”¹⁴³ Whenever a Minxinju needed to forward a letter where it had no branch or agency, it handed the letter to another network. Historians have presumed that these head offices had contracts with each other, but no such contracts have yet been found.¹⁴⁴ One might speculate that inter-firm contracts did not exist. Minxinju may have carried mail for each other free of charge assuming that such obligations would balance out over time. Or, Minxinju may have used their methods of charging postage to ensure both networks received half the fee. When a

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., II: 226-27.

¹⁴¹ *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, I: 395-96.

¹⁴² Ibid., III: 534-35.

¹⁴³ *Decennial Reports, 1881-1892*, I: 116-18.

¹⁴⁴ The extant Minxinju industry rules of the Guangxu period make no mention of inter-firm relationships. “Guangxu nianjian Minxinju tiaogui” (Minxinju rules of the Guangxu period) in *Beijing youzheng shiliao* (Beijing postal service historical materials) (Beijing: Beijing Yanshan chubanshe, 1988), 395-96.

Minxinju received a letter that would have to be passed to another Minxinju network, the first might have charged half the postage up front and had the end recipient pay the second half of the postage to the second Minxinju network. Both networks thereby received half the postage without having formal contracts or needing to settle accounts. Another Minxinju practice suggests this might have been the case. As noted above, Minxinju firms in the same city shared couriers, each taking their turn over given routes. Dividing such labor costs shows the flexibility of Minxinju firms and their inter-relationships suggesting that cost and labor savings may have outweighed the value of formal inter-firm contracts.

By the time the Qing government authorized the establishment of an Imperial Post Office in 1896, the Minxinju had already created a flourishing industry. The industry started slowly in the late eighteenth century and then underwent a period of rapid growth once steamers began plying Chinese waters. As Minxinju appeared in the larger treaty ports they began establishing branches in the smaller coastal and river towns, and those branches signed agency contracts with smaller inland shops – through contractual relations they were “knit together as a systematic and comprehensive body, providing the public with a most satisfactory service and supplying a national want.”¹⁴⁵

*“The Velvet Glove”: The Imperial Post Office and the Minxinju, 1896-1911*¹⁴⁶

When the Guangxu Emperor sanctioned the establishment of the Imperial Post Office in March 1896, Robert Hart and the other foreign postal administrators knew the Minxinju posed the greatest challenge to the success of the Post Office. The Guangxu Emperor, however, had

¹⁴⁵ *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, I: 141-42.

¹⁴⁶ The phrase “velvet glove” to describe the Post Office’s policy towards to the Minxinju comes from: No. 1287 P.M.G.: Despatch from Jiangsu Postal Commissioner to Postmaster General T. Piry, 23 February 1915 in SHAC137.2014.

admonished Hart not to interfere with the livelihood of the Minxinju. To abide by the emperor's wishes, but to begin the process of undermining the Minxinju, Hart invited the Minxinju to register with the Post Office and carry each others' mail while the Post Office built up its own network. Hart's policy encountered resistance from the Minxinju and the Qing government, both of whom resisted his attempts to dictate terms to the Minxinju. After several failed efforts to charge for the IPO carriage of Minxinju mails, Théophile Piry changed tactics to undermine the Minxinju through competition.

During 1896, Hart laid out his basic policy towards the Minxinju. In April he ordered that Minxinju could operate freely in places without IPO establishments; in places with IPO establishments, the Minxinju "must" register themselves with the Post Office and hand over their mails in clubbed packages (總包) to the IPO for delivery at yet to be determined "Coast postage" rates; and, when the IPO received mail for places where it has no offices, it would hand them to the Minxinju for delivery.¹⁴⁷ In his second circular on Minxinju policy, Hart contradicted himself by "inviting" Minxinju to registering themselves at the Post Office. In registering themselves, the Minxinju would be required to provide their name, date of establishment, name of owner and partners, their location, the location of all their branches, the frequency they despatched mail, and their rates of postage.¹⁴⁸ In late 1896, the postal commissioners attempted to force the Minxinju to register in accordance with Hart's first circular. Hart admonished them, "the Imperial Post is not established to either compete, hurt, or kill, but to work with the long-existing private agencies and to do this in such a way as shall both support and utilize them in the interests of themselves, the public, and the government" and that "their best policy will be

¹⁴⁷ Inspector General's Circulars, Postal Series, No. 7, I.G. Robert Hart, 9 April 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁴⁸ Inspector General's Circulars, Circular No. 733, Postal Circular 13, I.G. Robert Hart, 17 July 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

reciprocity and friendliness.”¹⁴⁹ This policy to “affiliate them as agents” of the IPO led some 300 Minxinju to register with the Post Office in 1897.¹⁵⁰

After the first group of Minxinju registered themselves with the Post Office, Hart began to apply pressure. Upon securing a monopoly on the steamer carriage of mail for the Imperial Post Office, Hart ordered that only Minxinju who registered themselves and sent their mail through the Post Office would be allowed steamer carriage. They would pay the full letter rate on the gross weight of their clubbed packages – or \$1.28 per pound. Any Minxinju found to be “smuggling” mail on steamers would be required to pay treble IPO letter rates as a fine.¹⁵¹ The Minxinju protested to various officials about this treatment – Hart not only forbid them use of the steamers, but charged them more than their own postage rates for the privilege.¹⁵² Hart, they argued, had disobeyed the Imperial Will. The protests proved effective and the Qing government forced Hart to lower the rates on Minxinju clubbed packages. Sometime in 1897, the Imperial Government ordered Hart to lower all carriage charges for Minxinju packages to half the normal letter rate or 64 cents per pound. Minxinju owners again protested this new rate forcing the government to lower rates to an astonishing ten cents per pound, which was lower than the Minxinju could transport their own mail.¹⁵³

The Qing government’s decision to grant such low rates forced Hart to adopt a two-pronged strategy. For the time being, the Post Office would acquiesce to the Imperial Will, but slowly try to raise rates; second, the Post Office would develop itself so that the Minxinju would

¹⁴⁹ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 740, Postal Circular 17, I.G. Robert Hart, 31 August 1896; Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 748, Postal No. 19, I.G. Robert Hart, 9 October 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁵⁰ The figure of 300 registered Minxinju comes from a statement made by Hart in 1897 quoted in *RWCPO, 1904*, xlvii. The *Decennial Reports, 1892-1901*, lists approximately 350 Minxinju in existence in 1901. The figure of 350 obviously under represents the total number of head offices, branches, and agencies.

¹⁵¹ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 755, Postal No. 21, I.G. Robert Hart, 9 December 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁵² Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 776, Postal No. 31, I.G. Robert Hart, 30 March 1897 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁵³ Mr. van Aalst’s Note on the Imperial Post Office in SHAC137.5277.

eventually “be absorbed” by the Imperial institution.¹⁵⁴ The Imperial Government repeatedly stymied the first half of the Post Office’s strategy. In 1899, Postal Secretary Jules van Aalst petitioned the government to raise rates on the Minxinju back to the half rate of mid-1897, which, after a year, would be raised to full letter rates.¹⁵⁵ The government seemed to agree with van Aalst’s plans for he announced the new rates effective as of 1 April 1900.¹⁵⁶ Before the new rates could come into effect, however, van Aalst was forced to withdraw them and the Post Office returned to the 10 cent rate.¹⁵⁷ The Minxinju had presumably again protested the rates and found a sympathetic audience at higher levels of government. In March 1902, Hart again tried to raise rates. With the approval of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hart’s immediate superiors, he raised rates to 30 cents per pound, and stated rates would then be annually increased by 10 cents until the total charge reached 90 cents.¹⁵⁸ Minxinju from the Yangzi ports, Tianjin, and Fuzhou joined together to protest the new rates.¹⁵⁹ And, once again, someone higher in the government – it is not clear who from postal documents – nullified Hart’s new rates. This time the Imperial Government sent a message – all Minxinju mails passing between Treaty Ports would be carried free of charge.¹⁶⁰

In 1902, Postal Secretary Théophile Piry decided to focus on an aggressive plan to increase business, introduce new services, and extend postal routes – all designed, he wrote, to

¹⁵⁴ *RWCPO, 1904*, xlvii.

¹⁵⁵ Mr. van Aalst’s Note on the Imperial Post Office in SHAC137.5277.

¹⁵⁶ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 28, Postal Secretary J.A. van Aalst, 21 December 1899 in SHAC137.2023-1. van Aalst also stipulated that only Minxinju in existence on 31 March 1900 would be allowed to register and enjoy these rates – a strategy to keep new Minxinju from opening – but it failed.

¹⁵⁷ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 32, Postal Secretary J.A. van Aalst, 21 March 1900 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁵⁸ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 1006, Postal No. 54, I.G. Robert Hart, 15 February 1902 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁵⁹ Postal Secretary’s Report on the year 1902, 7 April 1903 in SHAC137.5277.

¹⁶⁰ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 1012, Postal No. 55, I.G. Robert Hart, 17 March 1902 in SHAC137.2023-1.

“kill competition.”¹⁶¹ Less than three weeks after Hart withdrew his higher rates on the Minxinju, Piry lowered IPO letter rates from 4 cents to 1 cent.¹⁶² In September, Piry decided to take the battle to the Minxinju’s home territory by introducing Inland Agencies (鋪商/代辦所) – local shops who would sign contracts with the Post Office for a commission on the sale of stamps.¹⁶³ By the end of 1902, 153 Inland Agencies had been opened contributing greatly to the increase in the total number of IPO establishments from 176 in 1901 to 446 in 1902.¹⁶⁴ “There are certain typical advantages to be found in the new system of inland agencies,” Piry wrote, “They are cheap, easy to install, require no special staff, [and] work somewhat after the Chinese idea.”¹⁶⁵ The combination of rapid, but cheap postal extension and reducing IPO postage rates by 75% produced a “sudden and extraordinary increase” in letters sent through the Post Office – from 9.6 million in 1901 to 18.5 million in 1902.¹⁶⁶

Not content with his first successes, Piry continued adding new services and pushing postal extension. The Post Office had introduced registration and remittance services in 1897, a parcel post in 1898, and urban box offices in 1899, but Piry understood that new services would have to directly target the Minxinju. One of the keys to Minxinju success was their practice of collecting mail late at night and then transmitting it. Merchants who needed information as soon as possible, Piry wrote, “will support the Native establishments, which alone can afford them this convenience.” To compete with the Minxinju, Piry introduced a “late posting” (逾辦公時刻)

¹⁶¹ Postal Secretary’s Report on the year 1902, 7 April 1903 in SHAC137.5277.

¹⁶² The new rates became on 8 April 1902. Liu Chenghan and Xue Pinwen, *Zhongguo youzi kao* (A study of Chinese tariff rates) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1957), 8.

¹⁶³ Inland Agents would receive a fixed payment of \$3 per month plus 50% commission on their first \$10 worth of stamps sold and 5% thereafter. Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 65, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 26 September 1902 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁶⁴ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhongguo youzheng tongji huiji* (Collection of Chinese postal service statistics) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1956), 30.

¹⁶⁵ Postal Secretary’s Report on the year 1902, 7 April 1903 in SHAC137.5277.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

system in December 1904.¹⁶⁷ Minxinju would be allowed to hand their clubbed packages to postal employees at steamer wharfs and train stations just prior to departure and the Post Office would hand over the packages as soon as the steamer or train reached its destination. For such fast service, the Minxinju would pay full letter rates. On the same day he announced the late posting system, Piry also issued new anti-smuggling regulations. In addition to treble the letter rates on all smuggled mails confiscated, Minxinju firms would also pay fines of 10 taels for a first offense, 25 for a second, and 50 for a third – after a fourth offense, the Minxinju would forfeit their registration.¹⁶⁸ Increased seizures temporarily forced more Minxinju mail into the Post Office – 9 million letters in 1905 – but as soon as the restrictive measures were relaxed in the slightest, the Minxinju immediately went back to smuggling.¹⁶⁹ Piry also continued to push postal extension. In 1903, he opened another 456 new Inland Agencies, added another 318 in 1904, and reached a total of 1,189 in 1905. Such agencies would form the backbone of the Post Office until the late 1910s when even smaller agencies were introduced. The number of articles handled by the Post Office also rose to 42.5 million in 1903 and 66 million in 1904.¹⁷⁰

In early 1905, Piry looked back on the relationship between the Post Office and the Minxinju. He recognized that the private establishments could “neither be suppressed, transformed, nor replaced at a stroke.” Instead, the Post office had undertaken “a most considerate policy” of carrying their mails between Treaty Ports for free, only charging half rates to steam-served places, and allowed them to “affiliate as agents.” Despite the Post Office’s success in registering the Minxinju, it was still experiencing difficulty in forcing them to pay for

¹⁶⁷ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 115, Postal Secretary Piry, 19 December 1904 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁶⁸ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 116, Postal Secretary Piry, 19 December 1904 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁶⁹ *RWCPO, 1907*, 7.

¹⁷⁰ *RWCPO, 1904*, li.

their clubbed mails carried by the IPO. Those rates, Piry warned, would “forcibly require adjustment before long.”¹⁷¹

Piry began raising the question of increased rates on Minxinju mail in mid-1905. The Minxinju responded by jointly petitioning the Liangjiang Viceroy Zhou Fu, Huguang Governor Zhang Zhidong, and Inspector General Hart. Their argument, which had worked before, was that the Guangxu Emperor had guaranteed the Post Office would not “struggle with” the Minxinju. Despite the Emperor’s orders, the development of the Post Office had already eliminated more than half their business. The few firms still “holding out” sacrificed everything – worked continually, picked up customers’ mail at all hours, hurried overland to deliver it – all to gain the confidence of their customers. Even so, many couriers “returned with an empty hand.”¹⁷² Piry responded that unless the Minxinju start paying at least half the letter rate on mails between Treaty Ports, the Post Office would refuse to recognize them and deprive them entirely of steamer transport.¹⁷³ Nothing was resolved in June 1905, but a year later when the Post Office came under nominal Chinese administration, the newly appointed Superintendent of the Customs Administration Tieliang (鐵良) allowed Hart to raise rates on the Minxinju.

On 20 October 1906, Hart announced the new higher rates on the carriage of Minxinju clubbed packages. Hart felt vindicated, the new rates were “an important step reaffirming the principle stated in the fundamental rules approved by the Throne in 1896...that Native posting establishments shall pay for the carriage of their packages.”¹⁷⁴ In November, Piry formally announced the new rates: Minxinju would pay half the letter rate on all clubbed mails handed

¹⁷¹ The subsequent quotes in this paragraph all come from *RWCPO, 1904*.

¹⁷² “Jiang hai nei he ge xinju Pan Jingyu, Tong Ziqing deng, bing wei Minxinju shengji” (Petition on behalf of the livelihood of the Minxinju of the rivers, oceans, and streams, including Pan Jingyu, Tong Ziqing, etc.), 13 June 1905 in SHAC137.2010.

¹⁷³ Petition from Sh’ai Letter-Hongs, T. Piry, 15 June 1905 in SHAC137.2010.

¹⁷⁴ Postal Circular No. 149, I.G. Robert Hart, 20 October 1906 in SHAC137.2023-2.

over to the Post Office during normal business hours and full letter rates for the “late posting” system; Minxinju would also pay full letter rates on all overland courier routes.¹⁷⁵

In concert with the new postage rates on clubbed packages, Piry also required all unregistered Minxinju to present themselves for registration purposes. In 1904, Piry had “invited” all inland Minxinju to register themselves with the Post Office, but few firms appeared.¹⁷⁶ Recognizing that the foreignness of Post Office may be hindering the prosecution of the Minxinju, Piry turned to Superintendent of Customs Tieliang who issued an order resolving the “evil matter” of unregistered Minxinju – all Postal Commissioners would arrange with local territorial officials to force the firms to register within three months.¹⁷⁷ A year later, Piry regretfully noted that this new requirement “failed to produce the far-reaching effects anticipated.”¹⁷⁸ In some postal districts, the Minxinju registered, but then continued with their smuggling. In others, the Minxinju simply ignored the new orders. The problem, Piry and the foreign postmasters realized, was that local officials did not have well-defined laws allowing them to close down private businesses for violating postal policy.

In 1907, Piry resigned himself to a long, drawn-out battle with the Minxinju and decided to reinvigorate his campaign to undercut them through competition. “The competition of these honghs has,” Piry wrote, “not been an unmixed evil.” The introduction of new services and postal development “are calculated to bring about the absorption of the native letter honghs far more rapidly than any repressive measures are likely to do.”¹⁷⁹ That year he opened 707 new postal establishments – the highest number on record for a single year – bringing the total to 2,803.

¹⁷⁵ Postal Instructions No. 12, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 16 November 1906 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁷⁶ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 101, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 17 February 1904 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁷⁷ Postal Circular No. 159, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 27 January 1907 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁷⁸ *RWCPO, 1907, 7.*

¹⁷⁹ *RWCPO, 1907, 8.* The argument that the Minxinju spurred Post Office development was a frequent one among foreign postal officials. e.g. No. 1496 P.M.G.: Letter from A.H. Hyland, District Postmaster, Hankou, to Postmaster General T. Piry, 22 May 1912 in SHAC137.2017.

Those establishments handled 167 million articles of mail matter that year versus the 6.5 million sent by the Minxinju through the Post Office. To directly target the merchants and bankers, who provided the Minxinju with the majority of their business, Piry added new services. In February 1907, he created a two-class system of Inland Agencies to service mid-sized towns and smaller villages.¹⁸⁰ A month later, Piry also added “fast day-and-night couriers” (晝夜兼程快班) on important Minxinju routes effectively doubling the speed of mail over those lines.¹⁸¹ Finally, he introduced an experimental “express delivery service” (快遞) in Beijing, Tianjin, Shanghai, Hankou, Kaifeng, Fuzhou, and Guangzhou – all centers of Minxinju activity – to speed the delivery of mail to customers once it reached their city.¹⁸²

Despite Piry’s best efforts, there was almost no decline in Minxinju activity between 1906 and 1911. There had been a decline of clubbed packages posted in 1907 when the full effects of the new postage rates had been felt, from 7.8 in 1906 to 6.3 million letters in 1907, but in 1908 and 1909 the Minxinju still posted over 8 million letters each year. The overall numbers of Minxinju registered at the Post Office had not declined, but had increased. In 1897, the Post Office had registered some 300 Minxinju and in 1908 there were around 330 registered firms.¹⁸³ Some Minxinju had weathered competition from the Post Office by turning to other businesses such as selling lottery tickets or manipulating Customs regulations by reusing Lijin Tax Authority certificates, but in general the firms seemed as strong as ever.¹⁸⁴

In December 1910, Piry ordered the postmasters in the Jiangnan region to undertake studies of the Minxinju, their services, lines of communication, and other particulars in order to

¹⁸⁰ Postal Circular No. 160, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 14 February 1907 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁸¹ Postal Circular No. 162, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 5 March 1907 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁸² The express delivery service was introduced in the above named cities and, in 1909, extended to the entire empire. Postal Circular No. 220, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 2 February 1909 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁸³ *RWCPO, 1908*, 130-31 (Chinese version).

¹⁸⁴ *RWCPO, 1907*, 7; S/O, No. 3, Letter from Mr. Boyers, Suzhou Imperial Post Office to Inspectorate General of Posts T. Piry, 16 January 1911 in SHAC137.2014.

ascertain how they were able to survive postal competition.¹⁸⁵ What Piry discovered pleased him. Even though the Minxinju continued to send roughly the same number of clubbed packages through the Post Office, competition was having some effect. Most of the Minxinju in Suzhou, Nanjing, Ningbo, and Hangzhou were earning the majority of their income from other sources – remittances, transporting silk, sub-letting their shops to other firms, or selling newspapers, opium pills, and shoes.¹⁸⁶ Some shops had been forced to close while others had formed partnerships to keep both firms open. In many cases, former Minxinju couriers had left their firms to become private messengers or Xinke (信客).

There were probably a number of different types of private messengers throughout late imperial China who carried letters for a fee, but Xinke only seem to have appeared at the very end of the nineteenth century or beginning of the twentieth. Xinke likely emerged from two sources – former Minxinju couriers earning a living on their own and independents who filled in the gaps within the Minxinju postal network. An individual Xinke primarily handled letters between his home village and another nearby place. He was educated enough to write letters for his customers and was familiar with everyone in the nearby areas so that he almost never needed an address to deliver a letter. A Xinke could also transmit oral messages and carry small parcels. Instead of charging postage, the Xinke simply made rounds at the end of each year asking families to pay a small fee.¹⁸⁷ While the Xinke did not appear a threat to the Post Office, their rather sudden appearance and rapid growth soon alerted Piry to this growing problem.

¹⁸⁵ e.g. S/O: No. 14/1146, Letter from T. Piry, Inspectorate General of Posts to Mr. Boyers, Suzhou Postmaster, 29 December 1910 in SHAC137.2014.

¹⁸⁶ Despatch No. 553 from Mr. Boyers, Suzhou I.P.O. to Inspectorate General of Posts T. Piry, 16 January 1911 and No. 517, Letter from Postal Commissioner's Office Nanjing to Postal Secretary T. Piry, 19 January 1911 in SHAC137.2014; Postal No. 456, Letter from V. Chieri, Acting Deputy Postmaster, and J. Tweedie, District Postmaster to Postal Secretary, Beijing, 22 January 1911 and Postal No. 680, Letter from J. Tweedie, District Postmaster of Hangchow, to Postal Secretary, Beijing, 10 February 1911 in SHAC137.2015.

¹⁸⁷ Enclosure No. 2: Memorandum: Xinke and their operations, District Postmaster J. Tweedie, 3 February 1911 in SHAC137.2015.

The Revival of the Minxinju, 1911-1928

When the Imperial Post Office separated from the Customs Administration and moved to the Ministry of Posts and Communications in May 1911, Piry took the opportunity to raise rates again on the Minxinju. In September, Piry announced that henceforth all Minxinju would pay full tariff rates on their clubbed packages.¹⁸⁸ The Minxinju were outraged and began printing posters and hanging them in public places. The posters were filled with inflammatory, anti-foreign invective against Piry and the foreign postmasters. “The Postal Staff are Revolutionists,” such posters began, “Everyone is allowed to Kill the Revolutionists.” The posters called on all Chinese to unify against foreign domination of the country, particularly against foreign pressure on the lowly Minxinju. The Guangxu Emperor had promised not to interfere in the livelihood of the Minxinju owners, but the recent increase in postage rates “is designed to drive the Minxinju people to their death.” The posters then enumerate the various illegal activities of postal officials – intentional delays in delivering clubbed packages, fines pocketed by postal officials, and the bribing of Minxinju employees to rat on their brethren. These problems can be resolved, the writer argued, by allowing the Minxinju access to steamer and train transportation and by removing the foreigners from the Post Office. It then calls on all Minxinju to stop handing their mail to the Post Office, but to smuggle all of it “as an act of loyalty to the Emperor.”¹⁸⁹

Handwritten on the copy of a poster sent to Piry were also the following remarks:

The evil-doers from without are causing trouble within and are eating the flesh of the people... These animal-like people are waiting to be killed by the [Republican] Revolutionaries who have now captured Hubei. They soothe the people and kill those found guilty... When they come and kill these animal-like people, the Minju

¹⁸⁸ Postal Circular No. 274, Postmaster General T. Piry, 15 September 1911 in SHAC137.2023-3.

¹⁸⁹ Feng tongye xinshang deng gongqi (Open letter to fellow Minju merchants) as enclosure to S/O No. 135, Shanghai District Postmaster Tollefsen to Postmaster General Piry, 20 October 1911 in SHAC137.1802-7.

may hope for better days... If the revolutionaries were to kill the rebels [the foreigners in the Post Office] no questions would be asked.

In the text, the Minxinju continually stress their loyalty to the Emperor and his high officials, but blamed the corrupting influence of foreigners for causing the decline in their business. The handwritten notes, however, reference the events that would lead to the overthrow of the Qing dynasty. When the dynasty did fall, the Minxinju grasped this new opportunity.

With the establishment of the Republic, the Minxinju's new tactic was to declare that the downfall of the Qing dynasty freed them from the clutches of the Imperial Post Office. In April 1912, the foreign postmaster of Zhenjiang caught a Minxinju courier smuggling mail matter. The Minxinju owner arrived at the Post Office and declared that he could "do as he pleased" in a Republic. The owner returned in the afternoon with a statement by the Zhenjiang Minxinju Association (民信局同業):

Our industry humbly endured the Manchu Qing's cruel government for more than ten years...we had hopeless lives...It is comforting to know that Providence gave rise to the Republic...The present Post Office is a Republican Post Office...and the Minxinju should therefore enjoy the richness of Republican freedom....We were quite unaware that the Post Office could arbitrarily apply fines and...use the Manchu Qing's oppressive, murderous schemes in a Republic....Hereafter we will rely on our freedom to deliver the mail.¹⁹⁰

The Zhenjiang Minxinju were not acting on their own. Several days later, the Nanjing District Postmaster caught another Minxinju smuggling near Wuhu. After confiscating the mails, the postmaster received a wire from the Minxinju's Head Office in Shanghai declaring "Qing regulations are no longer in force!"¹⁹¹ A month later, Shanghai Minxinju were caught smuggling mail matter through Zhenjiang once again. This time the Minxinju owners threatened

¹⁹⁰ Enclosure to S/O No. 35 Zhenjiang Postmaster to Postmaster General T. Piry, 3 April 1912 in SHAC137.2182-2.

¹⁹¹ S/O No. 80, District Postmaster Nanjing to Postmaster General Piry, 8 April 1912 in SHAC137.2182-2.

to kill postal employees and destroy the Post Office if such harassment continued.¹⁹² The matter was ultimately resolved without further incident, but the Minxinju had started to act collectively and more forcefully in their struggle to protect their livelihoods.

The source of the Minxinju's new strength was the organization of modern trade associations. The associations, including the Shanghai Letter Trade Guild or Shanghai Letter Trade Association (上海信業公所/上海信業聯合會) and the National Minxinju Letter Trade Guild (全國民信局信業公所), had petitioned the newly established Beijing Government demanding freedom to carry their mails.¹⁹³ The Beijing Government's response was a verbal promise made by Premier Tang Shaoyi to the Shanghai Trade Association that he would alleviate foreign pressure on the firms.¹⁹⁴ In his report on the year's postal activities, Piry blithely acknowledged a "recrudescence" of Minxinju activity.¹⁹⁵

When the application of full letter rates produced no appreciable results, and the Minxinju began active and aggressive smuggling, Piry's fight against the Minxinju lost momentum. There was a notable decrease in the number of clubbed packages handed over by the Minxinju – from a pre-1911 average of about 7-8 million letters to a post-1912 average of around 3 million – but none of the postmasters saw this as a true decline in Minxinju activities (Table 2, at end of chapter). Piry struggled to find a new policy approach. In November 1913, he canvassed the postmasters in the most important Minxinju centers on possible new

¹⁹² No. 54, Letter from F. Scott, Acting Sub-District Postmaster of Zhenjiang to District Postmaster of Nanjing, 5 May 1912 in SHAC137.2014.

¹⁹³ Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jiaotong shi youzheng bian*, I: 58. Some historical sources refer to the guild as "Shanghai" while others use "National." The official name of the trade association is not clear. Zhang Zhuquan, "Zhenjiang youdian shihua" (Historical stories on Zhenjiang telecommunications), *Zhenjiang wenshi ziliao* (Zhenjiang literary and historical materials) 2 (1987); reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL: YDSL*, I: 475; Tao, "Zhejiang minxinju," 91; Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, I: 30.

¹⁹⁴ No. 695 P.M.G.: Letter from F. Scott, Acting Sub-District Postmaster Zhenjiang to Postmaster General T. Piry, Beijing, 6 May 1912 in SHAC137.2014.

¹⁹⁵ *RWCPO, 1911*, 15.

regulations.¹⁹⁶ The responses were lukewarm – the postmasters could only suggest the Minxinju might be forced to open departments within Post Offices, be amalgamated with the Post Office, or be forcibly closed.¹⁹⁷ W.W. Ritchie, the Hankou postmaster, expressed the problem best: “I am quite aware that the opinion is held that a compulsory closing of the honggs...will bring about a sort of postal Utopia, in which the C.P.O. will be a great monopolist...The reasoning is, I fear, false... the Chinese public find in our agile competitors something that we have not yet given them.”¹⁹⁸ Until the Post Office could discover this Minxinju advantage or find territorial officials willing to close them down, the Post Office would have to learn to live with them.¹⁹⁹ Piry retired in May 1915 leaving Minxinju policy adrift. The new Associate Director General Henri Picard-Destelan briefly tried to revive competition with the Minxinju by introducing a new rural delivery scheme, but when that proved ineffective, he too simply maintained the status quo.²⁰⁰

Recognizing the weakness of the Post Office and the warlord states, the Minxinju industry revived. During this period, the number of registered firms rose from 330 in 1908 to 445 in 1918 and continued rising to 567 in 1924.²⁰¹ The Post Office, however, was more concerned with the increase in unregistered firms smuggling mail. In Zhejiang and Jiangsu, the two most important centers of Minxinju activity, the Post Office saw a rapid shift in Minxinju

¹⁹⁶ Suggestions for Revised Regulations. C.P.O. vis-à-vis the Minju, Shanghai District Postmaster, 18 November 1913 as enclosure to Shanghai-P.M.G. Despatch No. 2551 of 1913 in SHAC137.2013.

¹⁹⁷ Outline of Regulations for Minju, J. Tweedie, 14 November 1913 as enclosure to No. 856: Re: Revised Regulation for Minju and Letter to Postmaster General from J. Tweedie, Acting District Postmaster of Hangzhou, 14 November 1913 in SHAC137.2015; Enclosure No. 2 in Hankow No. 1861 of 1913: Memorandum on the Min Chu submitted by Mr. O.H. Hulme in SHAC137.2017.

¹⁹⁸ No. 1851 P.M.G.: Minju, Considerations on, submitting, W.W. Ritchie, District Postmaster of Hankou to T. Piry, Postmaster General, 16 November 1913 in SHAC137.2017.

¹⁹⁹ S/O. No. 154, Letter to T. Piry from Mr. Schaumlöffel, 29 November 1914 in SHAC137.2015; No. 2509 A.D.G.: Minju: Hong, Li Yung-lung, Shashi Postmaster's report on smuggling by in SHAC137.2017; Instructions regarding action to be taken, soliciting. Letter by Paul Bauer, Postal Commissioner of Hankow to Acting Associate Director General in Beijing, 10 June 1915 in SHAC137.2017.

²⁰⁰ Circular No. 418, Acting Associate Director General Destelan, 12 July 1916 in SHAC137.2023-4.

²⁰¹ *RWCPO, 1918*, 3; Yan Xing, *Zhonghua youzheng fazhan shi* (History of the expansion of China's postal service) (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1994), 403.

activity towards smuggling. The Nanjing Head Office accepted 593,000 Minxinju letters in 1911, but only 86,000 in 1913.²⁰² In Hangzhou, the 13 registered firms were suddenly joined by 28 new unregistered Minxinju.²⁰³ In Ningbo, the local postmaster reported the Minxinju “league” was now doing four times the business of the Post Office.²⁰⁴ In Zhejiang, the number of unregistered Minxinju had skyrocketed. In addition to the 24 registered firms, there were now an additional 238 unregistered companies.²⁰⁵

To slow Minxinju growth, the Post Office continued trying to make seizures. Efforts at suppressing the smuggling trade, however, were entirely ineffective – the Post Office only seized between 3,000 to 6,000 letters per year out of several millions.²⁰⁶ When seizures were made, the Minxinju turned to their trade associations or external business groups to apply pressure. In addition to their own trade associations, the Minxinju also used local Chambers of Commerce, managers of modern banks, and sojourner organizations to apply pressure on the Post Office.²⁰⁷ If private pressure did not work, the Minxinju were not adverse to taking their case public by having sympathetic editorials published in local newspapers.²⁰⁸

The number of Xinke also rapidly increased in the period between 1911-1928. In 1909, the Shanghai Postal Commissioner had permitted 9 Xinke to carry mails by steamer between

²⁰² No. 1287 P.M.G.: Letter from Postal Commissioner of Jiangsu to Postmaster General T. Piry, 23 February 1915 in SHAC137.2014.

²⁰³ List of Unregistered Minju at Hangchow as enclosure to Zhejiang No. 1195 of 1915, 8 May 1915 in SHAC137.2015; Particulars of Minju Laoxiexing (老協興) at Shipu as enclosure to Zhejiang Despatch No. 1517/1846 of 1917 in SHAC137.2015 ; No. 1195: Letter to Postmaster General, Minju: Introduction of Compulsory Regulation of in Zhejiang District, suggesting and remarks in re:, E.A. Schaumlöffel, Acting Postal Commissioner, 8 May 1915 in SHAC137.2015

²⁰⁴ Extract from Ningbo Charge Memo. as enclosure to Zhejiang Despatch No. 1516/1845 of 7th July 1917 in SHAC137.2015.

²⁰⁵ List of Minju in Zhejiang as enclosure to Zhejiang Despatch No. 1885/2274 of 1919 to Co-D.G. in SHAC137.2015.

²⁰⁶ e.g. Enclosure No. 2 in Jiangsu Despatch No. 1875/2913 of 1917 to C.D.G.: Report of Seizure of Minju clubbed mails, H. O. Jones, September 1917 in SHAC137.2014.

²⁰⁷ Translation. Petition addressed to the Ministry of Communications by Mr. Wang Xirong, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce in Zhejiang, January 1922 in SHAC137.2015; No. 4200 Co-D.G.: Letter from Shanghai Postal Commissioner to Co-Director General, 14 March 1919 in SHAC137.2013.

²⁰⁸ Tao, “Zhejiang Minxinju,” 94-95.

Ningbo and the city; by 1916, there were more than 230 Xinke in Zhejiang province – 180 between Shanghai and Ningbo and 50 between Shanghai and Shaoxing.²⁰⁹ When the Post Office tried to interfere with the Xinke, they either protested to their local native place associations or tried to form companies so they could register as Minxinju.²¹⁰

The Directorate's rudderless Minxinju policy appeared to find a new direction in the early 1920s. On 21 October 1921, President Xu Shichang promulgated the long-awaited Postal Law giving a monopoly on all postal affairs to the state institution.²¹¹ As discussed above, the Beijing government issued the postal law in 1921 in preparation for the Washington Conference where the government would negotiate the abolition of the Foreign Post Offices, but many postal commissioners felt it was a prime opportunity to prosecute the Minxinju. Postal commissioners started trying to close down Minxinju firms, force them to pay fines, and pressured the unregistered companies to present themselves at the Post Office.²¹² The Minxinju's business continuously "hindered" the expansion of the Post Office, wrote Minister of Communications Ye Gongchuo, in his petition to the State Council requesting permission to establish a Committee on the Unification of Postal Rights (統一郵權委員會) in March 1922. The State Council approved the committee in April, which was to discuss the consolidation of all postal activity under the Chinese Post Office.²¹³ Sensing a tightening legal grip, the Minxinju quickly petitioned the Ministry of Communications numerous times through the Jiangsu and Shanghai Chambers of

²⁰⁹ No. 3395/6801, Minju: Collection of letters by Xinke: Suggestion to restrict, submitting, D. Mullen for Postal Commissioner to Associate Director General, 19 July 1916 in SHAC137.2013.

²¹⁰ Rough translation of a petition from a certain Xinke (信客) attempting to inaugurate a Letter Hong Corporation, styled Tongyi gongju (同義公局) at Hankou and Ningbo, 2 December 1919 as enclosure to Hubei Memo No. 513/7385 in SHAC137.2017.

²¹¹ Circular No. 507, Officiating Co-Director General, temporarily C. Rouse, 1 November 1921 in SHAC137.2023-5.

²¹² Translation of a letter from representatives of the Minju of Zhenjiang as enclosure No. 2 to Jiangsu Despatch No. 2521/3665 of 1922 to Co-Director General in SHAC137.2014.

²¹³ For the regulations establishing the Committee and the State Council's approval, see: Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Jiaotong shi youzheng bian*, I: 70-71.

Commerce, the Ningbo and Shaoxing Native Place Associations in Shanghai, and their own National Minxinju Letter Trade Association, asking the Ministry to grant them a “grace period” of fifteen years. The Ministry recognized the Post Office’s right to a national monopoly under the new Postal Law, but also believed that “due consideration” should also be given to the livelihood of the Minxinju. The Ministry then ordered the Director of Postal Affairs (郵政司) to verbally instruct the Directorate to “adopt a lenient attitude” towards the Minxinju for the time being.²¹⁴ Minxinju policy continued to drift until 1928.

The Iron Grip: The Minxinju, Chinese Post Office, and Nationalist Government, 1928-1935

In the midst of the Northern Expedition (1926-28), postal commissioners were convinced the Minxinju were experiencing a second spurt of growth. The reigning political chaos, the application of censorship on Post Office mails, and the declining efficiency in the Post Office as a result of numerous labor troubles, the commissioners argued, were giving the Minxinju too much breathing room.²¹⁵ The Directorate warned its commissioners that any firm stance against the Minxinju during the Northern Expedition would be most inopportune – the Nationalists might favor Jiangnan-based Chinese companies over a foreign-administered Post Office.²¹⁶

After the Nationalists took over the Post Office in June 1928, there was surprisingly little delay in outlawing the Minxinju. The new Nationalist-appointed Director General of Posts Liu Shufan (劉書蕃) directed Postal Commissioners Lin Zhuowu (林卓午) and Xie Weilin (謝爲霖) to present the case against the Minxinju at the National Communications Conference in mid-

²¹⁴ Translation of Ministry’s Xunling No. 1503, 11 December 1926 in SHAC137.2015.

²¹⁵ e.g. Despatch to the Ministry of Interior from the Ministry [of Communication], 19 January 1928 in SHAC137.2014; Memorandum No. 1570/12587, W. O’Neill, Acting Commissioner of Jiangxi District to Co-Director General, Beijing, 9 March 1928 in SHAC137.2232.

²¹⁶ No. 57674/2453: Minju, irregular use of Certificates, concerning, Letter from F.B. Tolliday, Officiating Chief Secretary to the Postal Commissioner of Nanjing, 8 July 1926 in SHAC137.2014.

August 1928. At the conference, Lin and Xie outlined the legal prohibitions, both national and international, against the private carriage of mails. Instead of prosecuting the Minxinju, the Beijing Governments had shown the “state’s compassion” by adopting a “lenient” policy, but the lawless Minxinju continued smuggling mail. The Minxinju must now register themselves and prepare to close their doors by the end of 1930.²¹⁷ The Conference adopted Lin and Xie’s recommendations, but with two provisos: (1) the public should not be inconvenienced by the closure of the Minxinju; and (2) the Post Office should take appropriate measures to make sure the employees of the Minxinju can find a new livelihood. The Post Office and Minxinju had until the end of 1930 to make the necessary preparations.²¹⁸

The Minxinju were shocked by the Conference’s resolution. They began flooding the various offices of the National Government with petitions pleading for greater sympathy for their livelihood, a delay in the implementation of the resolution, or for its cancellation.²¹⁹ They also used various legalistic arguments to try to convince the Nationalists to allow them to remain open such as claiming they had become part of the state postal system upon registration.²²⁰ Eventually either enough pressure was brought to bear, or enough donations were made, that the Nationalists agreed to a short delay. The Minxinju would receive a short respite, but they would have to apply for a license from the Post Office to continue operations and submit themselves to new postal regulations governing Minxinju activities.²²¹

²¹⁷ Guomin zhengfu jiaotong bu mishu chu, ed., *Quanguo jiaotong huiyi huibian* (Collection on the National Communications Conference) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1928), 382-84.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

²¹⁹ The archive file SHAC137.7791 is filled with such petitions.

²²⁰ “Jiaotongbu xunling di 4886 hao, ling Youzheng zongju, Jiaotongbu buzhang Wang Boqun, 20 November 1929,” *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) 97 (7 December 1929), 16-18.

²²¹ Circular Memo No. 520 (Translation): Instructions Relating to Registration of Minju at Post Offices, Conveying, Director General Wei Yifa and Co-D.G. E. Tollefsen, 29 September 1930 in SHAC137.6272-5.

In September 1930, the Directorate promulgated the Provisional Method on Minju Registered Licenses (暫行民局掛號領照辦法) that governed Minxinju activities.²²² All Minxinju would have to present themselves at the Post Office by the end of 1930 to be officially licensed. Any Minxinju not licensed would be immediately closed. Thereafter, each licensed Minxinju would have to reapply for their license each year. All Minxinju mail, no matter for urban or rural delivery, would have to be clubbed and sent through the Post Office at full letter rates. While many Minxinju presented themselves for registration, they also continued flooding the Ministry and Directorate with protest petitions.²²³ In most cases, however, the Minxinju simply refused to register. When the Directorate called for reports from all postal districts in 1933 on Minxinju activity, the totals reported were 775 Minxinju (including some Qiaopiju in Guangdong) then doing business, but an additional 200 remained unregistered.²²⁴ Despite continued Minxinju activity and agitation, the National Government decided in December 1933 that all Minxinju must cease business on 31 December 1934.²²⁵

In preparation for the closure of all Minxinju firms, the Post Office took steps to extend its network into rural areas. The Directorate opened 650 new Rural Box Offices, 60 Town Box Offices, 2403 Rural Stations, 431 Stamp-Sales Agencies, and introduced and new-style Town Agencies in late 1934 and early 1935.²²⁶ New rural courier lines were opened and others extended a total of 15,000 kilometers. The Post Office also began delivering mail for free to all

²²² Ibid.

²²³ e.g. Jiaotongbu zhiling di 3784 hao, 26 July 1932; Jiaotongbu xunling di 1974 hao, 27 July 1932; Jiaotongbu xunling di 1845 hao, 16 July 1932; Jiaotongbu xunling di 1837 hao, 16 July 1932; Jiaotongbu xunling di 2063 hao, 5 August 1932 all in SHAC137.6273.

²²⁴ Of those 775, there were 192 in Guangdong, 241 in Zhejiang, 190 in Jiangsu-Anhui, 57 in Shanghai, 34 in Jiangxi, 9 in Beijing, 7 in Hebei, 6 in Shandong, 6 in Eastern Sichuan, and 1 in Henan. SHAC137.1193.

²²⁵ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1205 hao, daili juzhang Tang Baoshu, (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts circular memo no. 1205, officiating director general Tang Baoshu) 8 December 1933 in SHAC137.7553-2.

²²⁶ *RWCPO, July 1934-June 1935*, 4.

places without postal establishments.²²⁷ In urban areas, the Post Office added more public mail and pillar boxes, increased the number of daily deliveries, and extended office hours. In addition to postal extension, the Directorate also hired additional inspectors to ensure all Minxinju closed.²²⁸ By early 1935, all Minxinju had closed.²²⁹

Conclusion

Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the political landscape in China was transformed by the application of externally-derived ideas of state sovereignty. The late Qing, Beiyang, Warlord, and Nationalist States shared certain fundamental state-making goals – building a modern army, extending the tax administration – but differed in their perception of the value of strong, pro-active administrative state institutions like the Post Office. The Imperial/Chinese Post Office’s struggle to attain a postal monopoly not only reveals some fundamental distinctions in the state-making agendas of these different governments, but also the ability of a strong administrative institution to pull a state towards a higher degree of stateness.

The Qing government that established the modern Post Office had an essentially pre-modern level of stateness. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Qing state lacked the authority and power to dislodge the local elites who had in many ways taken control of state functions in rural society during the Taiping Rebellion. The veneer of modernization on the east

²²⁷ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 1486 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts confidential circular memo no. 1486, Director General Guo Xinsong), 21 January 1935 in SHAC137.2684-1.

²²⁸ Youzheng zongju zhi 1510/42665 zhi Zhejiang youzheng guanliju (Despatch no. 1510/42665 from the Directorate General of Posts to the Zhejiang Head Post Office), 18 February 1935 in SHAC137.9081.

²²⁹ A few Minxinju firms attempted to operate illegally – the Post Office seizing 12,000 smuggled letters in early 1935 – but even those few stopped by late spring. Chu, *China’s Postal and Other Communications Services*, 48. For reports on a few Minxinju trying to operate in 1935, see: Youzheng zongju zhi 3443/24878 zhi Shanghai youzheng guanliju (Despatch no. 3443/24878, Directorate General of Posts to the Shanghai Head Post Office), 6 March 1935 and Youzheng zongju zhi 1773/43057 zhi Fujian youzheng guanliju (Despatch no. 1773/43057, Directorate General of Posts to the Fujian Head Post Office), 7 March 1935 in SHAC137.9081

coast Treaty Ports covered an imperial order that was ill-prepared to make the transition to a modern, Western-state nation-state. The Qing government recognized the need for some “reform,” but usually responded simply by grafting modern bureaucratic institutions like the Zongli Yamen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) onto its pre-existing state structure. The Imperial Post Office, like the Zongli Yamen, was simply attached to the old state system. The Qing government refused to take the necessary steps – eliminating the postal relay and post station systems or amalgamating the Wenbaoju with the Imperial Post Office – despite the fragmentation of authority, bureaucratic inefficiency, and financial wastefulness such a decision represented. Instead, the Qing state left it to the Imperial Post Office to “defeat” the other postal services. The Post Office, as a modern, administrative institution bent on securing a postal monopoly, undertook the task. Once the Post Office had proven itself capable of taking over postal affairs of the entire empire, and the Post Office came under nominal Chinese administration, the Qing state ordered the abolition of the relay and post station systems, which occurred just prior to the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution. The Wenbaoju, too, was gradually absorbed by the Post Office as it demonstrated its superiority through faster transmission and greater efficiency.

The Beiyang and Warlord Governments who established themselves in the aftermath of the Republican Revolution were unquestionably weak states. At its strongest, the Beiyang Government of Yuan Shikai could not extend its control over much of the former Qing empire. When Yuan fell and the country descended into the chaos of the warlord era, the weakness of the state was everywhere evident. The constant changeover in Beijing at the presidential level, but also in the ministries, trickled down to the lowest territorial officials who were afraid to exert many forms of state power given that their clique or local regime may be overthrown at any

moment. It was in precisely such a situation where the Chinese Post Office demonstrated its continuing value to the emergence of the modern Chinese nation-state by helping hold it together and increasing its level of stateness. The administrative integrity and bureaucratic efficiency of the Post Office was internationally recognized when China joined the Universal Postal Union in 1914. The international recognition of China's equality, at least postally, gave the Beijing state the strength to challenge the presence of the Foreign Post Offices at the Paris Peace Conference following World War I. While the four great powers rejected any discussion of the issue, the outpouring of nationalist sentiment in the May Fourth Movement gave the Beijing state the added momentum to continue pressing for an international resolution on the abolition of the Foreign Post Offices. At the Washington Conference in 1922, the Chinese delegation based their case on the internationally-recognized sovereignty of the Chinese Post Office, its efficiency and trustworthiness, and its retention of administrative integrity despite the ravages of the warlord years. The foreign powers agreed and withdrew the Foreign Post Offices on 1 January 1923.

Until the establishment of the National Government in 1927, none of the previous Chinese states were willing to clash with powerful social groups over the issue of a national postal monopoly. The Qing, Beiyang, and Warlord states were all too weak to attack a wealthy and socially-influential group of merchants like the owners of the Minxinju. Given the states' weakness, the foreign administrators of the Post Office took it upon themselves to try to undermine the economic viability of the Minxinju through competition. When the Post Office attempted to charge the Minxinju for carrying their mails, the Qing state caved to social pressure demonstrating its lack of autonomy. As the Post Office continued expanding, and the Qing undertook its own intra-governmental reforms during the New Policies era, the reorganized Qing government felt strong enough to demand the payment of half rates and then, in mid-1911, the

application of full rates. Just as the Qing government was starting to strengthen itself, it was toppled by Republican forces. As the Beiyang and Warlord states emerged, they proved entirely too weak to even enforce their own laws against the Minxinju. Postal expansion continued, but the Post Office could not solve the problem of the Minxinju on their own. With the establishment of the National Government, the situation changed quickly. While the Nationalists had based their ideology on anti-imperialism and anti-warlordism, they also understood the key to a successful program of state-making was the elevation of the national above the parochial/provincial. Bearing this in mind, it becomes easy to understand the Nationalists quick decision against the Minxinju. The Minxinju had not declined in power – they had actually increased their strength since 1911 – but the overall Nationalist goal of strengthening state power outweighed the sectional interests of social groups. In the battle between the Post Office and the Minxinju, then, it was not the strong institution that undermined a private postal network, but a strengthening state that valued the expansion of its authority over the economic interests of a small group of merchants.

Table 2: Minxinju Clubbed Packages Sent Through the Post Office

Year	Number of Clubbed Packages ²³⁰	Total Number of Letters in Clubbed Packages
1901	--	7,300,000
1902	--	8,000,000
1903	--	7,267,500
1904	--	8,304,125
1905	--	8,896,000
1906	262,902	7,892,000
1907	246,977	6,389,374
1908	241,562	8,042,000
1909	466,800	8,411,600
1910	441,400	7,409,600
1911	368,230	5,913,100
1912	204,120	2,749,600
1913	248,800	4,796,100
1914	145,933	3,124,279
1915	155,496	3,366,227
1916	155,417	2,624,301
1917	161,464	2,730,244
1918	156,668	2,559,314
1919	163,812	2,903,352
1920	190,350	3,017,463
1921	175,850	3,383,550
1922	166,019	3,435,011
1923	187,264	4,454,510
1924	169,500	3,352,730
1925	165,150	3,389,720
1926	151,890	3,691,940
1927	120,831	2,802,780
1928	137,967	3,551,110
1929	143,660	3,769,300
Jan-June 1930	77,280	1,760,610
July 1930-June 1931	152,820	4,090,650
July 1931-June 1932	142,700	3,927,700
July 1932-June 1933	142,300	3,713,700
July 1933-June 1934	143,400	3,978,800

²³⁰ Postal statistics from 1901 to 1917 include clubbed packages, and the letters inside them, both “received” and “posted,” which is an indication of how many times the Post Office handled clubbed packages, but not the actual number brought to the Post Office by Minxinju for mailing. In 1917, the Post Office began only calculating the number of items “posted” to accurately reflect the number of clubbed packages brought for mailing. The Post Office, in the *RWCPO* 1917, then backdated their new statistical method to 1914.

Chapter 3
“The Potentialities of the Institution”:
The Post Office, Business Services, and the Interventionist State¹

The official representative of capitalist society – the State – will ultimately have to undertake the direction of production. This necessity for conversion into State–property is felt first in the great institutions for intercourse and communication – the Post Office, the telegraphs, the railways.
 – Friedrich Engels

The Post Office giveth wings to the extension of commerce.
 – Pennant

Following the Taiping invasion of the Yangzi delta (1860-61) and Anglo-French occupation of Beijing at the end of the Second Opium War (1858-1860), various provincial viceroys such as Zeng Guofan and Zuo Zongtang launched numerous state-run self-strengthening (自強) projects aimed at modernizing China’s military to subdue domestic rebels and fend off foreign invaders. After a series of international crises in the early 1870s, self-strengtheners came to believe that Western armaments alone failed to strengthen the empire. Coupled with this new awareness was the emergence of a discourse on “commercial warfare” (商戰) produced by former compradors like Zheng Guanying (鄭觀應) (1842-1922) and government advisors such as Xue Fucheng (薛福成) (1838-1894).² In their view, “wealth and power” could only be secured by a combination of military modernization and industrial development. With a depleted imperial treasury, self-strengtheners like Li Hongzhang and Sheng Xuanhuai (盛宣懷) (1844-1916) pioneered the “government supervision and merchant management” (官督商辦) system of industrial development by creating enterprises such as the China Merchants Steam Navigation

¹ *RWCPO*, 1921, 12.

² Guo Wu, *Zheng Guanying: Merchant Reformer of Late Qing China and His Influence on Economics, Politics, and Society* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2010). Although Xue Fucheng is frequently mentioned in discussions of late nineteenth century reform, there is no definitive work on his life in English. For a general introduction, see: Helen Hsieh Chien, trans., *The European Diary of Hsieh Fucheng: Envoy Extraordinary of Imperial China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1993).

Company (1872), the Kaiping Coal Mines (1877), and the Imperial Telegraph Administration (1882).³ In this ad hoc system, private investors provided the necessary capital, but control remained in the hands of government bureaucrats.⁴ Although some of these new industries turned a profit, irregular administration and shaky financial practices by their bureaucratic managers eventually led merchant investors to shy away from them. The Qing defeat in the Sino-French War (1884-85) laid bare the doubtful utility of many of these early government-sponsored military and industrial enterprises.

In the midst of the Sino-French War (1884-1885), the Qing government despatched the Self-Strengthening advocate Liu Mingchuan (劉明傳) (1836-1896) to Taiwan to defend the island against the French Asiatic Squadron.⁵ Having succeeded in halting the French invasion, the Court appointed Liu as the first governor of Taiwan under whose administration the island became an independent province in 1887. During his gubernatorial tenure (1885-91) Liu initiated a series of wide-ranging reforms to modernize the island, including laying railway tracks, linking Taiwan to the mainland by telegraph, installing lights in Taipei, building modern roads, opening new schools, and inaugurating a postal service. Liu's Taiwan Post (台灣郵政總局), opened in 1888, was the first modern-style Post Office serving the general

³ There are numerous studies of the government supervision and merchant operation system, but the first of note was Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844-1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958); for a broad overview, see: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai shi yanjiu suo, ed., *Qingji ziqiang yundong yantaohui lunwenji* "Proceedings of the Conference on the Self-Strengthening Movement in Late Ch'ing China, 1860-1894," 2 vols. (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan jindai shi yanjiu suo, 1988); for a more recent interpretation, see: David Pong, *Shen Pao-chen and China's Modernization in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

⁴ The predecessor to this policy, and the model upon which it was based, was the "official transport and merchant sale" approach used in the state salt monopoly. Madeleine Zelin, *The Merchants of Zigong: Industrial Entrepreneurship in Early Modern China* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 140-160.

⁵ For biographical information on Liu, see: Arthur W. Hummel, *Eminent Chinese of the Ch'ing Period*, 2 vols (1943, reprint: SMC Publishing, 1991), I: 526-28. For a broad overview of Liu's reforms, see: Samuel C. Chu, "Liu Ming-ch'uan and Modernization of Taiwan," *Journal of Asian Studies* 23: 1 (November 1963): 37-53; on the traditionalistic reforms underlying Liu's self-strengthening program, see: William M. Speidel, "The Administrative and Fiscal Reforms of Liu Ming-ch'uan in Taiwan, 1884-1891: Foundation for Self-Strengthening," *Journal of Asian Studies* 35: 3 (May 1976): 441-459.

public run by the Qing government.⁶ The opening of a government-run postal service went little remarked at the time, but was perhaps Liu's most radical departure from standard self-strengthening programs.

The French defeat of the Qing not only stimulated Liu Mingchuan's reforms on Taiwan, but also a thorough reevaluation of the self-strengthening movement. Some self-strengtheners continued in the old vein by initiating a broad program of naval construction while others like Zhang Zhidong (張之洞) (1837-1909) tried to revive the interest of private capital through an "official and merchant joint management" (官商合辦) system of industrial enterprise. Reformers, government scholars, and intellectuals, however, also began to attach greater importance to political questions than to scientific and technological knowledge. From the early 1890s onward, reformers started talking more about political reform, particularly the introduction of a Western-style parliamentary system, as essential to strengthening the empire.⁷ None of these reforms had been enacted, however, when China was devastatingly defeated by Japan in the Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895).

Almost all historians agree that China's defeat by Japan sent shockwaves throughout the empire. To historians focusing on the self-strengthening movement, the Qing loss represented the failure of the bureaucratic capitalist model of industrial development exemplified by the official supervision and merchant management system.⁸ These historians tend to see the state's

⁶ You Yu, "Zhonghua youzheng shi: Taiwan xinshi youzheng, Haiguan shiban youwu" (History of the Chinese postal service: The new-style post office on Taiwan, Customs experimental post office), *Youzheng yanjiu* "Postal Research Quarterly" 49 (September 1993), 33-38; Cao Qian, *Zhonghua youzheng shi Taiwan bian: Zhonghua minguo jianguo qishi nian jinian* (History of the Chinese postal service, Taiwan: Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Republic of China) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1981), 81-126.

⁷ Lloyd Eastman, "Political Reformism in China Before the Sino-Japanese War," *Journal of Asian Studies* 27: 4 (August 1968): 695-710; Peter Zarrow, "Constitutionalism and the Imagination of the State: Official Views of Political Reform in the Late Qing," in Zarrow, ed., *Creating Chinese Modernity: Knowledge and Everyday Life, 1900-1940* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 51-82.

⁸ e.g. John L. Rawlinson, *China's Struggle for Naval Development, 1839-1895* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); Thomas L. Kennedy, *The Arms of Kiangnan: Modernization in the Chinese Ordnance Industry, 1860-*

role in the self-strengthening movement as positively hindering industrialization or having little impact at all.⁹ While most scholars agree that the industrialization projects bolstered the power of the viceroys and the central government, they often overlook that the state purposefully allowed industrial enterprises to be run as ad hoc provincial initiatives. From the state's view, it was necessary to keep the self-strengtheners in competition with each other to forestall the combination of too much military, civil, and financial power under one of the viceroys. The self-strengthening movement "failed," then, not because of the individual failures of the industrialization projects – many were quite successful – but because the Qing state refused to restructure itself in order to create bureaucracies capable of planning, financing, and directing a comprehensive imperial modernization program.

Historians of late Qing politics use China's loss to Japan as the beginning of a narrative emphasizing increasingly strident calls for central government political reform, particularly by Kang Youwei (康有為) (1858-1927) and his coterie. The reformist movement culminated in the Hundred Days Reforms (1898) in which the Guangxu Emperor and various reformists laid out a sweeping plan for government modernization.¹⁰ While these studies agree on the failure of the 1898 episode, most argue that after the disaster of the Boxer Rebellion and the Western occupation of Beijing in 1900 even "conservatives" within the central government admitted the

1895 (Boulder: Westview Press, 1978). A more recent revisionist approach emphasizes simple Japanese numerical superiority and strategic advantages for its victory. Allen Fung, "Testing the Self-Strengthening: The Chinese Army in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95," *Modern Asian Studies* 30: 4 (1996): 1007-1031.

⁹ Historians emphasizing the negative impact of state involvement in industrial enterprises include Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization* and Wellington K. K. Chan, *Merchants, Mandarins, and Modern Enterprise in Late Ch'ing China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); on the state having limited impact, see: Dwight Perkins, "Government as an Obstacle to Industrialization: The Case of Nineteenth-Century China," *Journal of Economic History* 27: 7 (1967): 478-92.

¹⁰ Luke Kwong, *A Mosaic of the Hundred Days: Personalities, Politics, and Ideas of 1898* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984); Peter Zarrow and Rebecca E. Karl, eds., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); on 1898 and the New Policies, see: Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1993); Roger R. Thompson, "The Lessons of Defeat: Transforming the Qing State after the Boxer War," *Modern Asian Studies* 37: 4 (2003): 769-773.

need for radical political change. In the immediate post-Boxer period, the Empress Dowager Cixi launched the New Policies reforms (1901-1911) that restructured the state as a modern-style centralizing ministerial government.¹¹

Between the “failure” of the self-strengthening movement in 1895 and the Hundred Days Reforms of 1898, the Guangxu Emperor launched a little-known reform movement with initiatives in education, industrial development, government administration, and military reorganization.¹² Although the Court enacted a number of reforms, its most radical departure was the creation of the Imperial Post Office (大清郵政). Instead of a joint official-merchant enterprise run by one of the provincial viceroys, the Post Office would run by the central government and offer a variety of services to the general public. As such, the Imperial Post Office represents a more expansive and aggressive view of the role of central government bureaucracies as agents of positive political, social, and economic change. The creation of the Post Office not only rapidly expanded the size of the central government, but also put the government into direct competition with the private sector in communications, transportation, and financial services.

In order to understand these momentous changes within the Qing government, this chapter begins by reviewing the debate over the establishment of a postal service designed to serve the public. In the debate, scholars and government officials brought together two on-going discussions – on the nature of relations between the state and civil society and between the government and capitalism – that helped rationalize the creation of the Post Office. Once

¹¹ Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 20-27; Richard Horowitz, “Breaking the Bonds of Precedent: The 1905-06 Government Reform Commission and the Remaking of the Qing Central State,” *Modern Asian Studies* 37: 4 (2003): 775-797.

¹² Lü Xiaobo, “Court-Sponsored Reforms, 1895-1898,” in *China, 1895-1912: State-Sponsored Reforms and China’s Late-Qing Revolution, Selected Essays from Zhongguo Jindai Shi*, edited and translated by Douglas R. Reynolds, 49-66 (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995).

created, the Post Office began offering a series of wide-ranging services in communications, banking, and transportation that put the central government into business. Instead of focusing on the competition between the government and private enterprise – much of that having been discussed in Chapter 2 – the second section of this chapter examines the government’s rationale for offering such a wide variety of “public services” through the Post Office. The Post Office usually justified its provision of public services as compensating for some of the inefficiencies inherent in capitalist development.

“Wouldn’t this be Shocking to See and Hear? ”: The Post Office and the State¹³

In the midst of the self-strengthening movement, various private subjects, merchant-compradors, lower-level officials, provincial viceroys, and foreign Customs administrators began promoting the establishment of a modern postal service.¹⁴ The arguments made in favor of, and against, the postal service dovetailed with the broader on-going debates about the state’s role in the economy and civil society. Two approaches dominated discussions surrounding the establishment of a postal service: a practical one made by Customs administrators concerned primarily with how to organize, fund, and operate a national service; second, a broader discussion among Chinese officialdom on the underlying rationale for creating a state institution purposefully designed to serve the public, but that would compete with private business.

Although Customs Inspector General Robert Hart always claimed his 1861 proposal was the earliest suggestion to create a modern postal service in China, such a radical departure

¹³ The quote comes from a conservative discussing the creation of a Western-style post office in China. Shao Zhitang, *Huangchao jingshi wen tongbian* (1901, rpt. Wenhai chubanshe, 1980), 3749.

¹⁴ In her work on the late nineteenth century Post Office, Ying-wan Cheng outlined the major proposals for the introduction of a modern postal service arguing that it was Robert Hart and other Customs officials who took the lead in its promotion. Cheng treats the introduction of the Post Office as just another “modern” institution adopted from the West while I aim to situate its creation within the broader discussions on the nature of the state and its relationship to civil society in the late Qing.

actually came first from Prime Minister Hong Ren'gan (洪仁玕) (1822-1864) of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. In 1859, Hong recommended setting up public mail boxes (郵亭) throughout the Taiping Kingdom to assist commoners in communication.¹⁵ Despite the occasional reference to modern postal services in the 1860s, serious discussions did not begin until the mid-1870s.¹⁶ In 1876, Robert Hart attempted to incorporate a modern postal service into the Chefoo Convention resolving the Margery Affair, but British representative Sir Thomas Wade ignored Hart's request. Although Hart failed, Li Hongzhang did approve the opening of the so-called Customs Post (海關撥駟達書信館) in 1878. In 1885, Ningbo Customs Commissioner Henry Kopsch wrote to Hart admitting that unless Chinese territorial officials supported the establishment of a modern postal service it would never be created. Fortunately for Kopsch, he had a well-known advocate of a modern postal service in his office. Back in 1876, Li Gui (李圭) (1842-1903), a writer in the Ningbo Customs Office, had been invited by Customs Commissioner Gustav Detring to attend the Philadelphia Centennial Exhibition and write about China's involvement. In his resulting travelogue, Li wrote positively about the American postal service recommending its adoption in China. The key to the success of Western postal services, Li argued, was that it combined public and private (合公私) mail services unlike the separation between the official postal relay system (驛站) and private Minxinju (民信局) letter firms. The union of public and private interests, wrote Li, "enriches the state and benefits

¹⁵ Hong Ren'gan, *Zizheng xinbian* (A new treatise for aid in administration) (1859, rpt. Taipei: Tailian guofeng chubanshe, 1969). Hong's radical reforms are discussed in detail in So Kwan-wai, Eugene P. Boardman, and Ch'iu P'ing, "Hung Jen-kan, Taiping Prime Minister, 1859-1864," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 20: 1/2 (June 1957): 262-294.

¹⁶ The British-owned *Shenbao* (Shanghai times) newspaper occasionally carried articles on modern postal services, e.g. 6 June 1872 and 27 February 1874. In 1877/78, *Shenbao* published three additional articles on the post office: 14 August 1877, 4 & 11 September 1878.

the people” (裕國便民).¹⁷ Li’s travelogue was well-known to self-strengtheners. Li Hongzhang wrote a preface to Li’s book and Guo Songtao and Kang Youwei were avid readers.¹⁸ In 1885, Kopsch decided to use Li Gui to push the idea of a modern postal service. Kopsch asked Li to petition Ningbo and Shaoxing Circuit Intendant Xue Fucheng, who had himself advocated a modern post office in the late 1870s, with Kopsch’s plans.¹⁹ Xue and Kopsch discussed the issue. After their discussion, Xue secured the approval of Min-Zhe Viceroy Yang Changjun (楊昌濬), the Governor of Zhejiang Liu Bingzhang (劉秉璋), and Zhili Viceroy Li Hongzhang before forwarding the petition to Liangguang Viceroy and Superintendent of the Southern Ports Zeng Guoquan (曾國荃), who then forwarded it to the Zongli Yamen.²⁰ Although nothing immediately came of Li Gui’s proposal, it was significant that a growing number of high officials had either tacitly or assertively approved of his petition. In 1892 and 1893, with the assistance of various Chinese officials, Hart repeatedly petitioned the Zongli Yamen on the establishment of a national post. Hart’s unrealistic plans, including hiring 300 new foreigners to staff post offices, failed to convince the Yamen.²¹ Embittered, Hart wrote, “The Yamen is ‘backing and filling’ in the Postal matter in an aggravating but thoroughly Yamen-esque way.”²²

¹⁷ Li Gui, *Huan you diqiu xin lu* (A new account of a trip around the world) (1877), juan 2: 26.

¹⁸ Charles Desnoyers, trans., *A Journey to the East: Li Gui’s A New Account of a Trip Around the Globe* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004), 3-4.

¹⁹ Xue’s reformist writings lead to a position as advisor to Li Hongzhang. For Xue’s writings on a modern postal service, see: Xue Fucheng, *Yong’an wenbian* (Essays by Xue Fucheng) (1888, reprint: Wenhai chubanshe, 1973), 118. While serving as an envoy to several European countries in the early 1890s, Xue also wrote several short pieces on Western postal services. Chen Zhongyi, ed., *Huangchao jingshi wen san bian* (Essays on statecraft of the dynasty, third collection) (Shanghai: Shanghai shuju, 1901), juan 55, 2.

²⁰ Various petitions from Kopsch to Hart, Feb.-Oct. 1885 reprinted in: Zhongguo jindai jingji shi ziliao congkan bianji wenyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo haiguan yu youzheng* (The Chinese customs administration and the postal service) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983), 29-37.

²¹ On Hart’s 1892 plan, see: Stanley F. Wright, *Hart and the Chinese Customs* (Belfast: WM. Mullan & Son, 1950), 630-31.

²² Robert Hart, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, edited by John K. Fairbank, et al (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), II: 920.

Hart's problem, and the problem of all of the Customs proposals, was that they failed to address fundamental questions raised by the creation of a modern postal system. How much should the state interfere with society and the economy? Would competition with private merchants undermine the Confucian rationale of the state? What were the implications of mixing the public and private realms? Should the state abolish a time honored institution like the postal relay system and how would those workers survive? Li Gui had hinted at some of the answers to these questions in his popular 1877 travelogue and they had begun to spread among Chinese officialdom.

In late Qing China, the postal relay system carried official documents and the private Minxinju firms transmitted letters for the public. How, reformers asked, could the state compete with private merchants while remaining within the bounds of traditional ideas of state action? Although the late imperial state maintained several monopolies – on salt, copper, and porcelain – the idea of a state institution engaged primarily in profit-producing services was profoundly disturbing to many officials. As one conservative wrote, “It’s simply unheard of that the state would transmit letters for the people.” Another asked “why should the government establish a post office to compete with the public?”²³ At the heart of these concerns was a traditional notion of the proper division between public and private activities. Throughout most of the imperial era, Confucian scholars and officials viewed the notion of “public,” as in public-mindedness, as a feature of the state that existed in opposition to the private self-interest of the “petty man” (小人). In discussions about the introduction a modern postal service, Chinese officials began creating a new interpretation of the relationship between the “state” (官, lit. “official”) or

²³ Qi Rushan, *Qi Rushan suibi* (The random jottings of Qi Rushan) (Taipei: Zhongyang wenwu gongyingshe, 1953), 34-35.

“public” (公) and “private” (私) realms.²⁴ In the late nineteenth century a variety of new discourses on the relationship between public and private, state and civil society emerged, but the one utilized by postal promoters focused on rationalizing the state’s pursuit of self-interest in a “commercial war” against the West as a public good.²⁵ Zheng Guanying and Xue Fucheng – both advocates of the “commercial war” approach – were joined by Chen Chi (陳熾) (1855-1899) and Hu Yufen (胡燏棻) (1840-1906) in promoting a modern postal service. These four reformers lamenting the continuing division between “public” good (公) and “private” interest (私). For the Qing dynasty to strengthen itself, they argued, the state had to lead the way by blending public good and private interest.²⁶ Official documents (公文) and private letters (私信), Chen Chi argued, should be transmitted together (一律通傳). Hu Yufen preferred to describe the Post Office as “a body of the public and private” (公私一體). Kang Youwei, too, wrote of “public and private, documents and letters” (公私文信) being intermingled by the state.²⁷

By creating a post office, these officials argued, the “public” government would be intervening in the economy to offer communications, transportation, and financial services that would put the state in competition with the private Minxinju firms. Reacting to such discussions,

²⁴ Although officials used “public” in a variety of ways, and scholars have vigorously debated this term in other contexts, among the group of officials discussed herein “public” meant the realm of state activity.

²⁵ Chi Kong Lai, “Merchant Discourse on Self-Interest in Modern China,” in Zarrow, ed., *Creating Chinese Modernity*, 99-116.

²⁶ Chen Chi worked in the Board of Revenue, Board of Punishments, and later held a mid-level position in the Grand Secretariat. In 1893, he wrote a preface to Zheng Guanying’s *Warning Words in a Prosperous Age* advocating reform as well as his own *Concerning Practical Matters* (庸書) (1893). In 1895, Chen was a leading organizer of Kang Youwei’s Society for the Study of Self-Strengthening. Hu Yufen (*jinshi*, 1874) served in Li Hongzhang’s private secretariat before being appointed Judicial Commissioner of Guangxi and then Prefect of Shuntian (Beijing). In his later years, Hu was a military advisor to Yuan Shikai.

²⁷ Zheng Guanying’s essay in Chen, *Huangchao jingshi wen sanbian*, II: 268-69; Chen Chi, *Yongshu* (Concerning practical matters) (1893, rpt. Tailian guofeng chubanshe, 1970); Hu Yufen’s essay in Liu Jinzao, *Qingchao xu wenxian tongkao* (Qing dynasty documents collection, continued) (1935, rpt. Xinxing shuju, 1959), 11225.

some “militant conservatives” such as Shandong Governor Li Bingheng (李秉衡) objected to a modern post office because it was just another Western-style institution, others simply felt it was undignified for the government to run a business or questioned whether the state could compete effectively.²⁸ Even Robert Hart recognized the “proper desire on the part of Chinese officials not to engage in a business competition with the people.”²⁹ The reformers objected to the private Minxinju firms because they were unreliable, expensive, and only served remunerative routes while leaving most of the population without access to communications facilities. The benefit of a state-run post office, Hu Yufen wrote, was that it could create a “web incorporating everywhere within reach.”³⁰ The reformers admitted that a state-run postal service would be motivated by profit, but such a motive would be tempered by the public interest of serving the entire population. In so doing, numerous Chinese reformers echoed Li Gui by claiming the Post Office would “enrich the state and benefit the people” (裕國便民).

The creation of a modern postal service might benefit state, society, and the economy, conservatives retorted, but what of the official postal relay system and its employees. Although almost everyone admitted the relay system was horribly corrupt and exceedingly expensive, conservatives defended local control by territorial officials over relay budgets, the system’s ability to house traveling officials, and the livelihood of its workers.³¹ Instead of arguing for continued local control of relay system budgets, which would sound too self-interested, the

²⁸ Li Bingheng was governor of Shandong from 1894-97. John Schrecher considered Li, who wrote a diatribe against the Western-style post office in 1895, one of the more “militant conservatives” at the end of the Qing. John Schrecher, *Imperialism and Chinese Nationalism: Germany in Shantung* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). The argument that the government running a postal service was undignified is in Qi, *Qi Rushan suibi*, 35.

²⁹ Circular No. 709 (Second Series), I.G. Robert Hart, 30 April 1896 in Inspector General of Customs, *Documents Illustrative of the Origin, Development, and Activities of the Chinese Customs Service, Vol. 2: Inspector General’s Circulars, 1893 to 1910* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1938), 55-56.

³⁰ Liu, *Qingchao xu wenxian tongkao*, 11225.

³¹ The conservative position is nicely outlined by Feng Guifen quoted in Xu Xuexia, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng, 1896-1928* (Modern China’s postal service, 1896-1928) (Taipei: Sili dongwu daxue, 1992), 340-41. Reformers who argued the relay system was too expensive, include: Hu Yufen, Liu Bangjun, and Kang Youwei. Xu, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng*, 120.

conservatives produced the specter of Li Zicheng (李自成) (1606-1645). Li Zicheng was a postal worker in the late Ming. When the Ming government decided to reduce by one-third the size of the relay system in Shaanxi, Li and his comrades rebelled. The laid off postal workers helped destroy the dynasty.³² The threat of tens of thousands of unemployed relay station workers rebelling against a weak government rightfully gave late Qing conservatives pause. In response, the reformers concocted a series of unusual organizational plans to blend the relay system with the modern postal service. A writer for the *Shenbao* newspaper suggested the employees of the relay system should be hired en masse by the modern post office.³³ Chen Chi and Zheng Guanying both thought the modern postal service should simply be an extension of the relay system.³⁴ The relay system should continue to house traveling officials, Luo Yulin argued, but give up all mail transmission to the modern service.³⁵ Wang Yisan felt the relay system should continue to carry mail in rural areas and the modern Post Office, with its use of steamers, could take over mail duties in the cities and along the coasts and rivers.³⁶

In December 1895, acting Viceroy of Liangjiang Zhang Zhidong petitioned the government to establish a post office.³⁷ Zhang's petition brought together the practical approach of the Customs administrators and the rhetoric of the reformers. Inspector General of Customs Robert Hart was behind Zhang's petition. In August 1895, Hart had a conversation with Weng Tonghe (翁同龢) (1830-1904) and Li Hongzao (李鴻藻) (1820-1897), both on the Grand

³² Harry Miller, *State versus Gentry in Late Ming Dynasty China, 1572-1644* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 150.

³³ *Shenbao*, 4 August 1878.

³⁴ Chen, *Yongshu*; Zheng, *Huangchao jingshi wen san bian*, II: 268-69.

³⁵ Luo Yulin, "Zhongguo youzheng ying ruhe banfa lun" (On the method that should be used for the Chinese postal service) in Chen, *Huangchao jingshi wen san bian*, juan 55: 4.

³⁶ Wang Yisan, "Youzheng ce" (Policy on post offices) in Chen, *Huangchao jingshi wen san bian*, juan 55: 3-4.

³⁷ Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang Wenxiang gong quanji* (Collected works of Zhang Zhidong) (1928. rpt. Wenhai chubanshe, 1963) II: 753-754.

Council, who lectured Hart on the impracticality of unfunded proposals.³⁸ Believing Zhang Zhidong – now the most influential reformer because Li Hongzhang signed the ignominious Treaty of Shimonoseki ending the Sino-Japanese War – might be able to push the postal idea, Hart despatched Henry Kopsch to meet with Zhang in Nanjing in September. Zhang thought the postal service should be run by provincial governors like a self-strengthening project, but he was told that Li Hongzhang had approved a plan to run the postal service through the Customs to keep expenses low. Hart committed the Customs to covering the initial costs and suggested the central government would only need to provide 40,000 taels a year in the future, which Zhang thought was more than reasonable.³⁹ On 27 December, Zhang petitioned the throne requesting official sanction for the creation of a postal service. Hart and Zhang may have colluded in crafting the memorial, but the Post Office only came to fruition because the Guangxu Emperor had already begun a small, but significant post-war reform program.

In May and July 1895, the Guangxu Emperor issued two edicts launching his reform movement. While the first edict focused on increasing efficiency in previous self-strengthening projects and eliminating corruption, the second one known as “Measures Appropriate to the Times” called for an expansion of railroads, currency and tax reforms, the opening of new educational institutions, military stockpiling, and the creation of a postal administration.⁴⁰ Many of these reforms had been recommended to the throne in Kang Youwei’s famous 10,000 word memorial in which he chastised the Court for failing to remodel the state, and establish a modern

³⁸ Hosea Ballou Morse, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire: The Period of Subjection, 1894-1911* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918), 65n2.

³⁹ 1895 nian 9 yue 10 ri Haiguan zaocechu shuiwusi Jiexianli cheng Hede wen di 923 hao (Statistical Secretary Kopsch to Robert Hart, 9 Sept. 1895), reprinted in Zhongguo jindai, ed., *Zhongguo haiguan yu youzheng*, 69-70.

⁴⁰ Lü, “Court Sponsored Reforms,” 51.

postal service.⁴¹ Particularly important to the Emperor, and Zhang Zhidong, was to foster economic growth in preparation for a new “commercial war” with the foreign powers. The Treaty of Shimonoseki gave Japan, and the Western Powers, the right to manufacture on Chinese soil. In addition to creating almost 200 new schools, launching tens of new publishing concerns, authorizing several new textile mills, and starting several new railroads, the Qing government also initiated new official supervision and merchant management projects such as the Imperial Bank of China, the Hanyang Iron Works, the Daye Iron Mines in 1896. The reformers rationale for creating a post office – that it would be profitable for the state – fit squarely into this new era. As Zhang wrote in his memorial, “For a small investment [postal] profits are tremendous...it will enrich the country and benefit the people.”⁴²

The establishment of the Imperial Post Office in 1896 represented a new conceptualization of the state as a vehicle for intervening in society and the economy. Although the modern postal service approved by the Guangxu Emperor contained numerous compromises reflecting the interests of the reformers and the conservatives, its establishment proclaimed the emergence of a more aggressive central state driving its own reforms. Its organization displayed increasing confidence in the efficiencies of large scale state-run institutions. Its organizational structure – a single head with almost unrestricted control over its operations – was unusual in the late Qing when diffuse power-sharing was common among Board presidents, but would become the standard model in 1905/06 when the Qing state reorganized itself as a ministerial government. Its funding was also somewhat unusual in that the cash-strapped central government decided to have the Customs administration pay for it. As it turned out, the Customs

⁴¹ Kang Youwei, *Kang Youwei zhenglun xuanji* (Selected political writings of Kang Youwei), compiled by Tang Zhijun (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1981), I: 57-59. For an English translation of the memorial, see: *NCH*, 6 December 1895.

⁴² Zhang, *Zhang Wenxiang gong quanji*, II: 754.

outlay was only about 100,000 taels per year in the first four years of operation.⁴³ The relative cheapness of the Imperial Post Office stands in sharp contrast to the government's decision to retain the postal relay system. To assuage conservatives, the Court left control of the yearly budget for the relay system of some three million taels to local officials, which also ensured that tens of thousands of relay workers remained employed. Although the Post Office was supposed to “unobtrusively” project state power, the Post Office suddenly and aggressively made its presence felt in the social and economic life of the empire, particularly as it began to challenge the relay system and Minxinju firms for control of the mail trade.⁴⁴ In the end, supporters of the Imperial Post Office hailed the “potentialities of the institution” as fostering a new understanding of the relationship between the state and civil society, public and private that not only would “enrich the state,” but also “benefit the people.”

Mail Matters: The Post Office's Letter Network

When the Imperial Post Office opened in February 1897 there was very little business and most of its early customers came simply to purchase stamps for their collections.⁴⁵ “The public itself...looked askance...at this new institution styling itself the ‘Imperial Post.’”⁴⁶ From scattered statistics, it appears foreigners patronized the Post Office more than Chinese in 1897 and 1898.⁴⁷ Chinese entering the Imperial Post Office found it a disorienting experience. Since Inspector General of Posts Robert Hart based the organization of the postal service on the

⁴³ Postal Deficits in Working of Postal a/cs shown by years in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

⁴⁴ Chia-hua Chu, *China's Postal and Other Communications Services* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), 20.

⁴⁵ “Unnumbered S/O, Letter from W. Bredon to Postal Secretary Kopsch, 6 February 1897” “Unnumbered S/O, Letter from Miller signing for W. Bredon to Postal Secretary Kopsch, 16 February 1897 in SHAC137.1813-2

⁴⁶ *RWCPO, 1921*, 72.

⁴⁷ For example, in 1898 the Tianjin District received more letters in foreign languages than Chinese. Qiu Runxi 仇潤喜 et al. ed. *Tianjin youzheng shiliao* 天津郵政史料 (Historical materials on the postal service of Tianjin). Six volumes. Beijing: Beijing hangkong hangtian daxue chubanshe, ?-1992), II: 293.

Customs system, all Head Post Offices were in Customs Houses – hardly a place frequented by most Chinese – or in obscure locations. In order to save money, Hart planted early post offices on back streets or on the outskirts of cities rather than in business districts.⁴⁸ Once a person entered the Post Office they found most of its technical terminology were neologisms concocted by foreigners and whose meanings were unclear. In the official postal regulations issued in 1896, a letter was known as a “sealed letter” (封口信) rather than the more common “letter” (信 or 書信), postcards were known as “open letter cards” (明信片), commercial papers as “trade registers” (貿易冊) and printed matter as “cut blocks and prints” (刊印). Dictionaries in the late 1890s were of no help either. Most did not include relevant postal terms or produced torturous translations such as “letters transmitted by the state letter office” (由國家信館寄來之信) for the noun “mail” or “to go to the letter office with a letter in the fingertips” (拈封信去信館) for the verb “to post [a letter].”⁴⁹ For those brave enough to get past the unusual terminology, their “hearts trembled in fear” when the postal clerks used a Western-style scale to weigh the letters.⁵⁰ The private Minxinju letter firms did not weigh letters so the new procedure was confusing. Chinese customers had a particularly difficult time understanding the relationship between Western ounces, in which all letters were weighed, and their own weight standard of the mace (錢).⁵¹ Many Chinese were suspicious that Western scales were purposefully inaccurate because the cost difference between something weighing 2.5 mace (1/2 oz) was 2 cents while something

⁴⁸ *RWCPO, 1907*, 12.

⁴⁹ Wong Su King, *An English and Chinese Dictionary: Comp. from General Miscellaneous Important Terms, Business Letters, Bills, Documents, and the Tariff of Imports and Outports of China, and Bills of Ladings* (Hong Kong: Manyutong, 1895). An examination of numerous dictionaries in the late 1890s produces either the complete lack of postal-related terms or other unusual neologisms.

⁵⁰ Bian Baoquan (邊寶泉), viceroy of Fujian and Zhejiang, cited in Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jiaotong shi youzheng bian* (History of communications: The Post Office) 4 volumes (Nanjing: Jiaotongbu zongwusi, 1930), I: 9.

⁵¹ A mace was one tenth of a Chinese ounce (兩).

weighing 3 mace was 4 cents.⁵² The Imperial Post Office also had a confusing three-tier postage system contingent upon the geographical destination of a letter: coastal (岸資), inland (內資), and international (外資), which made no sense to customers since post offices along inland waterways were considered “coastal,” but only if the letters were carried by steamer. If a customer made it this far, the clerk sold them the appropriate postage stamp, which again, most Chinese had never seen before – one dictionary translated stamp as “the head of a public person for gluing on a letter (貼信之公仔頭). Handed the stamp, many customers expressed “strong repugnance” at the idea of licking its adhesive back – eventually the Post Office had to introduce glue pots.⁵³ Once the disgusting stamp was licked, postal clerks found that Chinese as often as not put the stamp on the back of the horizontal envelope, which was a problem the Post Office was still struggling with in the 1930s.⁵⁴ The letters were then either handed to the clerk or, if the customer dared, placed in a public mailbox, which were the focus of considerable curiosity and rampant rumors when they first appeared.⁵⁵ Suffice it to say, the “far from confidence-inspiring” Chinese name of the Post Office was frequently “uttered in derision” in its early years.⁵⁶

As a business enterprise, the Post Office up to 1901 was a failure. Its network of 176 offices was smaller than the private Minxinju system, its rates were considerably higher at four cents per letter, and it was largely confined to coastal areas and Treaty Ports. Within ten years, however, the development of the Post Office as a business concern was considered by one

⁵² This was a complaint made by Liangguang Viceroy Tan Zhonglin (譚鐘麟) in the late 1890s. Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, *Jiaotong shi*, 9.

⁵³ *RWCPO*, 1907, 11.

⁵⁴ Jiaotong bu youzheng si, ed., *Youzheng huiyi huibian* (Collection on the Post Office Conference) (Nanjing: Jiaotong bu youzheng si, 1934), 63.

⁵⁵ *Beijing wuri bao* (Beijing weekly), 21 July 1906 cited in “Da Qing youzheng zongju: Woguo xiandai youzheng de xianhe” “Qing dynasty postal service general bureau: The beginning of our country’s modern postal service,” *Zhongguo diming* (China gazetter) 1 (1999), 17.

⁵⁶ *RWCPO*, 1921, 12, 72.

European to be “one of the romances of modern industrial development.”⁵⁷ The author of that romance was a Frenchman named Théophile Piry who became postal secretary in 1901. By creating an efficient, highly-organized network of post offices and post roads, with a monopoly on modern forms of transportation, Piry and his well-trained postal staff would turn the Post Office into one of the most successful state institutions. Within a short time, the Post Office provided a quicker means of communications, a better transportation system, and cheaper financial services than those offered by its private competitors.

At the heart of Piry’s success was his belief that providing mail services to the entire public was the primary mission of the Post Office. In order to fulfill that mission, Piry gambled in 1902 by cutting postage rates on standard letters to a “purely nominal” rate of one cent, which was 75% cheaper than most postage charged by the Minxinju.⁵⁸ He also simultaneously began a period of rapid expansion by utilizing Inland Box Office Agencies (鋪商, later 代辦所). Such agencies were pre-existing local businesses that agreed to collect mail and sell stamps for a monthly stipend and percentage of stamp sales.⁵⁹ Although Piry’s methods increased deficits by almost fifty percent over the next several years, both the size of the network and amount of business conducted more than doubled as well.⁶⁰ Key to the growth of the Post Office was its nominal postage rate that remained, from 1902 to the 1940s, the cheapest in the world of any country of note. By 1910, the Imperial Post Office could transmit a letter for three cents over 33 days and 4,400 miles from Beijing to Urumqi.

Along with physical expansion, Hart and Piry also engaged in a variety of internal and external campaigns to improve postal work, educate the public about the post office, and

⁵⁷ *T’oung Pao*, Second Series 12: 4 (1911), 573.

⁵⁸ Postal Circular No. 241, Postal Secretary Piry, 1 June 1910 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁵⁹ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 65, Postal Secretary Piry, 26 September 1902 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁶⁰ Postal deficits (in Customs taels) for 1901: 167,060.65; 1902: 241,858.35; 1903: 347,813.26 in Postal Deficits in Working of Postal a/cs shown by years in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

advertise its services. Hart and Piry both sent out morale-boosting circulars to all postal commissioners emphasizing efficiency, zeal, tact, and scrupulous honesty when dealing with the public. To improve the public perception of the Post Office, they also touted the qualities of speed, regularity, and security as the three essential prerequisites of postal work.⁶¹ Postal administrators and other government officials made a concerted effort to facilitate the public's understanding of postal communications, its terminology, and procedures by authoring dictionaries of postal terms, publishing letter writing manuals, and issuing lists of locations with Post Offices in Chinese.⁶² The Post Office also undertook, as discussed in Chapter 6, a wide variety of advertising campaigns, including planting positive stories in newspapers, selling very cheap provincial postal maps, publishing presentation-quality postal atlases, and giving out free calendars.

Starting in 1904, Postal Secretary Théophile Piry also sought to spread “postal culture” by methodically expanding the postal network and introducing new services for business customers.⁶³ He raised the domestic postage rate to 2 cents per letter, and made the domestic tariff uniform, to help fund the expansion program.⁶⁴ With the additional funds, Piry opened between 500-1,000 new offices per year. When all large urban areas had been provided with service by 1907, Piry focused on expanding into smaller cities, towns, and rural areas. Between

⁶¹ e.g. Postal Secretary's Circulars, No. 51, Postal Secretary van Aalst, 1 August 1901 and Postal Secretary's Circulars, No. 77, Postal Secretary Piry, 16 May 1903 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁶² Jan W. H. Ferguson, *A Glossary of the Principal Chinese Expressions Occurring in Postal Documents* (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1906); for early letter manuals, see: *Nong-Gong-Shang xue putong yingyong chidu jiaoben* (Letter writing manual for use in agriculture, industry, and commercial studies) (Shanghai: Wenming shuju, 1902); Ye Tongchun, *Putong Shangwuyingyong chidu jiaoben* (Letter writing manual for general business use) (Shanghai: Hanmozhai shuzhuang, 1907); *Zuixin nüzi chidu jiaoben* (The newest letter writing manual for women) (Shanghai: Zhangfuji shuzhuang, 1908); Gao Yuhan, *Baihua shuxin* (Letters in colloquial language) (Shanghai: Yadong shuxinguan, 1921); Inspectorate General of Customs and Posts, *Da Qing youzheng juming* (List of imperial post offices) (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1907). By 1947, the list of post offices, later known as simply as the *Youzheng jusuo huibian* (List of post offices), had gone through at least fifteen separate editions.

⁶³ Zhang Liangren, *Zhongguo youzheng* (The Chinese postal service) 3 vols. (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935-1936): II, 83.

⁶⁴ Postal Secretary's Circulars, No. 108, Postal Secretary Piry, 1 July 1904 in SHAC137.2023-1.

the larger Head and Branch Offices, Piry inaugurated fast day-and-night couriers and along many routes opened Town (城邑信櫃) and Rural Box Offices (村鎮信櫃) in 1908-09.⁶⁵ These Box Offices were subordinate to contracted Postal Agencies and established wherever the size of the local population did not warrant an agency. By using box offices to extend the postal network, Piry increased the number of offices from 2,803 in 1907 to 5,357 by 1910.

With the expansion of the postal network, Piry also started adding new services to facilitate business development. Since 1897, the Post Office had offered registered mail (掛號郵件), a form of tracking, to provide security for special mail matter at the rate of ten cents per letter. In 1906, Piry introduced a ten-cent express delivery (快遞郵件) service for business customers to ensure their mail matter was immediately sorted and delivered upon arrival at its destination.⁶⁶ Express delivery proved a very popular service with customers conducting time-sensitive business. Finally, Piry created an insured letter (保險郵件) service in 1912 to protect small valuable items.⁶⁷ These special add-on services proved moderately successful, which helped increase the total amount of mail matter being sent through the mail. Between 1904 and 1911, the amount of mail matter rose from 21 million items to 116 million.

One of the increasingly popular types of mail matter among business customers, urban residents, and foreigners during this period was the postcard. Having appeared in Europe in the late 1860s, the postcard was an immediate success. By the early twentieth century, Germans were sending more than 1.1 billion postcards per year, Americans more than 800 million, and the

⁶⁵ Postal Circular No. 162, Postal Secretary Piry, 5 March 1907 in SHAC137.2023-2.

⁶⁶ The express delivery service started experimentally in 1906 and was made general in 1909. Postal Circular No. 220, Postal Secretary Piry, 2 February 1909 in SHAC137.2023-2.

⁶⁷ Under discussion for four years, the insured letter service came into experimental use in 1912; Circular No. 299, Postmaster General Piry, 18 December 1912 in SHAC137.2023-3; for background on the insured letter system, see: SHAC137.1915.

British more than 700 million.⁶⁸ In China, the foreign-run Local Post Offices of the Treaty Port Municipal Councils (工商書信館) introduced postcards to China in the early 1870s.⁶⁹ In October 1897, the Imperial Post Office started selling its own postcards for a nominal fee.⁷⁰ In the late 1890s commercially-produced picture postcards (明信華片) began spreading throughout the West and China.⁷¹ Postcards could then be sent anywhere in China for one cent between 1897 and 1919. The Post Office in large urban centers such as Shanghai usually collected and delivered mail between six and ten times daily. A postcard dropped in a mailbox at 10:00 am was sure to reach its recipient in the early afternoon. For an additional cost, customers could also purchase “reply postcards” (雙明信片), which consisted of two parts allowing the recipient to tear off one half of the postcard and mail it back to the sender for free. While postcards never reached the same heights of popularity as in the West, they proved increasingly popular after 1910 when Piry raised the letter rate to three cents.⁷² From an average of less than a million a year, postcards jumped dramatically to three million in 1911 and continued to rise to 35 million by 1919.⁷³

⁶⁸ George and Dorothy Miller, *Picture Postcards in the United States, 1893-1918* (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1976), 22.

⁶⁹ Lu Jiafu, “Zhongguo jingnei zui zao de youzheng: Shanghai gongbujie shuxinguan” (The earliest postal service within China’s borders: The Shanghai Local Post Office) *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) 7 (September 1994), 24.

⁷⁰ For early IPO postcards, see: Hua Yukuan, “Zhongguo shiqian mingxin pian youzi kao” “A Study of the Rate of the Chinese Postcard Forerunners,” *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) 9 (August 1995), 6.

⁷¹ The picture postcards that we know today, with a picture on the recto with room for an address, message, and stamp on the verso were not introduced globally until 1906 at the Sixth Postal Union Congress. Frank Staff, *The Picture Postcard & Its Origins* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 66. There are numerous works that include images of late Qing and Republican era postcards. For representative samples, see: Hans-Rudiger Fluck, Barbara Boke-Fluck, and Zhu Jianhua, *Shanghai lishi mingxin pian* (Shanghai historic postcards) (Shanghai: Tongji daxue chubanshe, 1993); Liu Boxian, *Wangshi: Wan Qing mingxin pian toushi* (The past: A perspective through late Qing postcards) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2001); and three works by Zhe Fu, *Jiu Shanghai mingxin pian* (Postcards of old Shanghai) (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1999), *Mingxin pian zhong de lao Tianjin* (Old Tianjin in postcards) (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2000), and *Lao mingxin pian xuan* (Selected old postcards) (Xianggang: Lingtian chubanshe, 2001).

⁷² Postal Circular No. 241, Postal Secretary Piry, 1 June 1910 in SHAC137.2023-2.

⁷³ The numbers of postcards sent through the Post Office averaged between 35-40 million a year until the outbreak of World War II when their number dropped precipitously and never recovered.

As business developed, Postal Secretary Piry realized postal districts would have to be reorganized to facilitate routing, sorting, and administrative control. As discussed in Chapter 1, the postal districts and route systems had been based upon the Customs network. Customs districts, organized around trading ports, paid no attention to either provincial borders or traditional road networks. By 1903, there were some 33 separate postal districts. The smallest districts, Simao in Yunnan, Qiongzhou in Guangdong, and Longzhou in Guangxi, all had less than ten post offices as late as 1909.⁷⁴ More populous provinces such as Jiangsu were divided into four separate postal districts that overlapped parts of other provinces.⁷⁵ Understanding this to be an inefficient system, Piry began the process of re-organizing districts in 1909 to make every province its own postal district.⁷⁶ By 1913, Piry had completed the reorganization by shifting Head Offices to provincial capitals.⁷⁷ In concert with the district reorganization, Piry also restructured the administrative relationship between offices. After 1913, a postal commissioner (郵務長) in each Head Office administered an entire postal district (郵界, later 郵區), which was divided into a number of sub-districts supervised by a sub-district postmaster in a First-Class Post Office (一等郵局). Within each sub-district was a certain number of Second-Class offices in mid-sized cities and Third-Class Offices in smaller cities.⁷⁸ Each of the lower offices was overseen by a Clerk, Assistant, Postal Officer, or Postal Student (郵務生) of

⁷⁴ *RWCPO, 1910, 22.*

⁷⁵ For descriptions of all the early postal districts, see: Postal Secretary's Circulars, No. 75, Postal Secretary Piry, 18 April 1903 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁷⁶ Mr. Piry's Note, 17 April 1910 in SHAC137.679(6).1296.

⁷⁷ Circular No. 344, Postmaster General Piry, 13 December 1913 in SHAC137.2023-3. After 1913, there were only a few changes to district organization. In 1919, the Beijing metropolitan area became its own postal district. In 1921, Co-Director General Destelan divided Manchuria into Northern and Southern districts, but a year later renamed them the Fengtian (Liaoning district after 1929) and Ji[lin]-Hei[longjiang] districts. Sichuan was also divided into Eastern and Western districts in 1922. For eighteen months between 1929-30, postal administrators created a separate Shantou district in Guangdong. Finally, from 1931 to 1935, the Directorate amalgamated the Jiangsu and Anhui into the Su-Wan district, but re-separated in 1935.

⁷⁸ Circular No. 333, Postmaster General Piry, 17 November 1913 in SHAC137.2023-3.

requisite rank. Beneath these major establishments were the postal agencies, town and rural box offices, and, starting in 1918, rural stations (村鎮郵站).

In 1918, Henri Picard-Destelan, head of the Post Office since 1915, launched a new rural expansion program to spread the postal network. Seeking to expand into rural areas and to more remote villages, Destelan installed rural stations at places along postal routes. As couriers approached a village designated as a rural station, they would ring a bell to announce their arrival and then deliver and collect mail, sell stamps, and perform any other additional services required. As travelling Post Offices, Destelan wrote, the rural station system is “the most economical method of bringing into touch with the outside world those remote places far off the beaten track where...the arrival of the mail is an event and the postman always a welcome visitor.”⁷⁹ Within three years, Destelan had established 17,053 rural stations in addition to the 18,406 other post offices. The growth was so quick that the number of offices in Shandong alone in 1920 was more than the entire postal network in 1910. Destelan declared, “rural delivery is the most momentous and significant of all recent public efforts to promote the general welfare.”⁸⁰ Destelan did not ignore urban areas either. To increase the use and convenience of urban postal facilities, Destelan introduced Stamp Selling Agencies (代售郵票處) in 1922. These agencies were designed to replace the more expensive Town Box Offices and were situated in the vicinity of public mailboxes.⁸¹

With more than 35,000 post offices by 1921, Destelan saw profits rise rapidly. Having shown its first small profit in 1915, the Post Office averaged around a four million tael profit per

⁷⁹ *RWCPO, 1918*, 8.

⁸⁰ *RWCPO, 1919*, 1.

⁸¹ Destelan opened 821 Stamp Selling Agencies in 1922 and increased them rapidly to 1,639 by 1925. *RWCPO, 1925*, 1070 (Chinese version).

year in the early 1920s.⁸² While the Post Office's profit margins were relatively small compared to the Customs or railway administrations, the very fact that it produced profits at all was significant. The vast majority of postal administrations around the world usually had deficits. The source of profits at the Chinese Post Office stemmed primarily from a roughly 40% increase in the amount of mail matter handled between 1920 and 1925 from 400 to 565 million articles. As business at the Post Office increased, Destelan used the additional profits to pay off outstanding debts, improved internal equipment, purchased land for additional offices, and built new imposing head post office buildings in Shanghai, Beijing, Ji'nan, Kaifeng, Mukden, Urumqi, and Hangzhou.

By the late 1920s and early 1930s, the Post Office was encountering numerous challenges that checked postal development, but that did not fundamentally alter either the network or the Post Office's overriding mission. The chaos of the Northern Expedition (1926-1928) in which the Nationalists and Communists militarily unified the country, caused great disruption to the Post Office by interfering with postal routes, restricting the remittance of funds, and destroying some offices. Immediately after the Northern Expedition, the Nationalists took over administration of the Post Office. Their policies of using postal revenues to subsidize the development of the airline industry in 1929 and the decision to create a separate Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks in 1930 weakened the economic foundations of the Post Office. Shortly thereafter, the Directorate also lost control over the Manchurian postal districts, which contributed greatly to already mounting deficits. With all-time high deficits of 5.6 million in 1932 and 6.4 million in 1933 postal expansion came to a standstill.

⁸² Acting profits were 2.2 million in 1920, 2.8 million in 1921, 3.8 million in 1922, 4.4 million in 1923, 4.3 million in 1924, and 3.9 million in 1925. For these figures, see the relevant RWCPO.

In response to the economic crisis in the Post Office, the Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua (朱家驊) and Director General of Posts Guo Xinsong (郭心崧) instituted a policy of strict retrenchment coupled with rapid rural expansion.⁸³ The rural expansion program of 1934-36 completed the postal network. The rural expansion program of the mid-1930s was made up of three parts: a concerted effort to extend service into frontier provinces, the creation of a new-style establishment, and the inauguration of rural free delivery. To provide service to frontier provinces, the Post Office abandoned the principle that rural extension should only take place where it would prove profitable.⁸⁴ Starting from an office or agency, postal inspectors established three or four circuits in different directions of about 15-20 miles, which could be covered by a courier in a single day. An individual courier would then travel one such circuit each day under the assumption that each circuit would be travelled every three or four days. Along these new routes, the Post Office would hang public notices introducing the post office and its functions.⁸⁵ Wherever conditions required, the postal inspector could also plant one of the recently introduced Box Office D establishments. Local businessmen or village leaders could contract with the Post Office to open a Box Office D in a village used by the local area as a periodic market. The box holder would then promise to take mail matter from and delivery it to a local post office or agency whenever market day was held. The villages from the surrounding area could then conduct their postal business at the same time as their other trading. To advertise such services “picturesque posters” were hung in the market village.⁸⁶ Finally, the rural free delivery system literally brought the entire population into the postal network. Prior to 1935, the

⁸³ The retrenchment policy worked to produce profits of 684,000 in 1935 and 4.9 million in 1936.

⁸⁴ Chia-hua Chu, *The Ministry of Communications in 1934* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1935), 3; *RWCPO, 1933/34*, 2; *RWCPO, 1934/35*, 1.

⁸⁵ Directorate General of Posts, *Postal Compendium* 郵政綱要 (Shanghai: Directorate General of Posts, 1936), “Rural Delivery and Collection” in SHAC137.6223.

⁸⁶ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1600 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular memo no. 1600), 27 June 1935 in 137.6284-2.

Post Office relied on either the private Minxinju letter firms to deliver mail to isolated areas or could despatch special couriers, but in each case the recipient had to pay a fee. Under the new system, the Post Office would despatch couriers to any location free of charge no matter how isolated the location.⁸⁷ The rural extension program was a great success. In 1935, the Directorate opened 5,106 new offices and another 18,413 the following year. Even the most isolated provinces such as Yunnan, Guizhou, and Shaanxi now had sufficient postal service. Yunnan, for example, had 682 establishments transmitting 5.8 million articles of mail matter over 13,873 miles of postal routes in the mid-1930s. Postal coverage in more populous districts was even more impressive. In Zhejiang there were 4,615 post offices transmitting 55.2 million articles of mail matter over 18,600 miles of routes.⁸⁸ At its greatest pre-war size, the Chinese Post Office had a total of 72,690 post offices handling 881 million items of mail matter over a network of 400,000 miles of routes.

*“Newspapers are Beneficial to the State”*⁸⁹

State Subsidies to Private Businesses through Postal Rate-Making

In 1937, former Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua described the Post Office’s mission as to play “a leading part in the cultural development and political advancement of remote regions...by carrying to the interior the printed page from the capital and business centres.”⁹⁰ To play this vital part, the Post Office subsidized various categories of mail matter, including newspapers, printed matter, commercial papers, and samples. Unlike private companies who

⁸⁷ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1486 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of Posts, circular memo no. 1486), 21 January 1935 in SHAC137.6284-1.

⁸⁸ The statistics from this paragraph all come from Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhongguo youzheng tongji huiji* (Collection of Chinese postal service statistics) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1956).

⁸⁹ Liang Qichao (1896) cited in Andrew Nathan, “The Late Ch’ing Press: Role, Audience and Impact,” *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology* (1980), 1293.

⁹⁰ Chu, *China’s Postal*, 76.

would only carry such material for a profit, the state through the Post Office decided to accept postal deficits in exchange for serving the entire public. Indeed, the Post Office absorbed significant deficits from all categories of subsidized mail, but in exchange played an active part in the political, social, economic, and cultural life of the country.

The Post Office subsidized newspapers, magazines, and books – the focus of this section – but also several lesser-known categories. In 1897, Inspector General of Posts Robert Hart created the broad categories of printed matter (印書) and commercial papers (貿易冊). Printed matter included magazines and books, but also such things as pamphlets, sheets of music, page proofs, engravings, photographs, material for the blind, plans, maps, and mail-order catalogues.⁹¹ Commercial papers was a broad category generally for business customers and included such material as accounting ledgers, bank books and cheques, property deeds, bills of lading and manifests, insurance documents, various invoices and waybills, student exercise books, and all laws passed by government. In 1899 and 1911, the Post Office introduced new subsidized categories known as “samples” (貨樣) and “unaddressed trade circulars (不註姓名之商務傳單). Samples included all manner of items that companies could send to customers, but also flowers for florists, specimens for scientists, and blocks for printers.⁹² Unaddressed trade circulars, by contrast, were daily, weekly, or semi-monthly advertising flyers from places like Shanghai sent to the outports for distribution by local companies.⁹³ The postage rates on these four categories fluctuated slightly before 1911, but the next year the new Republican state decided to grant a long-term subsidy by only charging a nominal rate of 1 cent per 100 grams, 2.5 cents for 100-

⁹¹ The inclusion of “Reading Matter for the Use of the Blind” (瞽者所用印有點痕或凸出字樣之文件) did not appear in the printed matter category until 1920. *RWCPO, 1920*, 11

⁹² For detailed descriptions of these mail categories, see: *Da Qing youzheng zhangcheng*, 35-41.

⁹³ Postal Instruction No. 112, Postal Secretary Piry, 10 April 1911 in SHAC137.2023-2.

250 grams, and so on.⁹⁴ These remarkably cheap postage rates remained in effect until 1940. The greatest benefactors of government largess through subsidized mail rates, however, were newspaper, magazine, and book publishers.

Postal rate-makers took it as axiomatic that the government should underwrite the dissemination of “information in the public interest,” both timely such as newspapers and magazines and timeless such as books. The underlying purpose was to use postal rate-making policy and the physical postal network as conduits for the spread of education and culture. “For when cheap and speedy... facilities supplement and quicken the present mode of mail communications with the far interior, they will start the circulation of ideas among every larger groups of men, even as learning of all kinds increases with the means of disseminating it.”⁹⁵

State subsidies to newspapers, magazines, and books not only highlights the state’s desire to foster economic growth, particularly among printers and publishers, but also its willingness to effectively pay to spread what the state believed was educational and cultural content. These subsidies not only provide a window on the new-style interventionist state, but also complicate our understanding of state censorship in the late Qing and throughout the Republic. Over the last fifteen years, historians of China have paid considerable attention to the development of the newspaper and publishing industries. There have been studies of individual foreign- and Chinese-owned newspapers, the development of journalism as a profession, the creation of a public sphere/middle realm through the circulation of newspapers, the mechanics of publishing, and numerous works on the relationship between the government and newspaper industry.⁹⁶

⁹⁴ Xue and Liu, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 143-155. The official rate for commercial papers, printed matter, and trade circulars as of March 1912 was: 1 cent for 100 grams, 2.5 cents for 100-250 grams, 5 cents for 250-500 grams, 7.5 cents for 500-1000 grams, and 15 cents for 1000-2000 grams.

⁹⁵ *RWCPO*, 1921, 12.

⁹⁶ On the history of Chinese newspapers, see: John Fitzgerald, “The Origins of the Illiberal Party Newspaper: Print Journalism in China’s Nationalist Revolution,” *Republican China* 21: 2 (April 1996): 1-22; Henrietta Harrison, “Newspapers and Nationalism in Rural China, 1890-1920,” *Past and Present* 166 (2000): 181-204; Joan Judge,

These studies generally agree that the various governments ruling China from the late Qing through the Republican era had an adversarial relationship with the press. True enough, as we will see in Chapter 5 on postal censorship. With very few exceptions, however, do these newspaper historians even mention state subsidies of the newspaper, magazine, and book industries. Without such state subsidies, it is impossible that published material would have circulated so widely throughout China. Although state subsidies of newspapers, magazines, and books originated with the foreign administrators of the Post Office, the central or warlord governments would reassert the value of the circulation of public information through postal subsidies several times in the Republican era. The relationship between the newspaper, magazine, and book industries and the central government, then, was far more ambiguous than previously portrayed. The government did indeed censor information, but also paid for it to circulate at the lowest postage rates in the world.

In the early years of the Post Office, rate-makers adjusted subsidies to newspapers and other printed matter trying to strike a balance between the spread of newspapers, magazines, and books while limiting their own financial losses. When the Post Office opened in 1897, the postage rate on a single letter rate weighing $\frac{1}{2}$ oz was four cents while Chinese-language newspapers *of any weight* passed for one cent, foreign-language newspapers for two cents, and magazines for two cents.⁹⁷ Within a year, the Inspectorate realized the financial burden associated with an unlimited weight limit for newspapers and introduced a weighted scale.

Print and Politics: Shibao and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Stephen R. MacKinnon, "Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period," *Modern China* 23: 1 (January 1997): 3-32; Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872-1912* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004); Christopher A. Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai: Chinese Print Capitalism, 1876-1937* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); Lee-hsia Hsu Ting, *Government Control of the Press in Modern China* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, 1974); and Rudolf Wagner, "The Early Chinese Newspapers and the Chinese Public Sphere," *European Journal of East Asian Studies* 1: 1 (2001): 1-33.

⁹⁷ Inspector General's Circulars, Postal Series, No. 7, I. G. Robert Hart, 9 April 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

Under the new system, newspapers and magazines would pay ½ cent on two ounces, one cent between 2-4 oz, and one cent for every three ounces thereafter.⁹⁸ This rate lasted until 1904 when the Post Office abandoned the graduated weight system in favor of a flat rate of ½ cent per two ounces for local delivery and one cent per two ounces for all other places. Printed matter, however, retained its graduated scale.⁹⁹

As the newspaper industry started to develop, in no small measure due to the cheap postage rates, Postal Secretary Piry decided to introduce a newspaper registration system 1905. The new system would not only increase the speed of newspaper handling by allowing publishers to pay quarterly, but also granted additional concessions to established Chinese-language publications with a wide readership. Under the new system, all subscription publications of domestic origin issued from a “known establishment” could register themselves at the Post Office.¹⁰⁰ Only newspapers that registered themselves at the Post Office – that is, all “legitimate publications” not associated with the anti-Manchu movement – would be entitled to the subsidized preferential rates.¹⁰¹ The Post Office designed three different categories of newspaper: Class A was for those newspapers with a small readership and paid full tariff rates; the Class B category or so-called “Special Marks” newspapers (立卷之報紙) was primarily for foreign-language publications that paid postage in a lump sum quarterly at estimated weights; and, Class 3, or “Newspapers in Bulk Under Contract” (掛號按照總包特別優益寄送之報紙) was for Chinese-language newspapers sent in bulk for an estimated quarterly payment of 2/10ths

⁹⁸ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 13, Postal Secretary J.A. van Aalst, 19 October 1898 in SHAC137.2023-1.

⁹⁹ Liu and Xue, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 10.

¹⁰⁰ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 120, Postal Secretary Piry, 1 February 1905 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁰¹ The wording in these regulations allowed revolutionary publications to circulate through the Post Office as single issues paying full tariff rates. It was not until 1908 that the Post Office closed this loophole by issuing regulations banning all subversive publications from the mails. Postal Circular No. 218, Postal Secretary Piry, 24 December 1908 in SHAC137.2023-2.

of a cent per newspaper.¹⁰² By 1910 the generous subsidies to newspapers and printed matter resulted in some 29 million newspapers, magazines, and books being delivered by the Post Office. This represented an almost doubling of such matter since 1907 when 16 million issues were despatched. This growth, Postal Secretary Piry wrote, “denotes a striking movement in the intellectual and educational development of this wonderful country.”¹⁰³

The rapid growth in the number of newspapers and printed matter handled by the Post Office was beginning to cost the Post Office dearly. In 1910, Postal Secretary Piry decided to create light (輕件) and heavy (重件) mail categories.¹⁰⁴ The purpose of these two categories was to limit the financial losses attendant on the subsidies to newspapers and magazines by allowing Piry to renegotiate his carriage contracts with steamship and railway companies. Prior to 1910, the Post Office paid its contract carriers the same for transporting light letters as heavy bulk newspapers. To reduce the resulting financial loss, Piry renegotiated carriage contracts to make it cheaper to transport heavy mails by allowing them to be transported slower than light mails.

The already exceptionally low postage rates did not satisfying newspaper editors, magazine publishers, or booksellers. Despite the low rates and simplified posting procedure, newspaper publishers petitioned the newly-established National Parliament in 1910 “praying for further reductions in newspaper rates.”¹⁰⁵ The Post Office turned down their request, but faced new pressure from advertisers and book publishers who demanded rates similar to newspapers. In late 1910, Piry used the new light and heavy mail categories to grant advertisers a reduction in

¹⁰² Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 1242, Postal No. 83, I. G. Robert Hart, 26 April 1905 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁰³ *RWCPO, 1910, 2.*

¹⁰⁴ Postal Circular No. 255, Postal Secretary Piry, 21 December 1910 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁰⁵ *RWCPO, 1910, 2.* For additional requests for postage reductions, see: Shanghai Incoming, 1908 in SHAC137.1802-2.

rates for unaddressed trade circulars, which irritated the book publishers.¹⁰⁶ If profit-hungry advertisers could have their rates lowered, book publishers wanted the same preferential treatment. Book publishers like the Director of the Commercial Press (商務印書館) argued that unless they received the same low rates as newspapers and advertisements, the Post Office was “an obstacle in the way of educated Young China.”¹⁰⁷ Postal administrators parried such demands, but publishers would soon politicize the rate-making process by circumventing the Post Office and appealing directly to the central government.

On the eve of the 1911 Revolution, postal rate-makers had built a system for the cheap, fast, and reliable transmission of subsidized printed matter throughout the country. The postal framework for handling subsidized mail included a newspaper registration system, categories for light and heavy mail, and a statistical method for tracking how many newspapers, magazines, and books were transmitted. Despite many obstacles, including one of the largest postal networks in the world and a lack of sufficient modern transportation facilities, postal rate-makers intentionally subsidized newspapers, magazines, and books to make their postage rates “lighter than in any country in the world.”¹⁰⁸

*“The Greater the Number of Newspapers, the Stronger the Nation”*¹⁰⁹

“Everything possible is being done by the Post Office,” wrote Postal Secretary Piry, “to help [the] spreading of literature among the masses in all parts of the Empire.”¹¹⁰ Prior to the 1911 Revolution, postal rate-making was entirely an internal process. The separation of the Post

¹⁰⁶ Postal Instruction No. 112, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 10 April 1911 in SHAC137.2023-2.

¹⁰⁷ Letter from the Managing Director of the Commercial Press to the Inspector General of the Chinese Post Office, 20 May 1911 in SHAC137.1866.

¹⁰⁸ *RWCPO, 1910, 2.*

¹⁰⁹ Liang Qichao (1896) cited in Judge, *Print and Politics*, 17.

¹¹⁰ *RWCPO, 1910, 2.*

Office from the Customs Service in May 1911 and Piry's decision to join the Ministry of Posts and Communications, gave the authority to set postage rates to the central government.

In the immediate aftermath of the 1911 Revolution, newspaper publishers circumvented the Post Office by approaching Sun Zhongshan, the provisional president, directly. In March 1912, the Shanghai Newspaper Association (上海日報公會) formally petitioned Sun arguing for a rate reduction because they contributed to the 1911 Revolution and were fostering a cooperative relationship between Sun's provisional government and Yuan Shikai. Understanding the importance of newspapers, Sun would probably have granted the reduction, but he surrendered the presidency to Yuan Shikai before making his decision. Sun did, however, telegraph the petition to Yuan recommending its acceptance on the grounds that "newspapers represent public opinion."¹¹¹ As a man later known for his contentious relationship with the press – he had an estimated 24 journalists executed and 60 imprisoned during his four-year tenure as president – Yuan Shikai hardly seems a likely supporter of subsidized rates for the press. Unsettled conditions throughout the country and Yuan's tenuous hold on power, however, probably led him to believe a favorable press was essential for the immediate future. On 26 March, Yuan granted a one-half reduction on all newspaper rates.¹¹²

Fearing an angry torrent of petitions from booksellers and magazine editors, Postal Secretary Piry immediately granted them a fifty percent reduction as well.¹¹³ Under the new tariff schedule, postage on registered newspapers dropped from one cent per 50 grams to ½ cent, on bulk newspapers to 1/10 of a cent, and on printed matter, books, and commercial papers to one cent. The effect of the new rates was immediate. "The extension of newspaper business

¹¹¹ For the text of the original petition as well as Sun's telegram to Yuan, see: Liu and Xue, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 136-37.

¹¹² Circular No. 285, Postmaster General T. Piry, 28 March 1912 in SHAC137.2023-3; S/O No. 57, Zhejiang District Postmaster J. Tweedie to P.M.G., 28 March 1912 in SHAC137.2184-5.

¹¹³ Circular No. 289, Postmaster General T. Piry, 20 April 1912 in SHAC137.2023-3.

was,” Piry wrote at the end of 1912, “one of the features of the year.”¹¹⁴ By the end of 1912, more than 400 newspapers had registered at the Post Office; the number despatched rose from 32.4 to 37.1 million in 1912 and in 1913, once the full effects of the reduction had been felt, rose to 52.2 million (Table 3, at the end of this section).

By the early 1920s, the Post Office faced a number of new financial commitments. In April 1922, Shanghai postal workers struck and won a 20% pay increase for their co-workers across the country. That same year, the Directorate also granted raises to upper-level staff and introduced an expensive pension system.¹¹⁵ Contract carriers, particularly the railroads, were also asking for increased remuneration since the amount of heavy mail matter had increased dramatically to 91 million articles by 1921. Meanwhile, postage rates on newspapers, magazines, and books had remained the same for a decade.

To compensate some of these financial losses and fund its new commitments, the postal rate-makers petitioned the Ministry of Communications in August for a small rate increase of one cent on domestic letters, ½ cent on postcards, and a doubling of all newspaper rates *only* to non-steam-served places in the Ji[lin]-Hei[longjiang], Gansu, Shaanxi, Guizhou, and Yunnan postal districts.¹¹⁶ In early October, the Ministry of Communications publically announced the new rate increase to be effective as of 1 November.

The announcement of this minor rate increase set off a major political firestorm that threatened to engulf the Post Office. Over the next two months, newspaper editors, magazine publishers, book sellers, educational institutions, religious groups, and commercial associations filled the press with protests against the rate increase. During the newspaper campaign, the

¹¹⁴ *RWCPO, 1912*, 1.

¹¹⁵ Circular No. 523, Co-Director General Destelan, 9 September 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5; the superannuation fund officially opened on 1 January 1923. Tongyu di 233 hao, youzheng zongju zongban Tieshilan (Directorate instruction no. 233, Co-Director General Destelan), 14 August 1923 in SHAC137.2024-4.

¹¹⁶ Circular No. 521, Co-Director General Destelan, 19 August 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5.

Shanghai-based *Republican Daily* (民國日報) published 96 different articles on the rate increase. Newspapers in all the major cities, including Shanghai's *Shenbao* (申報), Tianjin's *Dagong bao* (大公報), and the Japanese-owned, Shenyang-based *Shengjing Shibao* (盛京時報), did likewise.¹¹⁷ The frenzy whipped up by the newspapers ultimately led to the intervention of warlords from across the country. Zhang Zuolin of the Three Eastern Provinces, He Fenglin of Shanghai, Chen Jiongming of Guangdong, Zhao Hengti of Hunan, Lu Yongxiang of Zhejiang, and Liu Xiang of Sichuan all separately demanded the Post Office cancel the increased newspaper rates. When the Directorate did not immediately obey their instructions, some of the warlords took action to restore the original tariff by placing soldiers in post offices to enforce the old rates. In Sichuan matters looked grim. The Provincial Assembly began taking steps to assume full control of all post offices to run them as a provincial concern. Zhejiang authorities starting making similar noises. As the protests and pressure mounted, the Directorate petitioned the Ministry to rescind the rate increase because the situation had become “critical for the maintenance of the Post Office as a national service.”¹¹⁸ The Ministry cancelled the rate increase on 1 January 1923.¹¹⁹

The Post Office was shocked that its minor rate increase resulted in such outrage, particularly since the protests had been “more or less of a political character.”¹²⁰ Looking back,

¹¹⁷ In the course of its articles, the *Republican Daily* mentioned roughly 80 different groups lobbying against the postage increase. Yue Qianhou and Tian Ming, “Yulun chuanmei, shehui dongyuan yu quanyi boyi: 1922nian Beijing zhengfu youzi jiajia fengbo zhi kaocha (Public opinion, social mobilization, and the chess match over rights and interests: An examination of the storm over the 1922 Beijing government's postage increase) *Anhui shixue* (Anhui historical studies) 2 (2008), 53.

¹¹⁸ Mimeographed copy of Cheng No. 486 to Ministry of 21 December 1922 in SHAC137.2186-2.

¹¹⁹ For studies focusing on the 1922 rate increase, see: Mai Xiumin, “1922 nian qianhou de youfei jiajia fengbo” (The storm over the increase in postal fees around 1922) *Shehui kexuejia* “The Social Scientist” 1 (May 2005): 518-19; Yue and Tian, “Yulun chuanmei”; and Cai Huanqin, “1922nian youzi jiajia fengbo” (The storm over the 1922 postage increase) *Youpiao baike* (Encyclopedia of stamps) (August 2004): 70.

¹²⁰ Mimeographed copy of Cheng No. 486 to Ministry of 21 December 1922 in SHAC137.2186-2.

postal administrators felt their purpose in raising rates had been “misconstrued.”¹²¹ Interpreting this misunderstanding as their own failure to prepare the public for the rate increase, postal rate-makers decided that in future they would provide cost accounting data to quell any possible furor. In response, postal administrators began making a number of alterations to their statistical gathering methods to more accurately reflect both the real numbers of newspapers, magazines, and books being sent through the Post Office and the financial costs of transporting them.¹²² Henceforth, the Post Office would prepare itself with cost accounting figures and publically explain the reasons for any rate increases. Before the Post Office tried to raise rates, however, the newspapers associations were again on the offensive.

In early 1928, the newly-established Nationalist Ministry of Communications convened a National Communications Conference to discuss future developments. The Shanghai Newspaper Association saw the establishment of the Nationalist government as an opportunity to ask for lower rates. The Association submitted a petition to the Conference calling the current three-class system of newspaper postage “unscientific” and requesting all newspapers only be charged bulk rates.¹²³ Postal administrators at the conference did want to talk about rates, but about doubling them to recover some of the losses on transportation.¹²⁴ Shortly after the conference, continued agitation by various newspaper associations led the hapless State Council to approve a uniform system of charges on newspapers, but the Ministry of Communications refused to consider such a course.¹²⁵ Frustrated, the newspaper associations started claiming the Post Office was making a profit out of them despite the industry being “engaged chiefly in the

¹²¹ *RWCPO, 1922, 1.*

¹²² *RWCPO, 1922, 2.*

¹²³ *NCH, 18 August 1928.*

¹²⁴ *Guomin zhengfu, Quanguo jiaotong huiyi, 377.*

¹²⁵ *NCH, 15 September 1928.*

dissemination of educational propaganda.”¹²⁶ In late December, Director General of Posts Liu Shufan (劉書蕃) placated the publishers by granting a modest postage reduction on “special marks” newspapers.¹²⁷ Despite this small victory, the various newspaper, magazine, and bookseller associations quickly mastered the revolutionary anti-imperialist lingo of the Nationalist Party arguing that any *class*-based postage system was a “remnant of the poison of imperialism.”¹²⁸

In the early 1930s, rising postal deficits once again forced postal rate-makers to seek a modest postage increase on printed matter. Inflation from the Great Depression, large postal subsidies to the airlines, the loss of the Manchurian districts, and the flooding of the Yangzi in the summer of 1932 all contributed to the Post Office’s financial crisis. New contracts signed with common carriers in the late 1920s and early 1930s also played their part in growing postal deficits as did a record 280 million newspapers, magazines, and books sent through the mail in 1932. By the early 1930s, the Post Office was averaging a 60,000 yuan yearly loss on “special marks” newspapers and about 475,000 on bulk newspapers.¹²⁹

To offset some of the mounting debt, the Post Office announced a postage increase on magazine and book rates on 1 May 1932. The new rates were not an across-the-board increase, but created a tariff system based on types of transport with those carried partially or wholly by courier to border provinces charged double or triple rates.¹³⁰ Upon the public announcement of the new tariff rates another wave of public protest broke out. It was a repeat performance of 1922, but with the Shanghai Booksellers’ Association (上海書業公會) taking the lead in whipping up public indignation. The newspapers, always ready to help another subsidized

¹²⁶ *NCH*, 10 November 1928.

¹²⁷ Liu and Xue, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 142.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, III: 99-101.

¹³⁰ Circular No. 666 (Translation), Director General Qian Chunqi, 14 April 1932 in SHAC137.2251-4.

industry, gave their columns over to the protesters. The Shanghai Booksellers' Association also used its connections to encourage similar associations in Hangzhou, Beiping, Hankou, Nanchang, Wuhu and other cities to flood the Post Office and Ministry of Communications with letters. They sent letters to everyone from the Ministry of Communications to Yuan President Yu Youren to Jiang Jieshi himself. In newspaper columns, and petitions to government officials, the message was the same – the book industry was vital to the educational and cultural development in isolated parts of the country and any rate increase was a hindrance to that development.¹³¹ The heavy lobbying effort succeeded, and the Ministry of Communications and Post Office cancelled all rate increases.¹³² Within a year, the Post Office was losing 10 million annually to subvent the publishing industry with such cheap postage. “Any increase in this low rate is to be deplored,” a prominent editor wrote, “The handling of books, magazines, and newspapers must...be one of the Post Office’s chief concerns, for thereby it does an amount of cultural work the full worth of which is not easy to estimate.”¹³³

The politicization of the rate-making process kept the Post Office from attempting any more postage increases after 1932. New increases were internally discussed, but each time the Ministry demurred.¹³⁴ By the mid-1930s, Chinese rates on newspapers, printed matter, and books were, in the words of Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua, “lower than those of any other country of note.” A single kilo of newspapers transmitted across Hong Kong cost 37 cents Chinese while the same kilo could travel across the entire mainland for a single cent.¹³⁵ Even the

¹³¹ In 1934, the booksellers association published a selection of their letters, and the government responses, during the 1932 campaign against rate increases, presumably to forestall any such attempts in the future. Zhang Shiliu, *Shu you jia jia kangyi jilue* (A records of the protests against raising the postage of the book post) (Shanghai: Shanghai shi shuye tongye gonghui, 1934).

¹³² Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 668. Translation (Advance Copy), Director General Qian Chunqi, 14 May 1932 in SHAC137.2251-4.

¹³³ *NCH*, 14 March 1933.

¹³⁴ Jiaotongbu youzheng si, ed., *Youzheng huiyi huibian*, 126-27.

¹³⁵ Chu, *China's Postal*, 20.

very heavily subsidized second-class mail rates in the United States were considerably more expensive than China's comparable bulk rate for newspapers. In 1935, one pound of second-class newspapers in the United States cost two cents US currency while the same pound sent by bulk across China only cost only ½ cent US.¹³⁶ Clearly, the political authorities of the Republican era were and remained committed to public subsidies for the press.

Table 3: Newspapers and other Printed Matter Sent through the Mail

Year	Newspapers			Printed Matter	Books	Unaddressed Trade Circulars	Commercial Papers
	Class A (Ordinary)	Class B (Special Marks)	Class C (Bulk)				
1907	15,932,850						
1908	26,401,031						
1909	28,657,400						
1910	28,581,300					--	--
1911 ¹³⁷	32,470,900					--	--
1912	37,163,500					--	--
1913	52,524,800					--	--
1914	42,139,300					--	--
1915	39,224,600					--	--
1916	47,373,040					--	123,200
1917 ¹³⁸	53,606,960					----	224,805
1918	58,789,470					--	286,800
1919	67,896,680					--	499,450
1920	80,528,000					--	625,400
1921	91,130,940					--	1,315,590
1922	43,024,700	29,764,400	28,398,600	4,374,930	1,395,900		
1923	45,375,525	35,344,801	37,124,840	5,295,784	1,078,627		
1924	50,409,074	46,890,300	40,162,682	6,534,800	1,472,290		
1925	60,032,004	47,633,719	44,802,948	3,658,414	2,314,387		
1926	72,573,172	48,450,168	43,292,193	3,141,526	2,462,899		
1927	77,038,988	37,504,300	41,947,313	3,548,836	2,287,899		

¹³⁶ Based on the official 1935 exchange rate of 1.00 US dollar to 2.73 Chinese yuan. Second-class mail matter in the United States cost 1.5 cents for reading content and anywhere from 2 to 10 cents for advertising content. One writer estimated that the cumulative average for second-class mail matter was 2 cents. Jane Kennedy, "Development of Postal Rates: 1845-1955," *Land Economics* 33:2 (May 1957), 100.

¹³⁷ For the years 1911-1916, the Post Office used the statistical categories "received," "despatched," and "in transit." The "received" category, the largest, represented the total number of items "received" both from the public in China and items coming from abroad as well as those "in transit"; the "despatched" category represented the total number of items sent out for delivery to the public, which included items for local delivery within the city of posting; and "in transit" represented the amount of mail matter sent from a sub-office to a Head Office for transit elsewhere. "Despatched," then, represents the most accurate figure for the number of items posted within China.

¹³⁸ For the years 1917-1921, the Post Office used the statistical categories "received," "posted" and "in transit." The "posted" category most accurately reflects the number of items brought from the public in China to the Post Office for mailing. "Received," always a higher figure, also includes all mail matter "received" at the Post Office from abroad as well as mail "in transit" from a sub-office to a head office.

Table 3: Continued

1928	82,918,300		41,492,300	51,442,400		3,996,000	2,930,500
1929	107,284,940		49,876,890	63,596,810		7,897,360	3,413,920
Jan-June 1930	55,119,300		23,494,000	34,342,600		1,367,300	2,040,000
July 1930– June 1931	113,141,900		49,941,400	71,824,300		8,988,700	4,322,200
July 1931– June 1932	129,828,300		56,659,000	73,115,400		3,401,500	4,138,700
July 1932– June 1933	125,065,800		55,593,700	72,557,100		3,333,100	3,046,000
July 1933– June 1934	140,287,500		56,380,300	87,525,100		4,121,500	4,139,600
July 1934– June 1935	144,310,100		47,176,400	98,332,100		5,212,800	4,852,100
July 1935– June 1936	52,497,600	114,401,000	42,047,900	101,008,300	10,449,200	4,647,400	6,520,400
July 1936– June 1937	55,771,000	138,466,9600	40,907,000	126,050,300	11,793,600	59,754,400	10,496,700
July 1937– June 1938	38,762,400	74,110,900	11,716,400	60,311,900	6,421,200	1,401,700	4,664,700
July 1938– Dec 1938	15,247,600	30,167,200	3,249,900	30,549,900	3,936,900	440,000	2,425,100
1939	26,379,310	60,484,300	316,800	60,128,070	3742200	3,362,600	5,658,000
1940	52,504,000	78,007,100	1,369,500	85,384,600	5,205,800	1,523,000	8,343,500
1941	67,599,100	64,882,500	720,100	72,592,000	5,304,500	312,400	8,067,100
1942	62,534,500	67,691,700	86,800	55,472,300	2,804,200	294,200	6,873,100
1943	47,453,988	77,175,916	170,537	32,089,434	1,827,023	182,872	3,473,405

Serving the People: State Interventions in the Economy through the Post Office

Advocates of self-strengthening often couched their ideas in traditional economic terminology.¹³⁹

Such use of traditional terminology, however, was a cover for late Qing reformers who were talking about with new conceptualizations of the state in the economy, the idea of capitalism, national and international markets, and the unequal distribution of resources and wealth throughout empire. Modern industrial enterprises disrupted traditional economic macro-regions as self-strengtheners re-prioritized the use of financial resources to build the infrastructure of a

¹³⁹ Margherita Zanasi, “Fostering the People’s Livelihood: Chinese Political Thought between Empire and Nation,” *Twentieth-Century China* 30: 1 (Nov. 2004), 8-10.

national economy.¹⁴⁰ The physical infrastructure of this new national economy was the steamship, railroad, and telegraph networks, but a lack of funding and inefficient management kept these three industries from becoming truly national in scope.¹⁴¹ In the late 1880s and early 1890s, a small, but influential group of government reformers began supporting the idea of broader state intervention in the economy through the creation of a national postal network that would unify traditional and modern transportation networks. Although many were concerned about the implications of this intervention, others viewed the state as the only institution that could paternalistically and altruistically build a national economy.

The Post Office successfully fulfilled its primary goal by creating a national communications network, but its supporters had always maintained that the Post Office's broader mission was to use the power of the state to assist economic development by providing basic financial and transportation services to the entire population. Those services were initially limited to money orders and parcel post, but as the Post Office gained public and government confidence its administrators expanded into postal savings and life insurance. Central to the whole thought process behind the Post Office's role in the economy was an idea that only found its literal expression in a neologism of the late 1940s – the “postalization” (郵政化) of the economy.¹⁴² What this writer, and many before him, meant was to use the unique strengths of the Post Office – its entire network of offices, routes, and employees – to carry out numerous economic tasks seen as vital to the maintenance of a national economy.

¹⁴⁰ For a detailed study of this process, see: Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Making of a Hinterland: State, Society, and Economy in Inland North China, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); for this process in Shanxi, see: Henrietta Harrison, *The Man Awakened from Dreams: One Man's Life in a North China Village, 1857-1942* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

¹⁴¹ As will be discussed in the next chapter, it was the Post Office that effectively linked the various modern transportation networks together to form a single national communications and transportation network.

¹⁴² “Chuhui gengsheng” (Revival of savings and money orders), *Youhui shenghuo* (Postal remittance life) (15 April 1947).

The Chinese Post Office's provision of economic and transportation services to the public rarely produced the tortured debates that were a predominant feature of political discussions in Western countries over the state's role in economic life. Particularly in the United States, contentious political debates preceded the introduction of the parcel post, postal savings banks, rural free delivery, and a variety of other postal innovations.¹⁴³ Although the Chinese Post Office encountered strong resistance from the Minxinju and Qiaopiju, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 7, the structure of both the broader state and the Post Office as autocratic institutions governing by fiat kept political debates over postal intervention in the economy to a minimum. The following discussion, then, is not primarily concerned with political conflicts over state invention in the economy, or its relative success or failure, but is focused the underlying rationale for such services. By concentrating on the Post Office's government's wide variety of economic services we can better understand how the state re-conceptualized its role in the life of the nation as it faced numerous domestic and international challenges throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Money Orders and Parcel Post

Although the state could and did fund individual industrial enterprises, the creation of a national economy required a system for remitting money and transporting goods throughout the entire empire. If the transmission of letters was profoundly shocking to conservative officials, the decision of the Post Office to transport parcels and remit money signified a dramatic new state

¹⁴³ e.g. E. W. Kemmerer, "The United States Postal Savings Bank," *Political Science Quarterly* 26: 3 (September 1911): 462-499; Richard B. Kielbowicz, "Mere Merchandise or Vessels of Culture?: Books in the Mail, 1792-1942," *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America* 82 (June 1988): 169-200; "Government Goes into Business: Parcel Post in the Nation's Political Economy, 1880-1915," *Studies in American Political Development* 8: 1 (1994): 150-172; Daniel P. Carpenter, "State Building through Reputation Building: Coalitions of Esteem and Program Innovation in the National Postal System, 1883-1913," *Studies in American Political Development* 14: 2 (2000): 121-155.

intervention in the economy. The decision to offer money orders (匯票) and a parcel post (包裹) service shows a late imperial state willing to depart from its traditional scope of action by competing with, and complementing, the private market to build something larger – a national communications, transportation, and financial market structured by the state through the Post Office.¹⁴⁴

The most well-known and significant financial and transportation institutions in the late Qing, the Shanxi draft banks (票號), the Shanghai or “native banks” (錢莊), and the Minxinju private letter firms, all engaged in the remittance business.¹⁴⁵ The Minxinju also carried parcels. Although conducting an extensive business, such institutions had several fatal flaws from the perspective of government reformers and postal administrators. Motivated solely by profit, the scope of their business was concentrated in certain remunerative regions – the Shanxi banks in the north, Shanghai banks in the south, and the Minxinju in the Jiangnan region – and therefore did not constitute a national network. Second, such businesses focused on providing credit and financial services to large-scale traders or other firms leaving small traders, petty urbanites, and peasants either without access to necessary economic services or charged exorbitant prices. In both cases, state administrators viewed the Post Office’s provision of money order and parcel post services as a way to solve these problems. By offering money order and parcel post services, the Post Office would not only be fostering economic growth across the entire country, but would also correct some of the unevenness of economic opportunity. That is, the

¹⁴⁴ Jiaotong tiedao jiaotong shi bianzuan weiyuanhui, ed., *Jiaotong shi youzheng bian*, I: 15-22. Wang Yisan also advocated the introduction of postal money orders and a parcel post in the early 1890s. Wang, “Youzheng ce.”

¹⁴⁵ On the Shanghai banks, see: Andrea L. McElderry, *Shanghai Old-Style Banks (ch'ien-chuang), 1800-1935: A Traditional Institution in a Changing Society* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies, 1976); on the Shanxi banks, see: Huang Jianhui, *Shanxi piaohao shi* (A history of Shanxi banks) (Taiyuan: Shanxi jingji chubanshe, 1992); on the Minxinju, see: Peng Yingtian, *Minxinju fazhan shi: Zhongguo de minjian tongxun shiye* (A history of the expansion of people’s letter offices: China’s popular communications enterprise) (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanshu, 1992).

ambiguously defined goal of the Post Office was to be a “market perfecting” state institution by narrowing geographic price disparities, reducing transaction costs for individuals and firms, and assuming debt to provide services to the entire population. “The Remittance Order of the Imperial Post Office,” Postal Secretary Piry wrote in 1904, “is one of the means by which...the public [will be] freed from risk and capricious exactions.”¹⁴⁶

The Post Office began offering money order and parcel post services in 1898.¹⁴⁷ Each was necessary for the other: remittances without parcel post would have found customers, but interregional trade would have suffered as merchants would have been left without a convenient means to distribute their products. Parcel post without a money order service would have been even less feasible since it was virtually impossible or prohibitively expensive for private banks to remit necessary funds to more isolated areas. The Post Office’s contribution was not only to offer both of these services, but also to link them together with its extensive network of couriers and contract carriers, both modern and traditional, to create a sustainable economic system for small to medium transactions between coastal areas and the hinterland.

Both the money order and parcel post services competed with existing banking and transportation companies, but the Post Office’s services were not meant to force private competitors out of business. Indeed, the Post Office relied heavily on contracts with private transportation firms and individual carters, muleteers, and boatmen to transport parcels around the country. These private firms may have suffered some loss of business from postal competition, but they also gained a regular customer in the Post Office who paid more than

¹⁴⁶ *RWCPO, 1904*, lv.

¹⁴⁷ The money order service official started on 1 January and parcel post on 1 May 1898. Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 3, Postal Secretary van Aalst, 17 November 1897 and Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 6, Postal Secretary van Aalst, 15 February 1898, both in SHAC137.2023-1.

amply for their services.¹⁴⁸ The Post Office also put strict limits on the size and weight of parcels in order to leave the transport of larger quantities to private companies.¹⁴⁹ Even as the railroad and steamship networks grew, thus reducing the need for a parcel post weight limit, the Post Office was careful to maintain its strict limits. For money orders, the Post Office's explicit rationale was to transmit small sums "as a bank would not consider worth its while to remit," but it was not to "supersede these banks where they are installed or replace them where they do not exist."¹⁵⁰ In recognition of this desire, the Post Office initially kept the total amount remittable by an individual in a single day to one hundred dollars Mex. When money orders doubled in 1906, the postal administrators felt this business was growing too fast and lowered its limits.¹⁵¹ Even with postal restrictions, some traditional banks did abandon their remittance services.¹⁵²

With the rapid growth of the Post Office and its reputation for probity and efficiency, both the money order and parcel post services became popular with the public.¹⁵³ In 1901, the first year the Post Office kept such statistics, they delivered only 126,000 parcels, but the number rose rapidly to 512,000 by 1907 with an average weight of 6 pounds.¹⁵⁴ The money order business, between 1904 and 1907, also grew at an astonishing annual rate of 64% reaching a

¹⁴⁸ The Post Office maintained literally thousands of overland and boat contracts with traditional transportation firms. For examples, see: SHAC137.4056.

¹⁴⁹ The weight limit for parcels was 5 kilograms (11 pounds) and maximum size was 2 feet x 1 foot x 1 foot.

¹⁵⁰ Postal Circular No. 163, Postal Secretary Piry, 26 March 1907 in SHAC137.2023-2; *RWCPO, 1907*, 6.

¹⁵¹ From 1898 to 1907, an individual in a non-steam served place could remit 100 dollars Mex a day for two cents on the dollar. In 1904, the Post Office allowed the transmission of \$500 per person per day between steam-served places. And, in 1907, the limit in rural areas was reduced to \$50 dollars and rates became flexible to allow local postmasters to restrict the amount collected to keep the Post Office from becoming too involved in the money order business.

¹⁵² William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984), 160.

¹⁵³ Although there is no work in Chinese or English on the parcel post system, the following are solid introductions to the money order system: Xingzheng yuan xinwenju, *Youzheng chuhui* (Postal service savings and remittance) (Nanjing: Xingzheng yuan xinwenju, 1947); Zhang Luming, *Zhonghua youzheng shiliao huidui bian* (Collection of historical materials on Chinese postal service remittances) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1976).

¹⁵⁴ *RWCPO, 1907*, 6.

value of 3.4 million Mex.¹⁵⁵ Inland traders found the parcel post such a cost effective medium – the Post Office usually lost money by carrying parcels – they began to treat it “in the light of a common carrier” upon which they relied completely to replenish their merchandise.¹⁵⁶ Although the Post Office intended its parcel post business to serve private individuals and petty merchants such as the hair net merchant in Shandong, the Dr. Williams Medicine Company selling anti-opium pills in Wanxian, or the Shanghai printer who sent 1766 pounds of books to Chengdu over three days in 1910, many of its most frequent users were shops selling sundries or tea, silk, and cotton merchants.¹⁵⁷ As one postmaster wrote, “The silk merchants seem to prefer to send their parcels by the I.P.O., as they find the Post Office safer, less troublesome, quicker, and, above all, cheaper than the cargo-boats.”¹⁵⁸

The money order and parcel post business both grew rapidly after the 1911 Revolution. With terrible business conditions for local merchants, constant bandit attacks on private bank couriers, and soldiers commandeering draft animals and other conveyances, the public began to look at the Post Office as one of the only safe means of sending money and parcels.¹⁵⁹ The success of the money order and parcel post services, Postmaster General Piry wrote in 1913, is due “to the confidence which the public now repose in the Service.”¹⁶⁰ Public confidence was high as evinced by the rates of growth for both services. Between 1912 and 1913, the number of parcels despatched by the Post Office rose by 63% and continued to grow throughout the decade

¹⁵⁵ Xu Xuexia, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng, 1896-1928* (Modern China's postal service, 1896-1928) (Taibei: Sili dongwu daxue, 1992), 302.

¹⁵⁶ *RWCPO, 1907*, 10.

¹⁵⁷ Common commodities being sent by parcel post from Shandong were lace, embroidery, and hair nets. *RWCPO, 1910*, 6 and *RWCPO, 1917*, 17. On the anti-opium pills, *RWCPO, 1909*, 5. On the books, S.O. No. 21, Changteh Sub-District Postmaster Caretti to Postmaster General Piry, 20 November 1910 in SHAC137.1807-2.

¹⁵⁸ *RWCPO, 1909*, 7

¹⁵⁹ *RWCPO, 1913*, 2.

¹⁶⁰ *RWCPO, 1913*, 14.

by around 20%.¹⁶¹ The growth was also due, in no small measure, to a tariff reduction in 1915 that gave favorable rates to parcels for local delivery, reduced charges on all domestic parcels, and increased the weight limit.¹⁶² Postal money orders, too, had the “absolute confidence” of the public.¹⁶³ From 1914 to 1923, money order business grew at an annual rate of 20%.¹⁶⁴ By 1923, the Post Office was selling more than 3 million money orders per year with a value around 100 million Mex. The onset of the warlord years was actually a great boon to the Post Office, wrote its new head H. Picard-Destelan, because “confidence in the security of the Post Office as a transmitting medium...manifested in an increased money order and parcel post business.”¹⁶⁵ The success of the parcel post and money order services allowed the Post Office to venture into more unusual services.

The Postal Savings Bank

In 1919, Co-Director General Destelan decided to finally establish a Postal Savings Bank (郵政儲金股). Postal savings banks had appeared in Europe in the late nineteenth century as a way to pool the resources of small savers to help finance public debt.¹⁶⁶ The first discussions of a postal savings system in China occurred within the Ministry of Posts and Communications in

¹⁶¹ Xu, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng*, 307.

¹⁶² Between 1902-1915, the domestic rate on parcels was 8 cents per kilo for local delivery and 15 cents for domestic transmission. In 1915, the local tariff on parcels was lowered to 10 cents for parcels of 5 kilos (2 cents per kilo) and 20 cents for parcels over 5 kilos; the domestic rate was 20 cents for the first kilo, but then 10 cents for every kilo thereafter. Chinese Imperial Post: Tariff of Postage, Notification No. 36 (Inspectorate General of Posts, 1902) in SHAC137.1866 and Circular No. 407, Acting Associate Director General Destelan, 14 December 1915 in SHAC137.2023-4.

¹⁶³ *RWCPO*, 1922, 43.

¹⁶⁴ Xu, *Jindai Zhongguo de youzheng*, 305-06.

¹⁶⁵ *RWCPO*, 1917, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Postal savings banks were introduced in England (1861), Belgium (1865), Canada (1868), Austria (1868), Italy (1875), France (1881), Sweden (1884), Hungary (1886), Finland (1886), Netherlands (1886), Russia (1889), Philippines (1906), and the United States (1911). For a general introduction to the history of the postal savings bank movement, see: Edward T. Heyn, “Postal Savings Banks,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 8 (November 1896): 29-58.

1907 and again in 1909.¹⁶⁷ In 1910, it was decided to send a small delegation to Austria to study the advantages of postal savings. In 1913, the Ministry of Communications established a Preparatory Committee for Postal Savings, but the chaos of the late Yuan Shikai period and the onset of the warlord era put the plan on hold. In 1916, the newly appointed Minister of Communications Cao Rulin (曹汝霖) revived discussions of postal savings, but was unable to promulgate the necessary regulations until 1919.¹⁶⁸

There were several primary ideas behind the establishment of a postal savings system.¹⁶⁹ In his speech opening the Postal Savings Bank, the Acting Minister of Communications Zeng Yujuan (曾毓雋) deplored the lavish spending of petty urbanites and celebrated the postal savings bank as a “remedy for social ills” by encouraging “the habit of savings among the people” to restore among the population “the habits of simplicity and thrift.”¹⁷⁰ The postal savings bank system was perfect, its own administrators argued, for “encouraging thrift” among the poorer classes by offering conservative, risk-averse savers a method for investing their money at a decent 4.2% interest rate in a wholly “reliable institution” with offices around the country.¹⁷¹ Indeed, unlike the native banks, the Post Office guaranteed the “absolute security” of all deposits.¹⁷²

¹⁶⁷ *NCH*, 30 January 1909.

¹⁶⁸ On the preparations to establish the Postal Savings Bank, see: Jiang Yun, “Minguo shiqi youzheng chujin ye gaishu” (A brief account of postal savings in the Republican era), *Minguo dang'an* “Republican Archives” 3 (1999), 32-33.

¹⁶⁹ The various activities of the Postal Savings Bank are recorded in its yearly reports. Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, *Report on the Working of the Chinese Post Office Savings Bank* (Shanghai: Savings Bank Supply Department of the Directorate General of Posts, 1920-1930).

¹⁷⁰ *NCH*, 12 July 1919.

¹⁷¹ *RWCPOSB*, 1919, 1, 3.

¹⁷² Detailed Regulations for the Execution of the Rules of the Post Office Savings Bank, Enclosure 4 to Circular No. 476, Co-Director General Destelan, 3 June 1919 in SHAC137.2023-5. When the Japanese seized Postal Savings Banks in Manchuria in 1931/32, the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks repaid all depositors. Chu, *China's Postal*, 88.

The postal savings system was not wholly created for the altruistic goal of encouraging thrift. Postal administrators also understood that the deposits from postal savings accounts could be pooled to “promote the free movement of capital” by utilizing them to purchase government bonds, make investments, and “develop popular industries and constructive government enterprises.”¹⁷³ The Postal Savings Bank, wrote Minister of Communications Wang Boqun (王伯群) in 1930, “interweaves the economic interests of the people with those of the Government, thus increasing loyalty to the Government.”¹⁷⁴ That is, the Postal Bank invested its depositors in the legitimacy and solvency of the central government by holding public debt. The Bank used accumulated deposits to invest in a wide range of government bond issues, private real estate, and loans to the foreign municipal councils in China.¹⁷⁵

As with the other business services offered by the Post Office, the Postal Savings Bank was not intended to compete directly with private banks.¹⁷⁶ Native and foreign banks, as with private transport or remitting firms, could not or would not establish offices in small communities because of the cost and inconvenience. The Post Office, by contrast, had a national network and “the confidence of the public” as “a State enterprise.”¹⁷⁷ To limit competition with private banks while encouraging savings among the previously untapped market of small depositors, the bank’s passbook (存簿儲金) accounts had a limit of 2,000 yuan. For the very smallest depositors, the Postal Savings Bank offered a system of postage savings stamps and

¹⁷³ Circular No. 476, Co-Director General Destelan, 3 June 1919 in SHAC137.2023-5; Ministry’s Cheng to the Executive Yuan recommending the creation of a Directorate General P.R.S.B., 6 January 1930 in SHAC127(2)171.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ The various editions of the *RWCPOSB* (1920-1930) have detailed lists of all investments made by the bank.

¹⁷⁶ On the history of private savings banks in the Republican period, see: Brett Sheehan, “The Modernity of Savings, 1900-1937,” in Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua L. Goldstein, ed., *Everyday Modernity in China*, 121-155 (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006).

¹⁷⁷ Ministry’s Cheng to the Executive Yuan recommending the creation of a Directorate General P.R.S.B., 6 January 1930 in SHAC127(2)171.

cards (儲金郵票) for those working towards saving a single dollar.¹⁷⁸ To induce savings, the Post Office offered an iron-clad guarantee of deposits and an interest rate of 4.2%, which was raised to 5% in 1920.¹⁷⁹

The Postal Bank achieved only modest success. It grew quickly from 81 offices in 1919 to 358 by 1923, but then slowly declined back to 288 by 1930. The number of total savings accounts only reached 71,000 by 1929 with a total of 11.4 million in deposits.¹⁸⁰ The Savings Bank did attract its targeted public, at least in cities and towns, where government employees (24%), merchants (19%), and students (12%) held the most accounts while peasants and workers only made up 3% of depositors.¹⁸¹ Within those categories, women and minors made up 25% of all depositors. The Postal Savings Bank regulations did, however, keep the institution from competing directly with private banks. More than 90% of all its accounts held less than \$500 and 38% less than \$10.¹⁸² While the administrators of the Postal Savings Bank would have liked more business, its low numbers of accounts and deposits did not signal the failure of the bank, but was the result of an intentional policy not to compete aggressively with private banks.

Expansion and Diversification in Postal Services, 1927-1949

In the late 1920s a combination of factors temporarily stagnated the expansion of the Post Office and its business services. Devastating warlord conflicts in 1924-25 followed by the launching of

¹⁷⁸ “Youzheng chujin tiaoli” (Regulations on postal savings) in *Zhonghua minguo jinrong fagui dang’an ziliao xuanbian* (Selected archival materials on financial laws and regulations of the Republic of China), 2 vols (Nanjing: Dang’an chubanshe), I: 339-40.

¹⁷⁹ Other national postal savings banks paid between 2% (USA) and 3.6% (Sweden) with only Japan offering a comparable 4.2% interest. The Postal Savings Bank initially paid 4.2%, but paid 5% from July 1920 to June 1927 and then 4.5% thereafter. Li Caiying, *Youzheng chujin yewu shiliao: Zhonghua youzheng bashi zhounian jinian* (Postal savings business materials: Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Chinese postal service) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1977), 27.

¹⁸⁰ The relevant *RWCPOSB* have the relevant statistics.

¹⁸¹ *RWCPOSB*, 1929, 31.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 32.

the Northern Expedition, disrupted the economy in general and the postal network in particular. All postal business services either stagnated or expanded slowly. At the end of the Northern Expedition, the Nationalists took over the Post Office and making significant internal administrative changes, including appointing a new Chinese head of the service. For a period thereafter, the situation inside the Post Office was unsettled as the new postal administrators made even more changes to personnel, working rules, and operating procedures. With a return to normalcy in 1929, the newly-appointed Director General of Posts Liu Shufan determined that the foreign heads of the Post Office had been too conservative in offering business services and expanding the network. In response, Liu and the next several directors general, rapidly diversified the types of money order, parcel post, savings accounts, and other services offered to the public. The newest innovation, begun in 1935, would be the sale of life insurance through the Post Office.

The parcel post service suffered heavily during the Northern Expedition and continued to be unsettled thereafter. From a high of 6 million parcels despatched in 1926, the number dropped to 5.5 million in 1927, but rebounded to 6.8 million by 1929. After 1929, the continued outbreak of civil wars between the National Government and its rebellious generals kept business conditions unstable just as the effects of the Great Depression started to be felt. Only when the Post Office negotiated an end to the onerous interport customs duty on parcels, raised the weight limit to 30 kilos, and began actively encouraging the use of the service, did the number of parcels despatched exceed 6.5 million.¹⁸³ In 1935, Director General Guo Xinsong (郭心崧) also created a small packet (輕便包裹) system for parcels weighing less than 1 kilo.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸³ Chu, *China's Postal*, 61.

¹⁸⁴ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1503 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular memo no. 1503, Director General Guo Xinsong), 1 March 1935 in SHAC137.6284-2.

The benefit of the small packet system was that such parcels would travel with light mail matter at the fastest transmission rates possible. In concert with the introduction of the small packet system, Director General Guo also ordered all commissioners to undertake an examination of local business conditions to promote inland trade and the use of the parcel post. The idea was to encourage inland merchants who previously focused exclusively on local trade to begin selling their merchandise across the country through mail-order catalogs. To promote the expansion of inland trade, the Post Office also published a guide on local products to inform coastal merchants of possible inland suppliers.¹⁸⁵ “In this way,” Director Guo wrote, “the Post Office may bring about the much needed commercial and financial intercourse between the urban and rural districts, thereby contributing to the promotion of commerce and industry with resultant improvements in the Nation’s financial structure, as well as an increase in our native products.”¹⁸⁶ Finally, the Post Office also experimentally introduced a home delivery service for parcels – all others having to be called for at the Post Office – in Shanghai for a nominal charge.¹⁸⁷ The various new innovations succeeded admirably and the Post Office saw an increase of 30%, or almost 2 million parcels, by the summer of 1937.¹⁸⁸

In the early 1930s, the most drastic changes to postal business services came with the establishment of a separate Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Bank (D.G. of P.R. & S.B.) (郵政儲金匯業總局).¹⁸⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 1, Director General of Posts Liu

¹⁸⁵ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhongguo tong you difang wuchan zhi* (Local products in places having postal service) (Shanghai: Shanghai yinshuguan, 1937).

¹⁸⁶ *RWCPO*, 1936/37, 2.

¹⁸⁷ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling changzi di 1805 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular, regular series, no. 1805, Director General Guo Xinsong), 18 March 1936 in SHAC137.6273-1.

¹⁸⁸ *RWCPO*, 1936/37, 7.

¹⁸⁹ For the most recent and interesting work on the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks, see: Xu Lin, “Shilun Nanjing guomin zhengfu shiqi youzheng chuxu zhidu de yanbian” (The evolution of the postal saving system in the Republican period), *Nanjing shehui kexue* (Social science journal of Nanjing University) 7 (2010): 143-148; “Shilun kangzhan shiqi de youzheng chujin huiyeju” (The Directorate General of Postal

Shufan left China in the wake of the 1928 Shanghai postal workers strike to undertake studies of postal savings systems around the world. At the end of his tour, Liu returned and convinced Minister of Communications Wang Boqun, a relation through marriage, to create a separate Directorate.¹⁹⁰ Liu's own rationale for creating a separate Directorate was to rapidly expand postal savings facilities, but he also shifted the remittance business to the new Directorate. As all upper-staff knew, Liu's decision to have the new Directorate take over the remittance business was designed to cover the bank's deficits.¹⁹¹ Although the new Directorate had offices in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Hankou, normal post offices continued to conduct the vast majority of savings and remittance services. The new Directorate, however, had the administrative authority to expand older services and introduce new ones.

Liu Shufan's first act as Director General of the P.R. & S.B. was to begin expanding savings facilities. From 288 offices offering savings accounts in 1929, the numbers rose to 476 in 1930 and 1,395 by 1940. In 1931, Liu also orchestrated the passage of a new Postal Savings Law by the Legislative Yuan permitting the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. to offer cheque savings (支票儲金), fixed savings (定期儲金), and transfer savings (劃撥儲金), in addition to its regular

Remittance and Savings Banks during the War of Resistance) *Sheke lunheng* "Social Sciences Review" 22: 11 (November 2007): 128-130; and "Shilun youzheng chujin huiyeju de jingying huodong: Yi kangzhan shiqi wei li" (The business activities of the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Bank during the Anti-Japanese war), *Chongqing youdian daxue xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* "Journal of Chongqing University of Posts and Telecommunications (Social Science)" 20: 2 (March 2008): 58-62.

¹⁹⁰ The founding documents for the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Bank are: "Youzheng chujin huiyuju zanxing zuzhi ji banshi xize" (Provisional organizational and working rules for the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Bank), *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) 119 (22 February 1930); Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling di 328 hao, daili youzheng zongban Lin Shi, youzheng huiban Duofusen (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular no. 328, acting Director General Lin Shi, Co-Director General Tollefsen), 27 February 1930 in SHAC137.288-2; and "Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Postal Remittances and Savings Banks, Note No. 1 (Corresponding Tongling Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4), 1 March 1930, Officiating D.G. of P.R.S.B. Liu Shufan; "Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Postal Remittances and Savings Banks, Note No. 2 (Corresponding Tongling Nos. 5, 6, 7, 8, 9), 1 May 1930, Officiating D.G. of P.R.S.B. Liu Shufan in SHAC127(2).171.

¹⁹¹ Liu Shufan, "The Postal Remittances and Savings Bank: A Government Institution with a Future" in SHAC127.173; Personal Letter of Deputy Director General Xu Changcheng to a Mr. Koh, 4 June 1940 in SHAC137(5).2635.

passbook savings accounts. Transfer savings accounts allowed depositors to transfer their funds to any postal bank throughout the country. Fixed savings, or certificates of deposit, required a minimum deposit of 50 yuan and returned the collect the principal and interest after six months.¹⁹² In the mid-1930s, the Bank also introduced a children's savings (兒童儲金) system for “inculcating the habit of thrift and encouraging savings among children.”¹⁹³ Under this system, primary and middle-school children could deposit up to 20 yuan a month at any postal savings bank office. To encourage the children, the Post Office also started selling miniature pillar boxes as savings banks.¹⁹⁴ During the War of Resistance, the fixed savings system in particular saw numerous special issues as the government sought to encourage the public to invest in the state as it battled Japan.¹⁹⁵

Coupled with the growth of postal savings services were money orders. As the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. expanded, it also began diversifying the types of remittance services offered to the public in order to cater to both business users and rural remitters. In 1931, the Legislative Yuan passed a new Remittance Law allowing the Directorate to offer agents' petty postal orders

¹⁹² Liu Shufan promulgated several new types of savings rules prior to the Savings Law of 1931. “Youzheng chujin tiaoli shixing xize” (Detailed Rules for Implementing the Rules for Postal Savings), *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) No. 48 (19 June 1929); “Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju chuxu chu banshi xize” (Detailed Working Rules of the Savings Office of the Directorate General of Posts of the Ministry of Communications), *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) No. 51 (29 June 1929); “Youzheng chujin huiye zongju Shanghai chujin guize (Shanghai savings regulations of the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Bank), *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) No. 130 (2 April 1930); “Youzheng chujin fa” (Postal Savings Law) in Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, II: 277-78.

¹⁹³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling changzi di 1879 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular, regular series, no. 1879, Director General Guo Xinsong), 19 June 1936 in SHAC137.6273-1; Chu, *China's Postal*, 86.

¹⁹⁴ *NCH*, 24 March 1937.

¹⁹⁵ Over the eight years of the war, the Directorate focused on offering various types of fixed savings certificates, including Thrifty National Construction Savings (節約建國儲金) National Economic Savings Certificates (節約建國儲蓄卷), Village Commonweal Savings (鄉鎮公益儲蓄), Special Lottery-Attached Savings (特種有獎儲蓄), and Employee Welfare Savings (職工福利儲蓄). For a description of these different certificates of deposit, see: Cao Qian, *Youzheng chuhui fazhan shi* (History of the expansion of postal service remittances and savings) (Taipei: Youzheng chujinhui ye ju, 1979), 91-111.

(小額匯票), telegraphic money orders (電報匯票), and air-mail remittances.¹⁹⁶ Although the petty remittance system for sending money orders between postal agencies started immediately, the telegraphic money order system did not begin until 1933. In 1935, the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. also started offering high-value money orders (高額匯票) for customers wanting to remit up to 10,000 yuan at a time. Finally, during the World War II, the Directorate introduced true postal orders (定額匯票), which were certificates payable to the bearer in values of 5, 10, or 20 yuan, as well as Postal Gift Certificates (郵政禮卷).¹⁹⁷ The new types of money orders and their continued spread around the country proved a great success. The total amount remitted through the Post Office reached its pre-war peak in 1936 with 14,033 remitting offices handling money orders valued at 266 million yuan.

Post Office Simple Life Insurance

The most innovative new public service offered by the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. in the mid-1930s was simple life insurance (簡易人壽保險). As with many other services, the Chinese Post Office's sale of simple life insurance was inspired by broad trends in postal development in other countries. The British Post Office first started selling life insurance in 1864, but it failed to attract many customers and was terminated in 1928. The Japanese postal life insurance scheme, however, proved very successful after its introduction in 1916.¹⁹⁸ As soon as the D.G. of P.R. &

¹⁹⁶ “Youzheng guonei huidui fa”(Domestic postal remittance law) in Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, II: 276-77.

¹⁹⁷ Unnumbered Circular S/O, D.G. of P.R. & S.B., 18 July 1938 in SHAC137.290-7. Postal Gift Certificates went on sale in 1937, but mail robberies and other problems forced the Post Office to suspend the service in 1939. Youzheng chujin huiyeju tongling di 64 hao, juzhang Shen Shuyu (Directorate General of Postal Remittances and Savings Bank, circular no. 64, Director General Shen Shuyu), 5 June 1937 in SHAC137.290-9; D.G. of P.R. & S.B. Circular Memo No. 462 (Translation), signed by S. Y. Liu, 28 November 1938 in SHAC137.290-8.

¹⁹⁸ The Japanese postal insurance system was so successful because it possessed a monopoly on industrial insurance. Wang Fuyi, “Jiaotong bu chouban jianyi renshou baoxian zhi jingguo” (The experience of the Ministry of Communications making preparations for simple life insurance), *Jiaotong zhigong yuebao* (Communications employees monthly) 3: 12 (1936), 2-3.

S.B. was established in 1930, Director General Liu Shufan established an Insurance Department (保險處) to plan for its introduction.¹⁹⁹ The department produced numerous drafts of simple life insurance laws, but plans were put on hold as the postal economy declined in the early 1930s.²⁰⁰ A Simple Life Insurance Discussion Committee, however, continued meeting and studying Japan's postal insurance system.²⁰¹ Postal administrators and other government officials also continued to promote the idea in the press.²⁰² In early 1935, Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua, in the midst of a broader program of postal reform and business expansion, revived the idea of postal life insurance. He pushed its regulations through the Legislative Yuan in December 1935 and policies went on sale in Shanghai, Nanjing, and Hankou later that month. The Post Office's provision of simple life insurance was intended to protect the productive output of peasants and the lower classes in urban centers. As with postal savings accounts, the administrators of the postal life insurance program saw it primarily as a method for encouraging the habits of thrift and thinking about long-term family economics. As Minister of Zhu put it, postal life insurance would be run as a "State enterprise, and as such its object is not to make profit, but merely to extend the benefits of insurance to workers and people of small means."²⁰³ Or, as another advocate put it, postal life insurance would "safeguard the stability of the lifestyle of the middle and lower-classes."²⁰⁴ As with other postal services, the Post Office could offer

¹⁹⁹ "Youzheng chujin huiyuju zanxing zuzhi ji banshi xize" (Provisional organizational and working rules for the Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Bank), *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) 119 (22 February 1930).

²⁰⁰ Wang Qingde, "Minguo nianjian Zhongguo youzheng jianyi shouxian shulun" "Simple life insurance offered by the post office in the Republican period," *Lishi dang'an* "Historical Archives" 1 (2001), 107.

²⁰¹ Xu Baiyuan, "Chouban youzheng jianyi renshou baoxian zhi jingguo" (Experiences preparing for postal simple life insurance), *Jiaotong zazhi* "Journal of Communications" 2: 11 (September 1934), 41.

²⁰² Wang Fuyi, "Youzheng jianyi renshou baoxian zhidu zhi chuangshe" (Establishing the Post Office simple life insurance system), *Jiaotong zazhi* "Journal of Communications" 1: 2 (November 1932): 91-93; Wang, "Jiaotong bu chouban jianyi renshou baoxian zhi jingguo"; Wang Guang, "Ruhe fuxing youzheng jingji (How to revitalize postal economics), *Jiaotong zazhi* "Journal of Communications" 1: 9 (July 1933): 15-16; Xu, "Chouban youzheng jianyi renshou baoxian zhi jingguo."

²⁰³ Chu, *China's Postal*, 102.

²⁰⁴ Wang, "Youzheng jianyi renshou baoxian zhidu zhi chuangshe," 92.

insurance at unprofitable rates because its pre-existing network and staff of highly-trained workers kept overhead costs to an absolute minimum.

In the case of simple life insurance, it was not intended to compete with private insurers, but to complement them. During preparations for selling simple life insurance, the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. undertook a study of the private insurance industry. Their research demonstrated that the rudimentary state of the insurance industry in China meant that the cheapest private policies were for 1,000 yuan or more.²⁰⁵ Postal administrators then intentionally crafted their regulations to fill the gap left open by private insurance carriers, particularly to offer insurance to poor and working-class people whose injury and mortality rates far outstripped the general population. To fill this gap, postal administrators put strict limits on the value of their policies – customers could only purchase one policy valued between 50-500 yuan – and would sell policies without making the customer have an expensive health check-up.²⁰⁶

The simple life insurance scheme benefitted from the pre-existing postal network and reputation of the service for probity, but had little opportunity to develop because of the outbreak of the war. In its first year of operation, 33 post offices sold 10,000 simple life insurance policies. By March 1936, the business had expanded to 285 offices in the seven postal districts of Jiangsu, Shanghai, Zhejiang, Anhui, Jiangxi, Hubei, and Hunan with sales starting in Guangdong and Fujian later that year.²⁰⁷ In September 1937, insurance policies also went on

²⁰⁵ For overviews of the Chinese insurance industry, see: Ao Wenwei, “1927-1937 nian Zhongguo baoxianye fazhan jiannan zhi yuanyin” “Reasons behind the difficulties in the development of the insurance industry in China, 1927-37,” *Minguo dang’an* (Republican Archives) 2 (2000): 71-75; Zhao Lanliang, *Jindai Shanghai baoxian shichang yanjiu (1843-1937)* (Research on the modern Shanghai insurance market [1843-1937]) (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2003).

²⁰⁶ Jianyi renshou baoxian fa (Simple life insurance law) as attachment to Jiaotongbu youzheng chujin huiye zongju tongling di48 hao (Ministry of Communications, D.G. of P.R. & S.B.), 8 June 1935 in SHAC127.954.

²⁰⁷ Youzheng chujin huiyeju tongling di 53 hao, juzhang Shen Shuyu (D.G. of P.R. & S.B. circular no 53, Director General Shen Shuyu), 5 November 1935 in SHAC127.954.

sale in Henan, Shandong, and Shanxi.²⁰⁸ By the late fall of 1937, postal life insurance had achieved moderate success with sales of 42,000 policies through 304 offices. As the war expanded, the D.G. of P.R. & S.B. continued selling postal insurance throughout Free China – adding Sichuan, Yunnan, Guizhou, and Guangxi to the sales area in 1939. The life insurance program showed a small profit in 1940.²⁰⁹ When the war reached a stalemate in 1942/43, the D.G. or P.R. & S.B. quickly expanded the simple life insurance business, including hiring full-time insurance salesmen.²¹⁰ From 347 offices in 1942, postal life insurance could be purchased at 1,653 offices by the end of 1943. The Directorate also encouraged sales competitions among its staff, raised the insurance limit, and began an old-age insurance program for those over 60.²¹¹ By the termination of the war, simple life insurance was being offered at 1,900 post offices with sales of 230,000 policies valued at 6 million yuan. Although achieving some success, the simple life insurance service never reached its target market of urban workers and peasants. Instead, 46% of simple life insurance policy holders were government employees, 22.5% were business people, and only 9% were workers in 1945.²¹² Facing massive deficits brought on by hyperinflation in the late 1940s, the Post Office abolished the simple life insurance program in 1948.

²⁰⁸ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling changzi di 2168 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular, regular series, no. 2168, Director General Guo Xinsong), 13 August 1937 in SHAC137.288-29.

²⁰⁹ Ershijiu nian jianyi renshou baoxian yewu baogao (Report on simple life insurance business for 1940) in SHAC127.936.

²¹⁰ “Chuanren shouxian yewuyuan fuwu zanxing guize” (Provisional regulations on full-time simple life insurance salesmen), 1943 in Youzheng chujin huiye ju, ed., *Chuhui renshi zhangze huibian* (Collection of regulations on personnel affairs in postal service savings banks) (N.p.: Youzheng chujin huiye ju, 1946).

²¹¹ Cao, *Youzheng chuhui fazhan shi*, 243-44.

²¹² Li Qiong, “Minguo shiqi shehui baoxian chutan” (A tentative study of social insurance during the Republican period), *Huazhong jishu daxue xuebao (shehui kexue bao)* (Journal of the Central China Science and Technology University [social science edition]) 1 (2006), 83.

Conclusion

In the Maoist era, the state played the central role in planning and directing almost all economic life. Prior to the communist period, the National Government under Jiang Jieshi, working from Sun Zhongshan's agenda for economic growth, had also created a number of state-run planning agencies to direct industrial development. Both the Nationalists and Communist had their own reasons for using the state to direct and shape the economy, but were nonetheless building upon the idea of state intervention in the economy first pioneered in the late Qing.

As with many non-Western countries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Qing and Republican governments believed that the structure of the state itself had to be transformed in order to secure national wealth and power. To reach these goals, government administrators began to shift their ideas about the role of the state in society and the economy. Government bureaucrats not only wanted to create a strong, centralizing state, but also one capable of transforming society and the economy.

The Imperial Post Office was one of the most representative institutions of the new trend of thinking in which the state could affect positive social and economic change. In creating a national communications, transportation, and financial network, the Post Office fundamentally altered the relationship between the state and its subjects. No longer would the state be solely represented by a county magistrate presiding over public affairs in a Yamen, but would now be represented by couriers donning a cloth vest with "Great Qing Post Office" stenciled on it. This shift represented a change from a small, stable state viewing its essential functions as presiding over an agricultural empire to a centralizing state intervening in many realms of public life to create a modern nation-state.

The heavy capital investment necessary for building nation-wide communications, transportation, and financial networks across one of the largest countries in the world made it one of the economic areas in which the state could effectively and productively intervene. To construct these networks, the Post Office methodically built up its offices, ranging from monumental edifices in Shanghai to humble rural stations in Xinjiang, and linked its own courier network to contracted traditional and modern forms of transportation to create a national communications and transportation system. Through this basic system, the Post Office then offered a bevy of public services catering to all segments of society.

Quantifying the Post Office's direct contributions to economic growth is impossible, but its most important role was as an "extramarket" force mitigating some of the negative effects of capitalist development. Since "natural" capitalist economies will result in an inefficient allocation of resources, the state can play a role in creating a system in which resources are better distributed – if not equally – throughout the overall economy. The Post Office helped redistribute resources and fostered a competitive level of economic activity over a large geographic area. By disciplining economic opportunity by offering letter carriage, parcel post, money orders, etc., across the country to prices below private firms to encourage entrepreneurship, thrift, and the creation of a more equal and integrated economy. The second manner in which the Post Office "corrected" the market was by carefully designing its services to only fill in gaps left in the economy by private companies. Except in the case of letter mail, which the Post Office always viewed as its monopoly, postal administrators tailored services so they did not compete aggressively with private companies. Instead, postal administrators saw their role, particularly in transportation and financial services, as offering economic services – money orders, petty savings accounts – ignored by private capitalists. Small banks, remitting

firms, and transport companies could still operate their smaller networks and connect themselves to the Post Office. The Post Office thus viewed itself as enhancing the market rather than monopolizing it. More significant than completing the national network was spreading economic opportunities to those without the financial wherewithal to purchase private services. By almost any measure, the Chinese Post Office succeeded in achieving its goals. Although there will always be disparity between the ambition and capacities of the state, the Post Office achieved remarkable progress in creating national communications, transportation, and financial networks. But, the Post Office also suffered from its own success. As seen in the example of state subsidies to the publishing industry, postal administrators initially acted autonomously in postal rate-making policy. As newspapers, magazines, and books began being distributed in greater numbers – thus politically and economically strengthening editors, publishers, and booksellers – private economic actors then circumvented the Post Office to politicize the rate-making process. In successfully lobby for lowering postage rates, newspaper editors, magazine publishers, and booksellers ironically weakened the autonomy of the state. What we see in this example, then, is how successful state intervention led over time to diminished state autonomy over time.

While this chapter was not intended to be a broader history of the expansion of state power in the late Qing and throughout the Republic, studying the origins of the Post Office, the construction of its network, and the provision of numerous public services clearly demonstrates the potentialities of the institution for aggressively intervening in society and the economy. If the Post Office as an institution lost some of its autonomy over time, its efforts still strengthened the overall state and economy by sacrificing its own institutional interests to guard the public interest.

Chapter 4
Instrument of Trade and Industry:
Mail Carriage Contracts and the Creation of an Information Infrastructure

The communications and transportation revolutions happened almost simultaneously in China. Within a fifty year period from 1890 to 1940 there was an unprecedented expansion in printing and publishing, the introduction of communications technologies like the post office, telegraphs, telephones, and radio, and rapid development in transportation with the growth of steamships, railroads, modern roads, automobiles, and airlines. These communications and transportation industries and routes reinforced each other; they were complementary institutions working together to revolutionize the sense of space, time, and speed in Chinese society. The transportation and communications revolutions forged in these decades by government bureaucrats, foreigners, businessmen, and ordinary Chinese profoundly altered existing patterns of life. The movement and circulation of information, people, and goods at incredible speeds, in great volumes, and at regular intervals all contributed to reshaping the country and laying the foundation for the modern Chinese nation-state.

The cataclysmic event in China that set the train in motion, figuratively speaking, was the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. Losing that war occasioned a “great awakening” for Chinese reformers and modernizers.¹ The pace of the Chinese communications and transportation revolutions increased rapidly, the changes became more abrupt, and its mission seemed vital – nothing less, its proponents argued, than the salvation of the country. In the years immediately following the Sino-Japanese War, previously hesitant government officials, merchants, and foreigners began sponsoring, financing, and constructing new railroads, extending the telegraph

¹ Leo Of-fan Lee and Andrew J. Nathan, “The Beginnings of Mass Culture: Journalism and Fiction in the Late Ch’ing and Beyond,” in *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China*, edited by David Johnson, Andrew Nathan, and Evelyn Rawski, 360-395 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 361.

network, opening new-style newspapers, and, most importantly, established the modern post office in 1896.

Over the next fifty years, the Post Office stood at the intersection of the communications and transportation revolutions in China. It is easy to overlook the significance of the Post Office in an age of the Internet, but to the history of communications and transportation development in China there was no more revolutionary organization. All old and new types of transportation and communications, information and media converged within the Post Office. In bringing together the communications and transportation systems, the Post Office revolutionized the informational environment of China. The Post Office held the power and authority to carry mail, reorganize the transportation system through the creation of postal routes, assist in the growth of modern transportation firms through mail contracts, and spread information through subsidies to newspapers, magazines, and books.

In late imperial China, access to the communications system was limited. High imperial officials could send their mail through the postal relay system (驛站), county magistrates through the post-station network (鋪), and merchants either through the Minxinju (民信局) or other types of letter networks, but the average imperial subject never sent mail at all. Once the Post Office opened its doors to the general public, ensured the inviolability of the mail, and offered service to every province in the country, the amount of letter mails expanded rapidly (Table 4, at end of this section). “Regularity, speed, and security,” wrote Secretary Piry, “are the essential requirements of a properly worked postal connection.”² In 1902, the Post Office transmitted 18.5 million letters, in 1922 the figure reached 298 million, and in 1943 there were 566 million letters sent through the mail. While these figures are small relative to the overall Chinese

² Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 77, Postal Secretary T. Piry, 16 May 1903 in SHAC137.2023-1.

population, we should not overlook the momentous impact the sudden and transformative effect such letters had on private individuals, the dissemination of information, and the growth of business.

Modern transportation industries developed their own networks independently, but the Post Office ensured the rapid, regular, and reliable transmission of mail through stipulations in mail carriage contracts. Contract stipulations such as when mails could be collected, how they should be handled, how fast they should be transmitted, where they should be housed, and where they should be delivered all conditioned contract carriers to a routine bureaucratic procedure defined by the Post Office. The Post Office was run as a business enterprise so it rarely gave direct subsidies to transportation companies – except in the case of the airlines – but it did provide a large volume of steady business vital to their survival. Through its routing of mail, the Post Office also worked with the transportation companies, other government agencies, and large corporations to help solidify a new transportation network of hubs and spokes. That network, and its reorganization of space, was dominated by railroads in the northern provinces, steamers along the coasts and up the Yangzi, steam launches on southern inland waterways, buses on macadamized roads across the country, and airplanes flying over it all. Within this new system, Shanghai became the most important center for transportation and communications by bringing together the coastwise trade from North and South and the inland networks through the Yangzi. Nanjing and Wuhan also played significant roles as railroads hubs of the Tianjin-Pukou and the Beijing-Wuhan-Guangzhou railroads. When modern transportation systems failed to serve a given province or border area, the Post Office took the lead in filling gaps by relying on traditional forms of transportation such as camel caravans, mule carts, wheelbarrows, and pole

carriers.³ The rapid growth in postal routes – both traversed by modern and traditional transport firms as well as postal couriers – is impressive. From 27,000 miles of post roads in 1902, the network expanded to 161,600 miles by 1917, and reached 354,096 miles by 1936.⁴

The communications and transportation system I have been briefly describing served as the new information infrastructure for the modern Chinese nation-state.⁵ The infrastructure transformed patterns of communication and ways of thinking by exposing Chinese to new ideas through letters, newspapers, magazines, and other types of information. That information not only flowed at great speeds, but also in larger volumes and with greater regularity. Intellectual debates that might have taken years in late imperial China could now happen within weeks. Knowledge of market prices and business information previously protected by a select few was now openly published in newspapers around the country. Travelers who might have spent their leisure time visiting local temples now thought little of traveling long-distances for pleasure on railroads or steamers. It was a new nation linked ever closer through communications and transportation.

The history of the communications and transportation revolutions in China has yet to be written. It is not my purpose in this chapter to do so. Instead, I will focus on how the Post Office facilitated the creation of the information infrastructure in the early twentieth century.

The Post Office's provision of mail carriage contracts to modern transportation companies

³ The Post Office preferred to use modern transportation firms, but the slow extension of their networks forced the Directorate to use all manner of other conveyances. Local economic conditions and the sheer number of different kinds of traditional firms make it impossible to draw significant conclusions about the economic impact of mail contracts on their companies, but we can say that roughly half of all postal payments to contract carriers went to them.

⁴ Postal Secretary's Report on the year 1902, 7 April 1903 in SHAC137.5277; *RWCPO, 1917*, 7; *RWCPO, 1936/37*, xxx.

⁵ The phrase "information infrastructure" comes from Richard R. John, "Recasting the Information Infrastructure for the Industrial Age," in *A Nation Transformed by Information: How Information Has Shaped the United States from Colonial Times to the Present*, edited by Alfred D. Chandler and James W. Cortada, 55-106 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

played the central role in linking the various communications systems together. Through these contracts, the Post Office, as a branch of the state, served as a primary financial contributor to the development of the modern transportation industry in China. The airline industry, in particular, benefited not only through mail contracts, but also received direct subsidies from the Post Office. Over this information infrastructure, the Chinese Post Office, aided by common carriers, circulated letters, newspapers, parcels, and other mail matter at the lowest postage rates in the world. Through the creation of this new, modern information infrastructure and the cheap postage rates, the Post Office contributed greatly to the process of state formation and nation-building.

Table 4: Growth in the Chinese Post Office (in five-year intervals)

Year	Offices ⁶	Total Distance of Routes (in miles)	Letters (in millions)	Newspapers, Magazines, Books, and other printed matter (in millions)
1902	446	27,000 ⁷	18.5	--
1907	2,803	71,581	167.0	
1912	6,816	133,000	137.1	54.3
1917	13,993	173,366	170.8	53.8
1922	38,585	254,266	289.0	101.2
1927	42,994	267,601	376.8	156.5
1932	45,261	314,499	439.1	256.3
1936/7	68,151	354,096	355.9	196.0
1943	70,891	371,604	566.5	162.2

⁶ Includes Town and Rural Box Offices and Stations

⁷ Not counting steamer or railway routes

*Transport(N)ation:**The Post Office, Mail Carriage Contracts, and the Modern Transportation Industry*

The Post Office considered itself “an instrument of trade and industry,” but a particular kind of instrument.⁸ In addition to facilitating business through the circulation of mail, parcels, and advertisements, the Post Office held as its mission to “expedite mail transmission” by any means available. “Full advantage has been taken of every means of transport used in China, and wherever acceleration or increased efficiency has been possible, it has been effected.”⁹ The desire to increase the speed, efficiency, and volume of mails transmitted brought the Post Office into a series of contractual relationships with the modern transportation industry.

Over the course of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the Post Office became an important early source of income for steamships, railroads, motor coaches, and airlines (Table A.1 in Appendix).¹⁰ Whenever a railroad or steamship started operating a new line, the Post Office was their first customer. This financial relationship between government and business, called the “Associative State” by some scholars, created a viable government-business relationship in which both parties benefited greatly.¹¹ The Post Office transmitted their mail faster, increased the volume of mail sent by modern conveyance, and economized by eliminating their own courier lines or contracts with expensive traditional transportation firms. In return, the modern transportation companies received lucrative government contracts that

⁸ *RWCPO, 1921*, 12.

⁹ *RWCPO, 1911*, 11.

¹⁰ Tables 2-8 are located at the end of the text.

¹¹ For a discussion of President Hoover’s Associative State and its relationship to mail contracts, see: F. Robert van der Linden, *Airlines and Air Mail: The Post Office and the Birth of the Commercial Aviation Industry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2002).

sustained their businesses, often accepted remuneration in excess of costs, and occasionally, as in the case of the airlines, were granted direct government subsidies.¹²

The Post Office also exerted its power to structure the modern transportation industry through the designation of postal routes, mail schedules, and working procedures. The coordination of mail schedules with the arrival and departure of steamers, railroads, coaches, and airplanes necessitated a sophisticated system of state-business cooperation. That cooperation, in turn, was shaped by the relative benefits offered by different types of modern conveyances, the geographic areas their networks covered, their speed of travel, the volume of mail they could handle, and their demands for remuneration.

All things being equal, the provision of these mail contracts was not controversial. The government contracted with modern transport companies whenever possible to speed the mails and conserve funds.¹³ The companies were pleased with the business eagerly signing contracts because the Post Office represented a steady revenue stream.¹⁴ And, the public was always happy to receive their mail faster. The contracts, however, did sometimes occasion intensive competition between the steamship companies, political maneuvering within the government over railroads and airlines, resistance by postal commissioners to using motor coaches, and public agitation by postal workers over the direct subsidies to the airlines. This competition, maneuvering, resistance, and agitation, served as interventions in the day-to-day relationships between the Post Office and the various companies. Indeed, it was often these external

¹² Unfortunately, I will not delve into the financial records of the modern transportation companies to determine the precise impact of mail carriage contracts on their economic well-being, but if evidence from other countries is any indication mail contracts were one of their financial cornerstones. For a general overview of the importance of mail contracts to the development of American transportation, see: Wayne E. Fuller, *The American Mail: Enlarger of the Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972).

¹³ *RWCPO, 1904*, xlix.

¹⁴ For example, see the rate wars between steamship companies discussed below.

interventions that reshaped the Post Office's relationships with the modern transportation industry.

The Post Office played the central role in extending the transportation network, speeding the mails, and increasing the volume and circulation of information knitting the country together ever tighter in the process of nation-building. The postal network grew along with the expansion of routes traversed by modern transportation companies and the amount of mail carried. In 1910, the Post Office handled 355 million pieces of mail, traversed a network of 117,300 miles of which railways and steamship lines together constituted 13,700 miles. Just twenty-seven years later, on the eve of World War II, the Post Office transmitted 881.6 million pieces of mail over a network of 363,400 miles within which there were 40,000 miles of steamer and boat lines, 7,200 miles of railroads, 34,000 miles of motor coach routes, and 11,200 miles covered by the airlines. The size of the network and volume of mail handled brought the country together, but so did the speeds attained by the Post Office. To give just one example: in the late Qing the imperial postal relay system took 82 days to reach Xinjiang from Beijing, by 1910 the Post Office had cut that time to 33 days, and in 1934 it took airmail less than a single day to reach Ürümqi. It was through the Post Office that these large-scale transportation systems were brought together to create an entirely new infrastructure for circulating information throughout the country.

Smoke on the Water: Political and Business Competition in Steamer Mail Contracts

The Tianjin treaty settlement (1858-1860) ending the Second Opium War provided for the introduction of foreign consular mails between Beijing and the other treaty ports. Until 1863, the Zongli Yamen (Ministry of Foreign Affairs) handled and delivered the legation mail, but in that year the Yamen found it convenient to pass the duty onto the Imperial Maritime Customs Service. In 1876, Inspector General of the Imperial Maritime Customs Service Sir Robert Hart

used the start offered by the carriage of legation mail to create a modern postal service by opening what became known as the Customs Post (海關撥駟達書信館).¹⁵ As Inspector General, Hart was well aware of the importance of steam navigation to his postal project. Foreign steamers had been plying the Chinese coast since the 1840s and inland waterways since the 1860s and Hart's Customs Service interacted with them daily. For his new Customs Post, Hart secured the agreement of Li Hongzhang to have the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company (輪船招商局) carry mail free of charge.¹⁶ The successful and speedy transmission of legation mails by steamship pleased Hart, but China Merchants and the other steamer companies also carried mails for the Local Post Offices (書信館) of the Treaty Port Municipal Councils, the national post offices or "Alien Posts" (客郵) of the various imperialist powers operating on Chinese soil, the Minxinju, and the Government Despatch Offices (文報局).¹⁷ As Hart continued planning for the creation of a modern postal service for China he undoubtedly gave great consideration to the political and economic question of how to secure a monopoly on the steamer carriage of mails.

Within months of the edict establishing the Imperial Post Office in March 1896, Hart with "prescient perspicacity" used his position as inspector general to make a unique contract with the steamship companies to secure a monopoly on mail carriage for the Imperial Post Office.¹⁸ The Customs Service had a rule dictating that cargo could only be loaded and unloaded between 6 am and 6 pm on weekdays. Steamer companies could purchase "special

¹⁵ Postal No. 576, Inspector General to the Ningbo Commissioner, 17 March 1886 in SHAC137-5277.

¹⁶ Ying-wan Cheng, *Postal Communication in China and Its Modernization, 1860-1896* (Cambridge, MA: East Asia Research Center, 1970), 72. Li Hongzhang founded the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company in 1873 as a joint-stock company, but it was also an agency of the government. On the history of the firm, see: Albert Feuerwerker, *China's Early Industrialization: Sheng Hsuan-huai (1844-1916) and Mandarin Enterprise* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1958), 96-188.

¹⁷ Each of these separate postal services is discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

¹⁸ *RWCPO, 1921*, 8.

permits” (關憑單) to bypass the rule paying 10 taels per half night, 20 per night, 20 for a holiday, and 40 for a holiday night. The companies eventually found these “special permits” onerously expensive and lobbied Hart to eliminate them. Instead, Hart agreed to refund half the special permit fees for any steamer company willing to carry IPO mails – the steamship companies agreed immediately.¹⁹ As it worked out, even a single ship carrying IPO mails provided the return of half of all special permit fees for the company’s whole fleet. Mail-carrying steamer companies thus gained a great advantage over their competitors by having their fees reduced for minimal work. In addition to the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company, Hart also signed such contracts with Butterfield & Swire’s China Navigation Company (太古輪船公司) and Jardine, Matheson’s Indo-China Steam Navigation Company (怡和輪船公司).²⁰ By 1901, eight other companies also agreed to carry IPO mails.²¹

The steamship companies benefited financially from Hart’s contract, but the Post Office also gained a competitive advantage in its pursuit of a national postal monopoly. “The Legations,” wrote Hart, “are awfully riled at my ‘collaring’ the interport steamers as I did – Gérard calls it a *coup d’état*.”²² The “collaring” of the steamer companies was in having them refuse to carry mail for any other postal service in return for the refunds. “We must either show our teeth or die,” wrote Hart’s Postal Secretary Jules van Aalst, “better that THEY die than

¹⁹ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 754, Postal No. 20, Sir Robert Hart, 9 December 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

²⁰ In 1872, John Samuel Swire, head of Butterfield and Swire in Shanghai, founded the China Navigation Company, which still exists. William Keswich, a partner of Jardine, Matheson & Co., established the Indo-China Steam Navigation Company in 1881.

²¹ The other companies were: Hoong On Company, the McBain steamers, the Douglas Steamship Company, Siemssen & Co., Jebesen & Co., Arnhold, Karberg & Co., Melchers & Co, and the steamers of A.R. Marty. Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 50, Postal Secretary J.A. van Aalst, 23 July 1901 in SHAC137.2023-1.

²² The Gérard referred to is M. Auguste Gérard, the French Envoy to China. Robert Hart, *The I.G. in Peking: Letters of Robert Hart, Chinese Maritime Customs, 1868-1907*, edited by John K. Fairbank, et al (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press), 1116.

we.”²³ The refund of half the special permit fees in exchange for the exclusive right to transmit mails by steamers was just one of the ways the Post Office tried to kill its competition to achieve a postal monopoly.

The contract had an immediate effect on the Local Post Offices of the various treaty port Municipal Councils. Since the 1860s, the LPOs had relied almost exclusively on the carriage of their mails by steamer. In February 1897 all the outport Local Post Offices closed their doors when the steamer companies refused to carry their mail. A monopoly on steamer-carried mail also hamstrung the so-called “steamer Minju” (輪船民局) who, though using steamships at least since 1882, were now forced to “club” their mails and transmit them through the Post Office or risk being caught smuggling mail.²⁴ It is not clear whether the Despatch Offices continued to transmit a few government covers by steamer after 1897, but by 1900 they were sending all their mail through the Post Office.

The Post Office also challenged the foreign post offices operating on Chinese soil through the use of steamers. The foreign post offices have “free elbows at Treaty Ports,” Hart complained, since his contract could not prohibit foreign steamship companies from carrying mail for their national governments.²⁵ Since the foreign post offices in China were technically part of their home services the steamers continued carrying their mail. Instead of using its steamer monopoly, Postal Secretary Piry introduced a tariff schedule with “steam-served” (汽機運送處所) places at half the postage rate of “non-steam-served” (非汽機運送處所) places

²³ Letter from Postal Secretary Jules A. van Aalst to Inspector General Sir Robert Hart, 29 June 1901 in SHAC137.1802-1.

²⁴ Ningbo Despatch to I.G. No. 88, 2 August 1882 in SHAC679.14907.

²⁵ Remarks, Postal Secretary Piry, 3 June 1904 in SHAC137.1866.

to try to financial undercut the foreign post offices.²⁶ The “steam-served” tariff schedule failed within six months when it proved too complicated for calculating postage, but it demonstrates the Post Office’s continued efforts to use steamship transport to undercut its competitors.

Hart’s contract with the steamer companies started to cause problems for the Post Office with the separation of the Customs and Posts in May 1911. While the two administrations were conjoined, a refund of half the special permit fees had no financial impact on the Post Office. After May 1911, the Post Office had to shoulder the entire cost of the refunds – the Customs still provided the discount, but the Post Office had to pay the Customs for the steamer carriage of mails. The Post Office had become “barnacled” with “sacred but unpractical precedents.”²⁷ The amounts “refunded” to the steamer companies were \$106,210 in 1909 and \$95,193 in 1910, but the Post Office paid the Customs \$92,572 in 1911, \$86,110 in 1912, and \$123,721 in 1913 at a time when the Service was running deficits.²⁸ Neither the Post Office nor the Customs had any idea what rates they were actually paying since no real relationship could be established between the refunded fees and the amount of mail carried, but the financial burden on the Post Office felt heavy after 1911.²⁹

For the steamer companies, the value of Hart’s contract also started to decline in the 1910s. In the early years, the companies were “much overpaid” since postal development was slow and they carried few mails for a significant decrease in their special permit fees.³⁰ After 1911, the situation reversed. The original contract did not stipulate a limit on the amount of mails carried – “the various steamer companies will receive, carry, and deliver *all* mail matter

²⁶ Postal Secretary’s Memo: I.P.O. Tariff Rate for Domestic Letters, Postal Secretary Théophile Piry, undated; Chinese Imperial Post, Notification No. 40: Tariff of Postage. In force as of 1 April 1904 and Chinese Imperial Post, Notification No. 41: Tariff of Postage. In force as of 1 September 1904 in SHAC137.1866.

²⁷ Circular No. 466, Co-Director General Destelan, 28 December 1918 in SHAC137.2023-4.

²⁸ S.O. No. 239, Postal Commissioner Destelan to Shanghai Postal Commissioner Rousse, 21 April 1914 in SHAC137.2183.

²⁹ Circular No. 466, Co-Director General Destelan, 28 December 1918 in SHAC137.2023-4.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

sent to their steamers.”³¹ By the mid-1910s, the Post Office was sending an increasing number of heavy mails to the steamer companies leading them to believe they were underpaid. As the head of the Post Office, H. Picard-Destelan wrote, “It was a good bargain for them then, but within ten years the advantage of the bargain was to the Posts.”³² In 1918, the most powerful foreign steamer companies requested an immediate revision of the contract.

In December 1918, the Post Office and the steamer companies worked out a new remuneration system styled “steamer subsidies” (輪船津貼).³³ Under the new contract, the Post Office and steamer companies decided to experiment with a space-based system of remuneration. The Post Office would pay \$15 per 40 cubic feet in special mail rooms provided by the companies. Any mails exceeding the space of a mail room would pay a weight-based 2-4 cents per kilo depending on the length of the journey.³⁴ In the last year under the old system the Post Office paid \$128,172 for the carriage of 290,000 kilos or 44 cents per kilo. With the new contract, the steamer companies transported 1,059,369 kilos of mail for \$217,605 or 20 cents per kilo in 1919 and carried 1,394,834 kilos for \$258,845 or 18.5 cents per kilo in 1920.³⁵ Although the rate per kilo clearly fluctuated, both the Post Office and steamer companies benefited from their new space-based system of remuneration. The Post Office sent a greater number of smaller, but heavy mails in the space provided such as parcels while the steamer companies received a greater amount of total remuneration for a predetermined space on their ships.³⁶ The new system proved satisfactory for both sides until the late 1920s (Table A.2 in Appendix).

³¹ Emphasis added. Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 754, Postal No. 20, Sir Robert Hart, 9 December 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

³² *RWCPO, 1921*, 8.

³³ *RWCPO, 1919* (Chinese version), 523.

³⁴ Circular No. 466, Co-Director General Destelan, 28 December 1918 in SHAC137.2023-4.

³⁵ The weights carried can be found in *RWCPO, 1918-1920* and the payments in Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, III: 169.

³⁶ Under the new system, the Combine continued to dominate the steamer mail carriage trade. In 1919, Butterfield & Swire’s China Navigation Company had 22 ships that carried mails with an aggregate total of 206,451 square feet

Despite the mutually beneficial contract for the coast and lower Yangzi, the Upper Yangzi had always posed a challenge for the Post Office. The larger steamship companies feared the force of the current through the Three Gorges, the lack of suitable anchorages, and the intricacy of navigation because of the changeable channel west of Yichang. It was not until the British-operated Sichuan Railway Steam Navigation Company's small, easily maneuverable *Shuhun* made the journey in 1914 that any steamer had successfully navigated the Gorges without being towed.³⁷ Instead of steamers, the Post Office usually relied on their own fleet of low-draught steam launches (汽船) on the upper river for most of the period up to the late 1920s. By the late 1920s, the larger steamship companies had built small steamers modeled on the *Shuhun* and started carrying mail. While the space-based system of remuneration worked well for other parts of the country, it was a decided disadvantage for the smaller steamers working the upper river because of their limited capacity; however, the Post Office desperately wanted steam service to the area. After a series of negotiations, the Post Office and steamship companies decided on a seasonally-adjusted weight-based system of remuneration. Standard contract rates

and was paid \$86,310, the China Merchants Steam Navigation Company had 16 ships with an aggregate total of 147,777 square feet and was paid \$61,740, and Jardine, Matheson's Indo-China Steam Navigation Company had 11 ships with an aggregate total of 113,021 square feet and was paid \$47,250. 1919 nian 2 yue 15 ri youzheng zongju zongbao Tieshilan banbu de tongyu di 136 hao (Postal instruction no. 136, Co-Director General Destelan, 15 February 1919) in Qiu, *Tianjin youzheng shiliao*, III: 398-413.

In addition to contract steamers, the Directorate frequently used non-contract steamers on a temporary basis when mail and parcels accumulated. In such cases, the Post Office paid the companies on a weight-based scale – usually two cents per kilo. With larger steamship companies outside the Combine, the Director signed longer-term contracts on a weight- and distance-based scale. The largest Japanese steamer company working in Chinese waters, the Dairen Kisen Kabushiki Kaisha (大連汽船株式會社), signed a five-year contract at ½ cent per kilo under 500 miles, one cent per kilo between 500-1,000 miles, and two cents per kilo over 1,000 miles. No. 2218/64257, Officiating Chief Secretary to Fujian Postal Commissioner, 7 June 1927 in SHAC137.8153 and No. 2218/64257, Officiating Chief Secretary to Fujian Postal Commissioner, 7 June 1927 in SHAC137.8153.

³⁷ A.D. Blue, "Land and River Routes to West China (With Especial Reference to the Upper Yangtze)" *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society, Hong Kong Branch* 16 (1976), 167. As soon as the *Shuhun* succeeded, the Directorate signed a mail carriage contract with the Sichuan Railway Steam Navigation Company, but the bulk of the mail on that route continued to travel by steam launch. Letter of Shanghai Postal Commissioner to Mr. Destelan, Chief Secretary, Directorate General of Posts, 8 July 1914 and Letter of J. McDowall, Acting Postal Commissioner of Chengdu to Harry H. Fox, British Consulate-General, Chengdu, 31 July 1914 in SHAC137.1875. On the design and draft plans for the *Shuhun*, see: Lieutenant-Commander H. Delano, USN, "Shipping Possibilities of the Yangtse Kiang River," *International Marine Engineering* 24, Part 1 (June 1919): 395-98.

for mails from Yichang to Chongqing in 1929 were \$40 per ton during the high water season, which lasted from April to October.³⁸ Under this new system, a host of foreign-owned steamers started working on the upper reaches of the Yangzi. Their presence riled the Sichuan warlord Liu Xiang (劉湘) (1888-1938) and an ardent nationalist Lu Zuofu (盧作孚) (1894-1952).³⁹

After militarily consolidating control over Chongqing and its surrounding environs, Liu Xiang aggressively challenged foreign shipping on the Upper Yangzi. Stymied in his attempts to force the local Chinese firms to amalgamate in order to reduce cut-throat competition, Liu changed tactics by reducing the advantages enjoyed by foreign steamers and threw his administrative and financial support behind Lu Zuofu's Minsheng Industrial Company Ltd (民生事業股份有限公司) to compete with the foreign steamers on the Upper Yangzi.⁴⁰ Starting a single small steamer, Lu's Minsheng Company began to work the route between Chongqing and his hometown of Hechuan. In 1929, Liu Xiang appointed Lu as head of the Upper Yangzi Navigation Bureau with authority to search competitor's ships. Over the next several years, Liu Xiang gradually reduced the advantages held by foreign steamers by using confrontational tactics, granted Minsheng monopoly contracts on important routes, and constantly funneled business to the Chinese firm. On Lu's side, he used tight budgeting and fiscal discipline to rapidly expand his control over the local shipping. By 1931, Lu had a fleet of 13 steamers of 2,153 tons. Just four years later, the Minsheng had more than 40 ships and dominated Chinese shipping on

³⁸ Upper Yangzi Contract Rates in SHAC137.2527-5.

³⁹ Lu Zuofu, the son of an impoverished farmer, would be celebrated by Mao Zedong as one of China's four greatest industrialists of the 1930s and 1940s. Lu started his working life in the education department of the Sichuan government in the late 1910s. He was responsible for introducing a number of education reforms and starting a model educational and industrial area in Sichuan, called Beibei (北碚).

⁴⁰ For a broader overview of Liu Xiang's confrontation with foreign shipping on the Upper Yangzi, see: Anne Reinhardt, "'Decolonisation' on the Periphery: Liu Xiang and Shipping Rights Recovery at Chongqing, 1926-1938," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 36: 2 (June 2008): 259-274.

the Upper Yangzi.⁴¹ With this sizable fleet, Lu decided to challenge the foreign steamship companies for control of the Upper Yangzi. To break the foreign control over mail contracts on this route, Lu offered to carry the mail at \$34 per ton against the standard \$40. The Post Office gladly accepted Lu's offer. The foreign companies were forced to drop their rates to \$36 per ton on the Yichang-Chongqing run.⁴² Still not satisfied, Lu's Minsheng Company made a new bid in late 1936 at \$33 per ton during the high water season and \$42 during low water.

The foreign steamer companies balked at Lu's constant efforts to undercut their profitability. They responded by trying to collectively negotiate with the Post Office as a "pool." Assuming the Post Office was reliant on their steamers, the "pool" offered the Post Office rates of \$40 for the first ton and \$55 for each additional ton at high water.⁴³ The Directorate warned that any attempted formation of such a monopolistic "pool" forced the Post Office to keep a "meticulous" eye on the foreign steamer companies.⁴⁴ Feeling threatened, representatives from Butterfield & Swire and Jardine, Matheson approached Postal Business Secretary W.W. Ritchie. They suggested that the Post Office was being short-sighted since local military authorities could commandeer Minsheng steamers while theirs were protected by extraterritoriality. That said, what the foreign companies really wanted, the representatives continued, were light mails like letters rather than the heavier parcel mails because of the weight limits on their small steamers. If only carrying light mails, the foreign companies were willing to drop their rates to \$30 per ton

⁴¹ For an overview of Lu Zuofu's Minsheng Co., see: Zhu, "1927-1937 nian Zhongguo lunchuan" and Ling Yaolun, *Lu Zuofu yu Minsheng gongsi* (Lu Zuofu and the Minsheng Company) (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 1987).

⁴² Upper Yangzi Contract Rates, undated in SHAC137. 2527-5.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Personal letter from Nanjing Postal Director Ritchie to Butterfield and Swire representative Lock, 12 June 1937 in SHAC137.2527-5.

at high water and \$45 at low water.⁴⁵ The Post Office agreed to their contract terms, but relied almost entirely on Lu's Minsheng Company because it would carry heavy parcel mails.

Lu's Minsheng Company thus brought about the "disintegration of the 'pool'" and an end to the foreign domination of steamer service on the Upper Yangzi.⁴⁶ Henceforth, and throughout all of World War II, the Minsheng Industrial Company carried the bulk of postal mails. For example, in the fourth quarter of 1938, Minsheng carried 217,025 kilos while the formerly dominant Butterfield & Swire's China Navigation Company carried only 61,735.⁴⁷ During the War, the Directorate signed a series of favorable contracts with a number of steamer companies at Minsheng's low rates.⁴⁸ Rates of remuneration for the steamer carriage of mails rose during the war, but only in tandem with inflation.⁴⁹

From 1897 to 1949, the Chinese Post Office utilized every available steamer route for the carriage of mails and helped expand the steamer network to every navigable waterway in the country (Table A.3 in Appendix). Steamers were particularly valued for linking northern and southern coastal ports with far inland places up the Yangzi. Without the steamer carriage of mails, and their ability to move heavy matter such as newspapers and magazines, the integration of western China with the coastal region would have taken much longer. In Ba Jin's novel *Family*, the Jue brothers eagerly gather every month to pour over the most recent revolutionary

⁴⁵ Letter from Butterfield & Swire representative Lock to Business Department Secretary Ritchie, 15 May 1937 in SHAC137.2527-5.

⁴⁶ S/O No. 135, Chu Chang Sing, signing for Director General, to Hankou Postal Director Greenfield, 20 May 1937 in SHAC137.2527-5.

⁴⁷ List Showing weight of mails for/from Upriver Ports distributed by Post Office to various shipping companies for the 4th quarter 1938, dated 25 January 1939 in SHAC137.2527-5.

⁴⁸ In 1937, the Directorate signed contracts with the Minsheng Industrial Company, San Pei, Societe Francaise Du Haut Yang-tze, Societa di Navigazione Fluviale Italo-Cinese, Jardine, Matheson's Indo-China Steam Navigation Company, and Butterfield & Swire's China Navigation Company all at \$33 per ton during high water and \$42 during low water. SHAC137.2527-1.

⁴⁹ The Post Office agreed to 25%, 50%, and 125% increases because of inflation between September 1938 and May 1941. Shanghai youzheng guanliju cheng di 12007/22099 hao, di 12202/22294 hao, and di 13529/22621 hao, Shanghai youzheng guanliju juzhang Zhapeilin (Shanghai head post office despatch nos. 12007/22099, 12202/22294, and 13529/22621, Postal Director Chapelain), 30 September 1938, 15 February 1939, and 29 May 1941 in SHAC137.2527-1.

magazines like *New Youth* and *New Tide* bringing news of the latest campaigns among May Fourth intellectuals. It was steamers under contract that carried these magazines to Sichuan allowing them to circulate in the far interior. Just as significant, the steamers also facilitated the growth of business between western provinces like Sichuan and the east coast. In 1915, 234,000 parcels left Sichuan weighing 645,500 kilos, in 1922 those numbers were 359,400 packages weighing 2.4 million kilos; after steamers started working the Upper River, the numbers of parcels stayed approximately the same at 356,900 parcels, but their total weight more than doubled to 5.2 million kilos in 1936.⁵⁰

Compartmentalized: Railroad Mail Contracts and the Problem of Space

Postal officials from around the world felt it a grave responsibility to “speed” the mails to their destination. In many industrialized countries, this responsibility led to increased costs for the carriage of mail by railroads – in effect, the state directly subsidized them. For example, in 1838 the United States Congress passed a law requiring the US Post Office to use railways as long as their cost was no more than 25 percent over stage coaches for the same routes.⁵¹ In China, however, the railroads represented a significant decrease in transportation costs for the Post Office at roughly 1/5th the price of steamers. In China, the problem with transmitting mail by railway was one of space – the limited space covered by rail networks and the limited space available in their cars.

In 1897, upon the opening of the Imperial Post Office, Tianjin Postal Commissioner Gustav Detring signed contracts with two government-owned railways that would shape the next

⁵⁰ For these figures, see *RWCPO, 1915*, 31; *RWCPO, 1922*, 37; *RWCPO, 1936/37*, 30-31. The increased weight of the parcels was also an effect of new parcel post regulations permitting larger and heavier parcels to pass through the mail.

⁵¹ Kelly Olds, “The Challenge to the U.S. Postal Monopoly, 1839-1851,” *CATO Journal* 15: 1 (Spring/Summer 1995), 4.

fifty years of Post Office-railway relations. Detring agreed to pay monthly lump sums of \$2,000 yuan to the Tianjin-Dagu and \$10,065 to the Tianjin-Beijing lines.⁵² The lump sum payments were *not* officially for the carriage of mail, but for renting space within a train car. On railroads accustomed to carrying coal and other heavy material, the weight of the mail was inconsequential, but space on rail cars was at a premium. This early decision to base payments on rented space shaped how the Post Office conceptualized the transport of mail on the railways. In 1903 the Imperial Post Office negotiated some basic principles for contractual relations with the railroads. Through the auspices of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (外務部) – foreigners owned most operative lines – postal administrators agreed with eight rules governing the transmission of mail by the railways.⁵³ Only the Imperial Post Office would be allowed to transmit mail on the contracted lines, which was significant in the Post Office’s battle to gain a state postal monopoly. On their part, the railroads guaranteed the provision of “special and suitable compartments” in a single car – called “mail compartments” (郵件車廂) – where postal employees could store and sort mail en route. Any sums to be paid by the Post Office to the railroads would be negotiated on a case-by-case basis.⁵⁴ The basis for all future contractual relations between the Post Office and railways, then, was in determining the remuneration for the space provided, but the space was often very limited. The Chinese government-owned lines agreed to carry any mail matter for free that could fit into the small compartments while the foreign-owned lines asked for minimal remuneration.⁵⁵

⁵² Tianjin youjie youzhengsi Deruilin cheng zongshuiwusi youzi di 370 hao wen (Despatch no. 370, Tianjin Postal Commissioner Detring to Inspector General, 26 July 1901) in Qiu Runxi, et al. ed., *Tianjin youzheng shiliao* (Historical materials on the postal service of Tianjin), six volumes (Beijing: Beijing hangkong hangtian daxue chubanshe, ?-1992), II, part 1: 220-22.

⁵³ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs was involved in these negotiations because the railroads in question were the Russian-owned Chinese Eastern and Japanese-owned South Manchurian Railways.

⁵⁴ Inspector General’s Circulars, Circular No. 1076, Postal No. 61, 16 April 1903 in SHAC137.2023-1

⁵⁵ All payments to railroads in Table 6 prior to 1923 were to foreign-owned lines.

Although space was limited, the Post Office utilized every railroad line available. Postal Secretary Théophile Piry, in charge of the day-to-day operations of the Post Office, wrote “Railways are still in their infancy in China, but lines already open are used to their full extent.”⁵⁶ By the end of 1903, the Post Office was sending mails along almost the entire 1512 miles of completed rail lines.⁵⁷ Whenever a new line was even partially opened, the Post Office would immediately sign a contract for a “mail compartment.” For example, the Post Office made a verbal agreement with the director of the Jiujiang-Nanchang line when as little as 40 miles were in operation.⁵⁸ During the initial wave of intensive railroad construction up to 1911, the Post Office utilized 98% of the available track.⁵⁹ From then onward, the Post Office utilized more than 95% of all available rail lines, except when the Japanese occupied the Northeast in the early 1930s and the eastern half of the country during World War II (Table A.4 in Appendix).⁶⁰

Even though it utilized almost the entire rail network, the Post Office was frustrated by two problems in its relationship with the railroads. First, the free or inexpensive “mail compartments” were very small. A standard mail compartment seems to have been around 18 cubic meters and each train only had one mail compartment.⁶¹ Because of the severely limited space, wrote Piry, “the [Post Office] restricted its demands more than was generally desirable for the healthy development of postal communications.”⁶² In 1914, the Beijing-Mukden and Tianjin-Pukou railways did start supplying entire cars to the Post Office, known as Bureaux

⁵⁶ *RWCPO, 1904*, xlix.

⁵⁷ By 1903, the French had a 43 mile rail line in the Guangzhouwan Leased Territory and the Germans had a 187 mile line between Jiaozhou and Zhoucun, but neither was used by the Post Office.

⁵⁸ *RWCPO, 1912*, 8.

⁵⁹ In 1911, there was 5,796 miles of railroads in China with the Post Office utilizing 5,700 of those miles. *RWCPO, 1911*, 14.

⁶⁰ For the most recent scholarship on Chinese railroads, see: Bruce Elleman and Stephen Kotkin, *Manchurian Railways and the Opening of China: An International History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2010).

⁶¹ For example, the Japanese-controlled railroads in Shandong provided 18 cubic meters in a single compartment up to 1919 and then increased it to 25. Enclosure in Shandong Memo No. 346/7390 of 1919 to Co-D.G., 29 November 1919 in SHAC137.4150.

⁶² Draft Ministry of Communications, Postal Despatch No. XX, Postmaster General Piry, 18 December 1913 in SHAC137.2527-4.

Ambulants (火車行動郵局), for the carriage and sorting of mail in transit, but other railways did not follow suit because they would have to shoulder the entire cost of the railcar.⁶³

The second problem, one outside the Post Office's control, was the general stagnation in railroad construction. Foreigners who had built the early railroads restricted most of their activities to North China and Manchuria, where relatively flat geography allowed them to build faster, but they often failed to link their separate networks together. In May 1911, the Qing government nationalized many railroads and slowly began the process of integrating the networks, but a lack of funding, the 1911 Revolution, and warlord conflicts stalled their efforts. In 1913, Minister of Railways Ye Gongchuo (葉恭綽) – a rail expert and future Minister of Communications – made an effort to forge a national rail system out of the disparate lines built by national, local, and foreign governments, but his efforts produced meager results.⁶⁴

The lack of space on trains and the stagnation in railroad construction eventually had a negative effect on postal finances. Without the benefits of railroads, the Post Office had to rely heavily on their own couriers or sign contracts with traditional style transportation companies. In North China, camel caravans, carters, muleteers, pole-carriers, and backpackers filled in the gaps in the rail network, but their rates were high. While railroads could move goods in the 1920s for 1-1½ cents per ton kilometer, carters and muleteers cost ten times as much while pole-carriers and backpackers cost 20-30 times as much.⁶⁵ Whenever a new rail line opened, it allowed the Post Office to eliminate more expensive courier routes or void their contracts with

⁶³ Circular No. 380, Postmaster General T. Piry, 11 July 1914 in SHAC137.2023-3. The Beijing-Hankou Railway also added bureaux ambulants in 1917.

⁶⁴ During Ye's efforts to standardize the railroads, he also proposed having the Post Office pay for the carriage of mail on government railroads. He proposed a complex system of remuneration in which the Post Office would pay by space-kilometer, but also adjusted in accordance with the type of rail car. The Post Office resisted this complex system and the plan was shelved. "Rules Governing Postal Transmission by Railways" as enclosure to Yifu from Youzhengsi to Directorate General of Posts, 8 December 1913 in SHAC137.2527-4.

⁶⁵ John Earl Baker, "Transportation in China," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 152 (Nov. 1930), 165; for comparative transport rates in various localities, see: Shu-hwai Wang, "The Effect of Railroad Transportation in China, 1912-1927," *Chinese Studies in History* 17: 3 (Spring 1984), 68.

traditional companies.⁶⁶ But, rail lines were also frequently interrupted by natural disasters or military conflicts forcing the Post Office to rely on expensive “specially hired couriers.”⁶⁷ The Post Office’s frustration with the railroads finally came to a head in the early 1920s.

Co-Director General Destelan, the head of the Post Office since Piry’s retirement in 1915, wanted to revise the regulations on rail transport to solve the problem of space restrictions. In 1921 the Beijing Government had promulgated a new Postal Law (郵政法) stipulating that all railways in China were obliged to carry the mails.⁶⁸ In late 1922, the Directorate announced an increase in the postage rate to help pay for increased remuneration rates demanded by the railroads. The public vehemently opposed the postage increase forcing the government to return to the original tariff rate, but the railroads continued asking for increased remuneration.⁶⁹ In April 1923, the central government intervened in the dispute between the railways and the Post Office by convening the Railway Traffic Conference (鐵路運輸會議) to negotiate mail carriage rates, among other things. It was finally agreed that the Post Office would pay the railways one cent per square meter per kilometer in exchange for the railroads increasing the space available for mail.⁷⁰ The new space-distance system of remuneration solved the problem of space on government lines, but the foreign-owned lines resisted these low rates. While Chinese government-owned railways paid the one cent rate, foreign-owned railways demanded more.

⁶⁶ The reductions in courier lines attendant upon the opening of a new railroad are frequently mentioned in the *RWCPO* series.

⁶⁷ *RWCPO*, 1915, 4.

⁶⁸ “Postal Law” as attachment to Circular No. 507, Officiating Co-Director General, temporarily C. Rouse, 1 November 1921 in SHAC137.2023-5.

⁶⁹ On the famous public debate over the 1922 postage increase, see: Yue Qianhou and Tian Ming, “Yulun chuanmei, shehui dongyuan yu quanyi boyi: 1922nian Beijing zhengfu youzi jiajia fengbo zhi kaocha (Public opinion, social mobilization, and the chess match over rights and interests: An examination of the storm over the 1922 Beijing government’s postage increase) *Anhui shixue* (Anhui historical studies) 2 (2008): 49-57.

⁷⁰ *RWCPO*, 1923, 9; Jiaotongbu, youzheng zongju, *Youzheng dashiji: Zhonghua youzheng qishi zhounian jinian* (Chronicle of the postal service: Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Chinese postal service) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1966), 161.

The Chinese Eastern Railway received 1.49 cents per square meter per kilometer during 1922-25, 2.98 cents during 1925-28, and 3.75 cents during 1932-35.⁷¹

Under the new contract between the Post Office and railroads the amount of mail transmitted by rail increased rapidly. The percentage of railroad vis-à-vis other types of contract carriers rose from a low of 5.65% in 1920 to 14.29% in 1923, and then, in the first full year under the new system, the railroads carried 26.73% of all mail by contractors in 1924. Tracking the growth through remuneration to railroads shows payments of \$140,235 in 1922, \$259,000 in 1923, and under the new agreement, payments almost trebled to \$763,185 in 1924 (Table A.5 in Appendix). Until the establishment of the airlines in 1930, and the loss of Manchurian railroads in 1932, the railways transported roughly 25% of all mails by modern transportation companies. After the establishment of the National Government in 1927, Chinese railroad managers began demanding increased rates. Their hope was that the avowedly anti-imperialist Nationalist government would correct the imbalances in the rates of remuneration between government and foreign-owned railroads. In early 1928, the Ministry of Communications convened a National Communications Conference. At the Conference, Beiping-Hankou Railway Director Huang Shiqian (黃士謙) complained that postal payments to the railroads were too low. He suggested the rate of remuneration should be raised to 1.5-2 cents per square meter per kilometer.⁷²

The Post Office was sympathetic to suggestions for greater remuneration to government railroads, but a series of postal crises kept rates from rising. Declining postal revenues stemming mostly from the disruption of service during the Northern Expedition was the immediate cause for the Post Office's refusal to increase rates. Postal finances improved slightly in 1928, but

⁷¹ Despatch No. 180/204, Ji-Hei Postal Commissioner to Co-D.G. Destelan, 30 June 1925; Rough translation of Harbin Head Office letter No. 2501 dated 26th June 1928 to the Board of Directors of the Chinese Eastern Railway; Agreement for the transfer by the Chinese Eastern Railway Administration of Cars to the Chinese Postal Administration for the Transportation of Mail, 6 April 1932 in SHAC137.2527-4.

⁷² Guomin zhengfu, *Quanguo jiaotong huiyi*, 12.

another successful strike for increased wages by postal workers that fall, and the loss of income from Manchuria in 1932 kept postal finances from recovering. A policy of postal retrenchment and business expansion in the early 1930s did improve revenues significantly, but by then the Post Office was concentrating its efforts on expanding airmail and providing direct subsidies to the airlines.

The Nationalists had planned to aggressively expand the rail network in the late 1920s, but other priorities pushed expansion into the mid-1930s. In 1936, the National Government started an aggressive “new era” in railroad construction under a five-year plan directed by Minister of Railways Chang Kia-ngau.⁷³ The new work began well with several significant projects completed. Needing additional funds to continue various planned lines, the Ministry of Railroads and the Directorate General of Posts agreed to a slight increase in transport charges to 1.25 cents per kilo.⁷⁴ The Japanese takeover of the railroads in the eastern half of the country in late 1937 and early 1938, however, quickly offset this slight increase.

By spring 1945 there were only 718 miles of railways in operating in Free China.⁷⁵ During the war, the Post Office used trains whenever possible, but most of the Directorate’s efforts went towards improving airmail service and developing a system of service-owned trucks to carry heavy mails, discussed below. When the war ended and the National Government recovered the railroads in late 1945, the Post Office was desperate to use them because its business had expanded so rapidly. Recognizing the Post Office’s weakness, the railways

⁷³ Asiaticus, “The New Era in Chinese Railway Construction,” *Pacific Affairs* 10: 3 (September 1937): 276-288. On Chang’s plans, see: Kia-ngau Chang, *China’s Struggle for Railroad Development* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975). The 1936 Five-Year Plan called for the construction of 8,500 kilometers of rail lines in the Northwest, Southeast, and Southwest, but little was accomplished before the start of World War II.

⁷⁴ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling di 748 hao (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 748), 24 March 1937 in SHAC137.2251.

⁷⁵ Chinese Ministry of Information, *China Handbook, 1937-1945: A Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China In Eight Years of War*, Revised and Enlarged with 1946 Supplement (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1947), 215.

demanded an outlandish increase in remuneration. On 1 January 1946, the Ministry of Communications caved to the Ministry of Railroads by signing a contract paying the railroads 50 cents per kilometer – more than 400 times the 1.25 cent allowance in effect since 1937.⁷⁶ The railroads were also savvy enough to insert a clause in the contract stipulating that each time postage rates rose remuneration to the railways would increase proportionally, which ensured their costs were covered during the hyperinflation of the late 1940s.

Rocky Roads: Motor Coaches, Mail Contracts, and Resistance by Postal Commissioners

The first “modern” roads in China did not open until the late 1910s. A few warlords like Shanxi’s “Model Governor” Yan Xishan did begin intra-provincial road construction projects during this period, but by 1921 there were only about 100 miles of modern roads in all of China.⁷⁷ The lack of modern roads limited the use of motor coaches – a hybrid bus and truck – for carrying mail. The few roads that did exist were treated like the private property of the builders, mostly provincial governments, and their use franchised out to a companies. Despite such difficulties, the Post Office was eager to sign contracts with the motor coach companies because their vehicles could quicken mail transport from rail stations or steamer ports to their destination or, in places such as Shanxi, provide the only form of quick, modern transport of mails between cities and towns.

As publically- or privately-owned motor coach companies began operations with the expansion of the road network in the early 1920s, the Directorate had postmasters negotiate

⁷⁶ Jiaotongbu, youzheng zongju, *Youzheng dashiji*, 437.

⁷⁷ Julius Morgan Clements, *China: Automotive Conditions and the Good Roads Movement* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1922).

contracts in accordance with local conditions.⁷⁸ The predominant feature of these early contracts was the disparity in rates of remuneration. In some places, the bus companies might receive 15 dollars per 40 kilos over a specific distance while in others 10 cents per bag of mail was the norm.⁷⁹ The disparity continued to worsen over the 1920s with the Directorate paying only 1/5 of a cent per kilo for every 100 *li* in some districts while in other places it was two cents. The savvy postal commissioner of the Ji-Hei district convinced the motor coach companies to carry up to 600 kilos for free.⁸⁰ While the Directorate benefited from some of these contracts, the time spent checking archives for different rates, calculating payments in different amounts, and dealing with the paperwork stemming from such an unorganized system proved frustrating.

The wide disparity in the mail contracts for motor coach companies carriage was also partially an effect of a mini road-building boom begun in the late 1920s. A few years earlier, the National Good Roads Construction Association had started educational and publicity work in China to promote modern roads and automobiles.⁸¹ In 1928, the Nationalist Ministry of Communications convened its National Communications Conference. In addition to all the other topics discussed, conference delegates considered postal remuneration rates to motor coach companies and the establishment of a National Highway Planning Commission.⁸² After the Commission was established, it held its own Highway Conference in February 1929 where a

⁷⁸ The first negotiations for the carriage of mail by motor bus took place in 1919. In preparation for such negotiations, the Beijing Government passed the “Regulations on the Business of Long-Distance Motor Bus Companies” (長途汽車公司營業規則) in August 1918, which required “mails to be carried by all buses in transit.” SHAC137.8979.

⁷⁹ 1919 nian 4 yue 27 ri Zhangjiakou yideng ju juzhang Gao Bengong cheng Zhili youwuzhang di 188 hao han (Memo No. 188, Zhangjiakou First-Class Postmaster Gao Bengong to Zhili Postmaster, 27 April 1919) in Qiu Runxi et al. ed., *Tianjin youzheng shiliao* (Historical materials on the postal service of Tianjin) Six volumes (Beijing: Beijing hangkong hangtian daxue chubanshe, 1992), III: 393-94; Agreement made this 1st day of February 1921 between Mr. J.A. Greenfield, Postal Commissioner, acting as Agent for the Co-Director General of Posts of the one part and Mr. Chang Tsun-hsu, Manager of the Yan Fu Chuan Motor Bus Company in SHAC137.2182-4.

⁸⁰ Circular Memo No. 131, Director General Liu Shufan and Officiating Co-Director General Shields, 28 January 1929 in SHAC137.288-3.

⁸¹ Clements, *China: Automotive Conditions*.

⁸² Guomin zhengfu jiaotong bu mishu chu, ed., *Quanguo jiaotong huiyi huibian* (Collection on the National Communications Conference) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1928); *RWCPO*, 1928, 3.

plan for a national system of 12 major inter-provincial highways stretching across the entire country was outlined. Under this plan, the road network quickly expanded to 22,000 miles in 1929, 29,000 in 1930, and 41,000 in 1931 (Table A.6 in Appendix).⁸³

The rapid growth of the road system required a re-evaluation of Directorate policy on carriage contracts for motor coach companies. The newly-appointed Nationalist Director General of Posts Liu Shufan circulated draft regulations on the carriage of mails by coaches asking postal commissioners for their input.⁸⁴ The salient features of the Liu's draft regulations were the application of uniform maximum charges on the carriage of mails, that all bus companies were obliged to carry mails under contract, and that light mails must be carried for free.⁸⁵ After receiving the input from postal commissioners the Ministry of Communications and the Directorate promulgated the "Regulations on the Transmission of Mails by Long-Distance Motor Coaches" in December 1929.⁸⁶

Under these new regulations, the government dictated that all publically- and privately-owned motor coach companies were obligated to carry mail. The companies had to carry Class A and B newspapers and other light mails for free. For heavy mails and parcels, the Directorate would remunerate the companies at the rate of one cent per kilo for each 100 *li* (33 miles). For carrying heavy mails to outlying areas, the coach companies could negotiate for higher rates, but they were not to exceed twice the normal rate. Realizing that postal commissioners might

⁸³ Much of the information in this paragraph, and all of the statistics, comes from A. Viola Smith, *Motor Roads in China* (Washington: United States Government Printing Office, 1931); Lawrence M Chen, *Highways in China* (Nanking: Council of International Affairs, 1936); and T.K. Chao, *Highway Construction and Transport in China* (Nanking: Council of International Affairs, 1937).

⁸⁴ "Niding qiche daiyun youjian tiaoli" (Draft regulations on the transmission of mails by motor bus companies) as attachment to Circular Memo No. 131, Director General Liu Shufan and Officiating Co-Director General Shields, 28 January 1929 in SHAC137.288-3.

⁸⁵ In accordance with Article 16 of the 1921 Postal Law, all motor vehicles were required to carry mails for the Post Office, if so requested. "Postal Law" as enclosure to Circular No. 507, Officiating Co-Director General, temporarily C. Rousse, 1 November 1921 in SHAC137.2023-5.

⁸⁶ "Changtu qiche gongsi daiyun youjian guize" (Regulations for the transmission of mails by long-distance motor coaches) as attachment to Jiaotongbu zhiling di 5393 hao, Jiaotongbu buzhang Wang Boqun, 26 December 1929 in SHAC137.7520.

overburden the companies with light mails, the regulations set the ratio of mails delivered to the companies at 20% of light and 80% of heavy mails.

With the new regulations in place, the Directorate began rapidly expanding its relationship with the motor coach industry. Prior to 1929, the Post Office had contracts with motor coach companies on an average of about 1,200 miles of routes. After the passage of the new regulations, motor coach routes more than trebled to 11,543 miles. By 1932, there were roughly 44,000 miles of modern roads, and 5,900 coaches, with the Post Office using about 39% or 17,200 miles for the carriage of mails.⁸⁷ In 1936, there were 70,000 miles of roads with the Post Office using 48% or 34,000 miles of them.

Although the Directorate was eager to take “every advantage” of bus transport, it is surprising the Post Office utilized less than 50% of modern roads. Granted, motor coach companies did not operate on every single road, but it appears that resistance by postal commissioners to the high cost of motor coach transport is the underlying reason. With postal finances suffering in the early 1930s, local postmasters hesitated to use motor coach lines. In a study conducted on the relative costs of transportation for 5000 kilos of mail over 200 miles, buses proved the second most expensive mode of transportation. Trains could carry the 5000 kilos for \$9 yuan, steamers for \$63.75, buses for \$290, and carters for \$750.⁸⁸

Although postal commissioners wanted to use motor coaches to fill in the gaps left by other modern transportation systems, they would only deliver light mails to the companies, who were required by the regulation to carry them for free. The 1929 regulations dictated that bus companies would only have to carry 20% of light versus 80% of heavy mails, but in actual practice commissioners saddled the companies with a great number of light mails. In Shandong

⁸⁷ The figure of 5,900 coaches comes from Smith, *Motor Roads in China*.

⁸⁸ S/O No. 734, Jiangsu Postal Commissioner Tu Chia-hua to Director General Guo Xinsong, 28 May 1935 in SHAC137.2460-7.

and Shanxi the ratio was 90% light to 10% heavy mails while in Hubei, Jiangxi, Anhui, Zhejiang, Hebei, and Hunan the ratios were 50-50 or worse.⁸⁹ As a result of such practices many bus companies complained to the Post Office that they only received one yuan a month for carrying mails.

In 1935, the Directorate circularized the postal commissioners suggesting various revisions to the regulations on motor coaches. The Directorate suggested the possibility of lowering the rates for heavy mail and parcels, the application of uniform charges on all mail, or simply making minimum monthly payments to the companies in lieu of calculating rates.⁹⁰ The money saving measures suggested by the Directorate – the lowering of uniform rates on heavy mails – was offset by suggestions that would cost more money such as minimum payments. The postal commissioners reacted negatively to the Directorate's suggestions. To help the coach companies, the Directorate started remunerating the motor coach companies at a rate of two cents per kilo per 100 *li* on parcels, but still made them carry light mails for free.⁹¹

During the War of Resistance motor coaches continued to carry some mails, but with the dire economic climate, the failure of many of the companies, and loss of access to modern transportation networks on the east coast, the Directorate looked to other options. One of those options was the use of military vehicles for the carriage of mails. Starting in 1940, the Military Affairs Commission required all military vehicles to carry light mails free of charge.⁹² Another option was requiring all state- and publically-owned vehicles to carry light and heavy mails at a rate of one cent per kilogram per 100 *li*, but the Post Office was restricted to sending each

⁸⁹ Circular S/O No. 249, Director General Guo Xinsong, 15 September 1935 in SHAC137.6138.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Mail Carriage Contracts, 1940 in SHAC137.2527-9.

⁹² “Ge junshi jiguan ji budui jiaotong yunshu gongju daiyun youjian banfa” (Method of the carriage of mails by all military unit vehicles) as enclosure to Junshi weiyuanhui xunling youzi di 9692 hao, 6 October 1940 (Military Affairs Committee order, postal series no. 9692) in SHAC137(2).1141.

company 200 kilos a day.⁹³ The final option, and the one used most extensively during the war, was using postally-owned vehicles. The Post Office had owned its own trucks for intra-urban transportation since 1917, but it was not until the opening of the Chongqing to Chengdu highway in 1936 that the Directorate purchased 10 trucks to serve that route. By 1937, the Directorate had 40 trucks on the highways, but after losing access to eastern railways and steamer lines Director General Guo Xinsong shifted tactics and decided to invest in trucks. At the end of 1938 the Post Office had purchased 230 trucks, owned a total of 370 in 1940, and had a wartime high of 437 in 1942.⁹⁴

The Post Office's relationship with the motor coach companies was rocky. The Directorate's lack of a comprehensive rate policy until 1929 and the commissioners' active resistance thereafter did not make things easy. The light mails carried by motor coach companies, however, greatly increased the speed that letters and newspapers reached many people. Steamers and railroads could carry large amounts of mail over their routes, but their networks did not extend to many places. The road network, on the other hand, spider-webbed across the country reaching places otherwise reliant on walking postal couriers. While steamers and railroads might only carry mails on their routes once a day, motor coaches often made two or three trips per day over their routes. The increase in speed represented by the motor coach companies helped bring family greetings, news, and business information to individuals farther away from other modern transportation networks thus linking them with the growing sense of belonging to the nation.

⁹³ “Changtu qiche gongsi daiyun youjian guize” (Regulations for the transmission of mails by long-distance motor buses) and “Zhanshi guoying gongying gonglu jiguan yingye qiche daiyun youjian banfa” (Method for the carriage of mails by all national and public vehicles of road organs during wartime) as enclosures to Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling di 801 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Xu Jizhuang, 15 September 1943 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts circular no. 801, Director General Xu Jizhuang) in SHAC137.6614.

⁹⁴ *RWCPO, 1938-1943* (Chinese versions).

Turbulence:

Political Rivalries, Airmail Subsidies, and the National Postal Workers Strike of 1932

The inauguration of airmail service, the Directorate declared, launched a “new epoch in postal progress.”⁹⁵ The new epoch was a turbulent one. The relationship between the Post Office and the airlines was unique in that it became entangled in the development of the airline industry itself. The National Government decided to become directly involved in fostering the airline industry and so, to use Carter Goodrich’s phrase, engaged in “developmental construction.”⁹⁶ That is, the National Government created either wholly-owned or heavily subsidized joint-venture aviation companies ahead of demand hoping to decrease the financial risk to private investors. To assist the airlines, the National Government not only gave them generous airmail contracts, but also ordered the Post Office to directly subsidize them. In no other transportation industry did the Post Office play such an instrumental role.

The first efforts to establish viable airlines between 1919 and 1925 were all abortive. After a few experimental flights around the country by various foreigners, the Beijing government started plans to create an extensive air network across the country. The Beijing Aeronautical Department (北京航空署), under the directorship of General Ding Jin (丁錦), oversaw those plans and the first flights between Beijing and Ji’nan in 1919 and 1920.⁹⁷ In April 1921, the Directorate General of Posts signed an airmail contract with the Aeronautical Department for the carriage of mail over their routes. The Department would carry all airmail

⁹⁵ *RWCPO, 1929*, 1.

⁹⁶ Carter Goodrich, *Government Promotion of American Canals and Railroads, 1800 to 1890* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960).

⁹⁷ Tang Youshi, “Woguo di’yici hangyou shihang shibai de jingyou” (The failure of our country’s first airmail trials) *Wenshi ziliao xuanbian* (Beijing) (Selected literary and historical materials) 22 (1984): 198-200; reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, I: 139-140.

free of charge, but would retain four-fifths of the revenue on the sale of all airmail stamps. Given then current airmail stamp rates, the Post Office was remunerating the airline at approximately \$7.50 per kilo per 3,000 *li* (930 miles) on light mails and \$3.50 per kilo on heavy mails.⁹⁸ The Post Office abandoned the new service shortly thereafter because of irregular service. In the late summer, the Aeronautical Department started regular flights between Beijing and Beidaihe, a coastal resort town frequented by many Chinese and Western officials escaping from the Beijing heat. Until 1925, when warlord conflicts halted flights, the Department operated a successful airmail service between Beijing and Beidaihe for about a month each summer.⁹⁹ A few warlords attempted to operate airmail services in the mid-1920s, but all were abandoned because of a poor equipment, lack of trained pilots, and local military conflicts.¹⁰⁰ No airmail flights existed between 1925 and 1929.

Government officials in Beijing, and then Nanjing after 1927, continued discussing the possible creation of a national airline. In late 1928 and early 1929, Minister of Railroads Sun Ke (孫科), son of Nationalist Party founder Sun Zhongshan, was in talks with several American airline companies. Hearing rumors of these talks, the Directorate General of Posts prudently circularizing all postal commissioners on principles to be maintained during future contractual talks for airmail service. Lin Shi (林實), the acting head of the Post Office, ordered that all future airline contracts should follow the outline of the one signed with the Aeronautical

⁹⁸ “Memorandum of Agreement made this 26th day of April 1921 between the Directorate General of Posts at Beijing, on the one part, and the Aeronautical Department at Beijing, on the other part” as enclosure to Circular No. 500, Co-Director General Destelan, 28 June 1921 in SHAC137.2023-5.

⁹⁹ *RWCPO, 1922, 1923.*

¹⁰⁰ For example, Zhang Zuolin, the warlord of Manchuria, tried to open a line between Fengtian and Niuzhuang in 1924 and Hu Jingyi (胡京伊), the recently appointed governor of Henan and a Guominjun general, ordered several flights between Zhengzhou and Luoyang in late spring 1925 that offered to carry airmail.

Department in 1921. Every effort, however, should be made to lower the remuneration for the carriage of mails, Lin instructed.¹⁰¹

In May 1929, Nationalist Minister of Communications Wang Boqun (王伯群) established the Aeronautical Administration of the Shanghai-Chengdu Airline (滬蓉航空線管理處). Wang established the new airline company to compete with the soon to be established China National Aviation Corporation over the Shanghai-Nanjing route.¹⁰² The Post Office, under Wang's administration, immediately signed a contract with the Shanghai-Chengdu Administration, which agreed to carry light and heavy mails at \$3.75 and \$1.50 per kilo over 1,500 kilometers, respectively. Routes between 1,500-3,000 kilometers would receive double remuneration.¹⁰³ During the negotiations, the Directorate had succeeded in securing a very favorable contract paying the Administration roughly half what it gave for airmail carriage in the early 1920s. Undoubtedly, one of the factors in Wang's agreement to such favorable rates is his having "borrowed" 520,000 yuan from the Post Office to establish the airline.¹⁰⁴

The Directorate General of Posts looked forward to signing similarly favorable contracts with several new airlines under discussion, but events outside the Post Office's control would quickly reshape airmail contracts and the entire airline industry. While the Post office was negotiating with the Ministry of Communications about the airmail contract for the Shanghai-

¹⁰¹ The \$7.50 and \$3.50 figures represent four-fifths of the revenue generated from the sale of airmail stamps per kilo, depending on the category of mail matter. Circular No. 144, Officiating Director General Lin Shi, Officiating Co-Director General C. H. Shields, 18 February 1929 in SHAC137.288-3.

¹⁰² Jiaotongbu Hu-Rong hangkong xian guanlichu zanxing zhangcheng (Provisional regulations of the Shanghai-Chengdu Aviation Administration of the Ministry of Communications) in SHAC137.6038.

¹⁰³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju he Hu-Rong hangkong xian guanlichu youjian baoguo hetong (Airmail and parcel contract between the Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts and the Shanghai-Chengdu Aviation Administration), 7 June 1929 in SHAC137.7812.

¹⁰⁴ The Post Office made monthly deposits in various amounts to the Shanghai Communications Bank for the Shanghai-Chengdu Line Aeronautical Administration totaling 520,000 yuan. For an example of authorization to make such payments, see: Youzheng zongju wen Shanghai jiaotong yinhang (Letter from the Directorate General of Posts to the Bank of Communications, Shanghai), 12 June 1929; for the total amount paid to the airline, see: Jiaotongbu wen di284 hao (Letter no. 284 from the Ministry of Communications), 7 June 1930, both in SHAC137.7812.

Chengdu line, Minister of Railways Sun Ke was in the last stages of negotiations with Aviation Exploration Incorporated (航空發展公司), a subsidiary of Curtiss Aeroplane and Motor Company, concerning the establishment of a new airline to be called China National Aviation Corporation (中國航空公司) or CNAC. Sun Ke, like his father, believed modern transportation to be absolutely essential to the economic development of China. While Sun Zhongshan dreamt about a dense network of railroads crisscrossing China, Sun Ke believed airlines could also solve many of China's economic ills. He was so eager to create an airline that he exceeded his authority as minister of railways by signing an airmail contract with Curtiss.

During the negotiations to create CNAC, Curtiss representatives had demanded a steady source of income for the airline until passenger traffic increased. As in the United States, an airmail contract with the Post Office proved the simplest solution. In his excitement about the new airline, Sun ultimately signed an airmail contract wholly favorable to the Americans. The contract, signed on 20 April 1929 between Sun Ke and Curtiss representative Major William B. Robertson, was a "brilliant coup" for the Americans.¹⁰⁵ In addition to owning the exclusive rights to sell airplanes to CNAC, the Americans would be allowed to establish an independent corporation to operate CNAC, a liability shield to protect Curtiss-Wright's assets. This independent company, incorporated in the United States as China Airways Federal, Inc., USA (中國飛運公司) in August 1929, would fly CNAC airplanes and possess an airmail monopoly on three routes: (1) Shanghai to Hankou via Nanjing; (2) Nanjing to Beijing via Xuzhou, Ji'nan, and Tianjin; and (3) Hankou to Guangzhou via Changsha, plus a monopoly on all future mail routes emanating from any of the above named cities. Sun Ke's CNAC, for he was immediately named president of the airline, was responsible for constructing airfields at all the named cities

¹⁰⁵ W. Langhorne Bond, *Wings for an Embattled China*, edited by James E. Ellis (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, 2001), 23.

and at intervals of no more than 100 miles between them. Immediate operating funds were secured through a very generous airmail contract signed the same day the airline was created.¹⁰⁶ For each mile flown, Sun Ke guaranteed \$1.50 gold American dollars for small planes with a carrying capacity up to 800 lbs and \$2.25 gold dollars per mile for planes with a carrying capacity between 800-2000 lbs. The Americans promised to fly a minimum of 3,000 miles per day. To pay these costs, Sun Ke agreed to give the American operating company all airmail revenues and, since airmail revenue would not reach such sums in the foreseeable future, promissory notes from the Ministry of Finance for the difference in eight-year government bonds with an “unconditionally guaranteed” eight percent interest rate.¹⁰⁷

The public announcement of the airmail contract between Sun Ke and Aviation Exploration set off a firestorm of protest. Minister of Communications Wang Boqun “feeling that being ignored has caused him a great loss of face” refused to recognize the validity of the contract since Sun Ke, as minister of railways, had no authority to sign it.¹⁰⁸ Wang immediately began working behind the scenes to embarrass Sun Ke by ordering that no airmail actually be delivered to CNAC once it started operations in October. By December 1929, both the Ministries of Finance and Communications refused all payments to the airline.¹⁰⁹ Wang also forwarded protest letters about the airmail contract to the company and then had them published in the *Communications Gazette* to spur public protest.¹¹⁰ While Wang maneuvered politically, the Directorate General of Posts also lodged a strongly-worded protest with the National Government describing the disastrous financial results the airmail contract would have on the

¹⁰⁶ Air Mail Contract between the China National Aviation Corporation and Aviation Exploration Inc. in SHAC137.6038.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Bond, *Wings for an Embattled China*, 23.

¹⁰⁹ “Reports China Ends Airline Contract,” *New York Times*, 5 February 1930.

¹¹⁰ Jiaotongbu gonghan di 638 zhi Zhongguo hangkong gongsi (Ministry of Communications letter no. 638 to the China National Aviation Corporation), 4 June 1929 in *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) 47 (15 June 1929).

Post Office. The Directorate showed that actual losses to the Post Office resulting from the airmail service would amount to 3,679,000 yuan per year when the Post Office only showed profits of around 1,000,000 a year.¹¹¹

The Directorate's measured private response was quickly outdone by the postal workers' public protests. Once the airmail contract became public on 27 April, leaders in the Shanghai Postal Workers' Union (上海郵務工會) and Shanghai Postal Employees' Association (上海郵務職公會) joined forces to agitate against it. On 16 October, the Union and Association organized the Shanghai Postal Personnel Committee to Oppose the Sino-American Airmail Contract (上海郵務同人反對中美航空合同委員會). Shortly thereafter, the National Postal Workers' Union Preparatory Committee (全國郵務工會籌辦委員會) ordered all postal unions across the country to organize similar committees.¹¹² Liu Chenghan (劉承漢), known as the "Postal Legal Specialist," represented the Employees' Association on the anti-airmail contract committee. Under the committee's name, he authored a pamphlet outlining the postal workers' problems with the contract: (1) the airmail contract violated standing international airmail regulations by allowing a foreign company to operate an airmail service without being subject to the host country's laws; (2) the astronomical deficits created by the airmail contract turned the Post Office solely into an instrument for paying an American company; (3) the decision to grant monopolies on all future routes prohibited private Chinese companies from securing airmail contracts; and (4) allowing Americans to operate airfields and hangers was a threat to national security.¹¹³ Unbeknownst to Sun Ke, the airmail contract did violate international airmail agreements. In March 1919, under the auspices of the Paris Peace Conference, an Aeronautical

¹¹¹ Translation of Proposed Cheng to the Ministry, undated in SHAC137.6038.

¹¹² *Zhonghua minguo yougong yundong liushi nian* (Sixty years of the postal workers movement in the Republic of China) (Taipei: Taiwan Quanguo youlian hui, 1990), 20.

¹¹³ Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, I: 212-13.

Commission agreed on the Convention Relating to the Regulation of Aerial Navigation, which gave all contracting parties “complete and exclusive sovereignty over the air space above its territory.”¹¹⁴ Although Wellington Koo signed the Convention as part of the Paris Peace Treaties, the treaties were never ratified by the Beijing government because of the outbreak of the May Fourth Movement. Since China was not a convention member, any airline seeking to operate within Chinese airspace had to sign a separate treaty – Sun Ke and the Americans had overlooked this requirement. With public pressure and legal troubles mounting, and having been outmaneuvered by Wang Boqun, Sun Ke folded. On 5 December 1929, Sun Ke resigned as president of the China National Aviation Corporation.

The National Government immediately appointed Wang Boqun as president of CNAC and he moved to nullify the contract. Having been insulted by the original American negotiating team and having bested Sun in their political rivalry Wang convened a meeting of the Board of Directors of CNAC on 16 January 1930. He also invited representatives of the Ministries of Communications, Finance, Foreign Affairs, and Military Affairs to build consensus within the government. The meeting outlined various reasons for canceling the contract, including huge deficits to the Post Office, threats to national defense, American domination of the most lucrative airmail routes, and the lack of tax revenues from the airline.¹¹⁵ After the meeting, Wang and the board of directors petitioned the National Government recommending the cancellation of the airmail contract, which it did at the end of January.

Wang Boqun wanted a new airmail contract. He declined, however, to work with any of the other original negotiating team sent by Curtiss-Wright. Eventually, Max A. Polin and W.

¹¹⁴ Convention Relating to the Regulation of Aerial Navigation, signed at Paris, October 13, 1919 at http://www.spacelaw.olemiss.edu/library/aviation/IntAgr/multilateral/1919_Paris_convention.pdf

¹¹⁵ Zhang Xinzhen, *Zhongguo xiandai jiaotong shi* (History of modern Chinese communications) (1931, reprint: Taipei: Taiwan xuesheng shiju, 1976), 358-60.

Langhorne Bond traveled to China to start negotiations. Bond, who recognized the “situation had been badly bungled,” advocated a “cordial” relationship with Wang Boqun.¹¹⁶ After extensive negotiations, a series of contracts were signed on 8 July 1930 creating a new airline.¹¹⁷ Under the new contract, the old CNAC merged with China Airways Federal and the Shanghai-Chengdu Line of the Ministry of Communication to form a new China National Aviation Corporation. Whereas the Americans originally controlled 60% of the stock of CNAC, the new company’s stock was divided between the Ministry of Communications with 55% and the Americans with the remainder. The Minister of Communications would almost always be the president of the company and many high-ranking postal officials sat on the board.¹¹⁸ The company kept its monopoly on the Shanghai-Chengdu, Nanjing-Beijing, and Shanghai-Guangzhou routes and received, in the new airmail contract, all actual revenues from the sale of airmail stamps.¹¹⁹ To ensure a reasonable revenue, the Directorate issued a new circular on airmail procedures introducing an “airmail zone” (飛航區域) system. In this system, the Post Office charged customers fifteen cents per twenty grams per 1,000 kilometers for airmail.¹²⁰ The new contract had been modeled on a similar one recently signed with the Eurasia Aviation Corporation.

In the middle of 1928, the German airline company Deutsche Lufthansa (德國漢沙公司) despatched Wilhelm Schmidt to China to establish an international airmail route between China

¹¹⁶ Bond, *Wings for an Embattled China*, 23.

¹¹⁷ Contract between Ministry of Communications, National Government, Republic of China, and China Airways Federal Inc. USA at <http://www.cnac.org/history02.htm>

¹¹⁸ Ministers of Communications who also served as president of CNAC were: Wang Boqun (Aug. 1930-May 1932), Chen Mingshu (May 1932-December 1932), Zhu Jiahua (December 1932-May 1933), Yu Feipeng (December 1935-December 1941), and Yu Dawei (April 1945-1949).

¹¹⁹ Liu Chenghan and Xue Pinwen, *Zhongguo youzi kao* (A study of Chinese postal tariff rates) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1957), 187.

¹²⁰ Circular Memo No. 481, Director General Wei Yifu and Co-Director General Tollefsen, 7 July 1930 in SHAC137.288-41.

and Germany.¹²¹ Political instability in the late 1920s kept Schmidt from securing a contract, but plans and negotiations started moving forward in September 1929 with several meetings between Schmidt and representatives from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Communications. On 21 February 1930, Lufthansa and the Ministry of Communications agreed to the creation of the Eurasia Aviation Corporation (歐亞郵運股份有限公司).¹²² Under the contract, Eurasia would be a Sino-foreign joint venture with the Chinese owning two-thirds of the stock as well as holding two-thirds of the board positions.¹²³ The airline received a monopoly on three routes: (1) Shanghai to Manzhouli via Nanjing, Tianjin, and Beijing; Shanghai to Urga via Nanjing, Tianjin, Beijing, and Pailingmiao; Shanghai/Nanjing to Soviet Russia via Zhengzhou, Xi'an, Lanzhou, Hami (Kumul), and Dihua (Ürümqi). As it turned out, Eurasia would never make an air connection between China and Germany, but it did rapidly expand air services to western China. By the end of 1931, CNAC and Eurasia flew a combined 2,709 kilometers of airmail routes; by 1932, the that distance had extended to 4,746 kilometers (Table A.7 in Appendix).¹²⁴

Changes in the rates of remuneration for airmail carriage occasioned little dispute after mid-1930. The airmail contracts signed between the Directorate, CNAC, and Eurasia in 1930 guaranteed the payment of all receipts from the sale of airmail stamps to the airlines (Table A.8

¹²¹ For a general introduction to Luft Hansa and the Eurasia Aviation Corporation, see: Karl Morgenstern and Dietmar Plath, *Eurasia Aviation Corporation: Junkers and Lufthansa in China, 1931-1943* (München: GeraMond, 2006).

¹²² Zhong-De heban Ou-Ya hangkong youyun gufen youxian gongsi zhangcheng (xiuzheng) (Regulations pertaining to the joint Sino-German Eurasia Aviation Corporation [revised]) in Chen Gang, comp., “Youguan chouban Ou-Ya hangkong gongsi de yizu shiliao” (Some historical materials related to the preparations for establishing the Eurasia Aviation Corporation) *Minguo dang'an* “Republican Archives” 4 (1994), 8-10.

¹²³ There was considerable overlap between the Board of Directors of the Eurasia Aviation Corporation and the Directorate General of Post and Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks. Wei Yifu was Chairman of the Board from May 1930-July 1933 and Director General of Posts from 13 May 1930-2 February 1931. Also on the Board of Directors were: Liu Shufan (May 1930-May 1932) while he was D.G. of P.R. & S.B.; Lin Shi (May 1930-July 1933) while he was Acting D.G. of Posts; Huang Naishu (May 1932-July 1933) while he was D.G. of Posts from 23 May 1932-4 December 1933; Tang Baoshu (March 1934-July 1937) while he was Acting D.G. of Posts from December 1933-16 May 1934 and D.G. of P.R. & S.B. from 9 January 1933-14 February 1935.

¹²⁴ *RWCPO, 1931, 1932.*

in Appendix).¹²⁵ This style of remuneration, however, only lasted a year until the Directorate and airlines agreed to a standard fee based on weight-distance. Starting from mid-1931, the Post Office paid the airlines of \$7.50 (Mex.) per kilo per airmail zone of 1,000 kilometers.¹²⁶ Apparently, this new rate was still considered too low by the airlines for on 1 February 1933, the Post Office raised the rate to \$12.50 (Mex.) per kilo per 1,000 kilometers while also raising the airmail postage rate, to help pay for the increase, from \$0.15 to \$0.25.¹²⁷

While remuneration to the airlines was generally kept private, the public nature of state subsidies to the airlines provoked intense criticism by postal workers. In 1929, the Ministry ordered the Directorate to pay yearly subsidies to “aviation enterprises.” Initially, subsidies only went to the Shanghai-Chengdu Line, which was given \$630,721.44 spread over late 1929 and early 1930. CNAC, the frequent target of criticism, wrote Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua, is “not receiving from the Government anything in the nature of a subsidy.”¹²⁸ Zhu was lying. CNAC received two million Mex. between 1930 and 1935. In 1933, when the American side of CNAC sold its interest to Pan-American Airlines, the contract between Pan-American and CNAC expressly stipulated a monthly subsidy of \$3,500 from the Post Office to their Shanghai-Beiping line.¹²⁹ During the early 1930s, Eurasia also received subsidies totaling three

¹²⁵ I have been unable to locate original versions of these two airmail contracts as have other scholars. The most authoritative statement comes from Liu Chenghan, a high-ranking postal official in the early 1930s, who states that the revenue from the sale of all airmail stamps went to the airlines in lieu of payment per kilometer carried. Liu and Xue, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 187.

¹²⁶ S/O No. 345, Director General of Posts Tang Baoshu to Guangzhou Postal Commissioner E. Nordstrom, 7 May 1934 in SHAC137.6067.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*; Liu and Xue, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 187. In their text, Liu and Xue record rates of \$13.20 National Currency for the period mid-1931 to 1 Feb. 1933 and \$22.00 National Currency after February 1933. Apparently, the Post Office implicitly used “Mex” – the national silver dollar – rather than yuan, or paper currency, in paying carriage contracts to the airlines. The exchange rate between Mex. and national paper currency fluctuated widely, but was generally 1: 2.

¹²⁸ Chia-hua Chu, *China's Postal and Other Communications Services*, 214.

¹²⁹ William M. Leary, *The Dragon's Wings: The China National Aviation Corporation and the Development of Commercial Aviation in China* (Athens, University of Georgia Press, 1976), 79.

million Mex.¹³⁰ The Director General of Posts put it bluntly in 1934, “all the established [air]lines carry...mails and are running at a financial loss covered by annual subsidies of the Ministry of Communications.”¹³¹

*Table 5: Postal Subsidies to Aviation Enterprises*¹³²

1929	\$630,721.44
January-June 1930	No information available
July 1930-June 1931	No information available
July 1931-June 1932	\$1,222,451.56
July 1932-June 1933	\$572,834.00
July 1933-June 1934	\$745,901.93
July 1934-June 1935	\$1,368,690.45
July 1935-June 1936	\$1,609,253.96
July 1936-June 1937	\$1,408,380.35
July 1937-June 1938	\$529,193.72
July 1938-December 1938	No information available
1939	\$273,893.33
1940	\$537,289.30
1941	\$8,599.46

In a different context, Zhu Jiahua admitted the subsidies, but claimed they were “probably the lowest in the world” at an average of \$0.30 yuan per mile in 1933 compared to the United States government’s subsidies to its airlines of between US\$2.00-2.50 per mile, which was roughly the equivalent of \$7.00-8.50 yuan.¹³³ Zhu’s efforts to either deny or defend the subsidies on the grounds of their cheapness were clearly an attempt to justify them to the tens of thousands of postal workers around the country.

Postal subsidies to the airlines started during the most difficult financial times the Directorate General of Posts had ever faced. Rising costs and over-extension in the mid-1920s led to stringent service economy, but the savings effected were lost almost immediately because

¹³⁰ The figures for the subsidies to CNAC and Eurasia come from: Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, III: 185-86.

¹³¹ Draft Letter to G. Herring, Chief Superintendent, Air Mail Service, Post Office Department, Canada by Huang Naishu, August 1934 in SHAC137.6208-3.

¹³² The figures for total postal subsidies to the airlines come from: for 1929: Jiaotongbu wen di 284 hao (Letter from the Ministry of Communications), 7 June 1930 (Petition from Directorate to Ministry); for 1931/32, 1932/33, and 1933/34: Chu, *China’s Postal*, 36; for 1934/35-1941: the appropriate *RWCPO*.

¹³³ Chu, *China’s Postal*, 214.

of the suspensions of service and occupation of many postal districts by the National Revolutionary Army during the Northern Expedition (1926-1928). Just as the political situation began to settle in mid-1928, China started experiencing the effects of the Great Depression. In the fall of 1931, postal finances received another blow when all revenue from the Northeast was lost following the Mukden Incident. At this very moment, when the Post Office showed a deficit of 5.9 million for July 1931-June 1932 and 4.2 million for July 1932-June 1933, the Ministry ordered the Post Office to continue paying subsidies to the airlines.

Postal workers, considered aristocrats of the labor movement, understood the long-term financial implications of such subsidies on their livelihoods – they would soon be eating out of a “begging bowl.”¹³⁴ After a successful strike by Shanghai postal workers for increased wages in 1925, their union underwent deradicalization during the anti-communist White Terror of 1927 and a “yellowing” when pro-Nationalist labor leaders took it over during the Party Purification Campaigns of 1928-1930. Despite the deradicalization, Shanghai postal workers struck again in 1928 defying state law forbidding strikes by government workers. Having achieved another small “victory” in 1928, the postal workers movement began focusing on the general postal economy understanding its health as essential to their livelihoods.

In 1930, Director General of Posts Liu Shufan decided to move the savings bank and domestic remittance businesses to a new Directorate General of Postal Remittance and Savings Banks (D.G. of P.R. & S.B.). It was clear to postal workers that Liu was siphoning off some of the most lucrative postal businesses for his new Directorate. In response, they launched the so-called “protect the postal foundation” movement (鞏固郵基運動), which initially coincided with renewed demands for increased compensation to offset the inflationary effects of the Great

¹³⁴ You Zhi, “Huashuo youju ‘tiefanwan’” (Tales of the ‘iron rice bowl’ of the post office) *Wuhan wenshi ziliao* 29 (1987): 111-117; Fan Qing, “Fubai de Guomindang Zhonghua youzheng” (The corrupt Nationalist Party Chinese Post Office) *Wenshi jinghua* (literature and history elite) 3 (2003), 60.

Depression. The Ministry and Directorate refused all requests for additional compensation to the workers, but continued to pay the airline subsidies. By May 1932, the protect the postal foundation movement reached a crescendo when its organizing committee issued four demands to the Ministry of Communications: (1) abolish the D.G. of P.R. & S.B.; (2) cease the payment of all airline subsidies; (3) protect the postal personnel system; and (4) use postal income only to support the Post Office. The organizing committee despatched representatives to Nanjing, but they were rebuffed by Ministry officials. On 22 May 1932, the Shanghai Postal Workers' Union and Shanghai Postal Employees' Association both declared a strike. In the days following, postal workers struck in dozens of cities.¹³⁵

The postal workers' strike lasted five days and paralyzed communications throughout the country. The magnitude of the strike and the unusual demands by the workers called for a strong response by the government. Qian Chunqi, the new director general of posts, and Long Dawen, postal secretary in the Ministry of Communications, were both immediately fired and detained for "instigating" the strike. To negotiate with the workers, the government assembled a team of government and civic leaders, including Minister of Industry Chen Gongbo, Mayor of Shanghai Wu Tiecheng, business leader Yu Xiaqing, newspaper editor Shi Liangcai, chair of the Shanghai Merchants' Association Wang Xiaolai, leader of the Green Gang Du Yuesheng, and banking leaders Zhang Jia'ao (Chang Kia-ngau) and Ling Hongxun. After several sessions, the government negotiating team accepted the workers' demands "in principle" and agreed to the formation of a special Postal Economic System Research Committee to conduct more intensive research into postal economics. Chen Gongbo and Wu Tiecheng promised to submit the

¹³⁵ The sources about the 1932 national postal workers' strike are numerous. The best at situating it within the larger postal workers movement is: *Shanghai youzheng zhigong yundong shi* (The history of the Shanghai postal service labor movement) (Beijing: Zhonggongdang shi chubanshe, 1999). In English, see: *North China Herald*, 24 & 31 May 1932.

committee's findings to the government for ratification. The strike ended on 27 May. Shortly thereafter, Minister of Communications Chen Mingshu (陳銘樞) was also cashiered not only for contributing to the strike, the immediate cause, but also for embarrassing Jiang Jieshi with his valiant defense of Shanghai as the overall commander of the 19th Route Army during the Shanghai War of January 1932. After the 1932 strike, the airline issue faded from national attention and ceased to be a source of agitation for postal workers.¹³⁶

The most significant developments in postal relations with the airlines over the next several years were the inauguration of a new airline, continued adjustments in remuneration payments, and the elimination of the airmail zone system. Few of CNAC's flights were to South China leading Chen Jitang (陳濟棠) and the Southwest Political Council – rivals of the National Government – to work with local merchants to create the Southwest Aviation Corporation in 1933. Southwest's plans were to inaugurate five routes linking the southern provinces. The Directorate signed an airmail contract with the company in May 1934. Southwest Aviation representatives indicated they did not expect significant income from airmail allowing the Directorate to sign an advantageous contract with the firm. The new rates of remuneration to Southwest were \$21 national currency per kilo for one flight zone, \$38 for two, \$56 for three, and \$73 for four zones.¹³⁷

Shortly after signing the contract with Southwest, the Directorate unified remuneration schedules with the other airlines and continued pushing for lower payments. Director General

¹³⁶ Postal subsidies continued to elicit some complaints by postal workers, but had none of the virulence of 1932. For examples of post-1932 complaints about subsidies, see: Zheng Mengke, "Youzheng jingji zhi wei ji qi bujiu banfa" (The crisis in the postal economy and its remedy) *Jiangxi yougong* (Jiangxi postal workers) 1: 1 (November 1932): 5-8; "'Zongwei cizhi' yundong zhi yulun yiban" (Some public opinion on the 'General Committee resignation' movement) *Shanghai yougong* (Shanghai postal workers) 7: 3-4 (October 20, 1934): 9-15; *Zhonghua yougong* (The Chinese postal worker) 2: 1-3 (1936), 7.

¹³⁷ Letter to Director General of Posts Huang Naishu, 5 October 1933; "Provisional Air Mail Agreement between Guangdong Postal District Head Office and Southwestern Aviation Corporation" as attachment to S/O No. 345, Director General of Posts Tang Baoshu to Guangzhou Postal Commissioner E. Nordstrom, 7 May 1934 in SHAC137.6067.

Guo Xinsong ordered the promulgation of the “Regulations for Handling Airmail,” applicable to all airlines with mail contracts, requiring them to agree to the same low rates as Southwest.¹³⁸

Two years later, with CNAC showing its first profits, the Directorate engaged in a year-long negotiation to effectively lower airmail carriage fees by eliminating the airmail zone system.

Under the new system, the entire country would constitute a single airmail zone and each airline would receive \$20.50 national currency per each kilo regardless of distance.¹³⁹ This rate remained in effect until late in the War of Resistance when the inflationary spiral started to push airmail postage and rates of remuneration to the airlines higher and higher.¹⁴⁰

Conclusion

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, China underwent a series of profound revolutions. The revolutions that immediately come to mind, Republicanism in 1911, Nationalism in 1927, and Communism in 1949, while significant political eruptions pale in comparison to long-term revolutionary processes that survived and continue to survive changes in government. The creation of a modern state, the construction of a nation of citizens, the dissemination of new forms of information, and the effects of modern transportation all wrought more profound changes than any revolutionary ideology.

¹³⁸ “Hangkong youwu banli guize” (Regulations for handling airmail) as attachment to Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 79 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts), 6 August 1934 in SHAC137.288-2.

¹³⁹ Hangzhengsi zhi zhongguo hangkong gongsi gongwen (Letter from the Secretary of Aviation to CNAC), 25 January 1936; Zhongguo hangkong gongsi gonghan di 33 hao (China National Aviation Corporation, letter no. 33, 8 February 1936; Circular Memo No. 1777 (Translation); Air Mails: Abolition of ‘Flight Zone’ System, notifying, Director General Guo Xinsong, 21 February 1936. The new lower rates did not take effect until 1 January 1937. Circular Memo No. 2059, Director General Guo Xinsong, 11 March 1937, all in SHAC137.6240.

¹⁴⁰ By the end of 1946, just prior to the devastating hyperinflation of 1947-48, the Post Office was charging \$150 yuan per airmail letter and paying \$3000 national currency per ton to the airlines. Liu and Xue, *Zhongguo youzi kao*, 189.

The Post Office stood at the epicenter of the communications and transportation revolutions that rocked China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to the widespread use of the commercialized telegraph, transportation and communications were strictly the same thing. The Chinese word *jiaotong* (交通), which can be translated as both communications and transportation, expresses these overlapping meanings. The significance of this definitional overlap is that communications only travelled as fast as the mode of transportation conveying it. Even after the advent of the telegraph, radio, and other electric forms of communication, most information reached its destination in Republican China at the speed of the Post Office. The Post Office used its power to coordinate and create a *jiaotong* infrastructure by fusing together the different transportation systems – steamships, railroads, motor coaches, and airlines – with its own courier routes to create a network consisting of some 360,000 miles linking together virtually every village across the country.¹⁴¹ The postal network also reshaped the experience of physical space and time by controlling the flow and speed of goods and information.

The Post Office played this fundamental role in this transportation revolution by entering into contractual relations with the transportation companies. Through mail contracts or direct subsidies, the Post Office provided needed income to the young industries thereby creating facilities for transmitting information cheaply, reliably, and on a regular basis throughout the country and to the world.¹⁴² The relationships between the Post Office and modern transportation industries, however, was not without its problems. Although the Post Office would have preferred business relationships built strictly on an economic foundation, external

¹⁴¹ In accordance with the 1935 rural free delivery program, the Post Office would deliver to every village in the country.

¹⁴² Although the Post Office and transportation companies often battled over remuneration, postal payments to the modern transportation companies remained low relative to other countries.

considerations or outside interventions often foiled the Post Office's plans. Hart's need to establish a postal monopoly, the problem of space in mail compartments, postal commissioners' resistance to motor coaches, and workers' agitation over airmail subsidies were just some of the factors influencing the smooth working of contractual relations between the Post Office and modern transportation industry.

As a result of the Post Office's information infrastructure, the Chinese nation had never before been so closely connected. Nanjing officials woke up to newspapers from across the country, anarchists in Guangzhou opened letters in Esperanto from abroad, students in Yichang got the latest textbooks from Shanghai, Beijing businessmen unwrapped parcels of silk from Chengdu, Wuhan housewives read the latest scandal-filled tabloids, missionaries received moral-improving religious tracts, Chengdu merchants skimmed middle-brow pictorial magazines, and educated peasants read the latest practical-minded agricultural manuals – all at miraculous speeds through modern transportation networks coordinated by the Post Office. Not to be overlooked either, the Post Office's information infrastructure linked China to the wider world – missionary tracts were delivered to Gansu from churches in the Middle East, Chinese studying at Harvard sent the *Lampoon* to friends in Fujian, and San Francisco's most respected Chinese-language newspaper *Chung Sai Yat Po* reprinted the latest political news from China when they received their copy of *Shenbao* from Shanghai. The Post Office also fostered the spread of “universalized education” to far inland areas to incorporate residents in those areas into the nation.¹⁴³ In 1934, the Post Office introduced several new services whereby local post offices would sell subscriptions to coastal newspapers and magazines across the country to make them

¹⁴³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1382 hao, youzheng zongju Guo Xinsong, 28 August 1934 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts circular memo no. 1382, Director General Guo Xinsong).

“available to the most distant purchaser.”¹⁴⁴ The Post Office also published several book catalogs of titles purchasable at any post office in the country.¹⁴⁵ In the first catalogue of books available for sale at the Post Office, there were 5,300 individual titles and 8,000 in the second edition thus making the Post Office the largest “bookstore” in the entire country.¹⁴⁶ These unusual services, wrote Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua, were “in the interest of culture and popular education in the frontier provinces.”¹⁴⁷

On any given day, the publications flowing through postal channels represented ideas old and new, foreign and domestic melded into a cultural milieu accessible to any and all at discounted prices postage rates.¹⁴⁸ The millions of periodicals, representing political, social, economic persuasions of all types undoubtedly facilitated the creation of numerous reading publics in Republican China – publics that engaged in heated debates, expressed public sympathy for others, criticized their government, and discussed the latest world events – but that did so with a sense of themselves as a single nation of citizens of the Chinese Republic. As Minister Zhu Jiahua wrote of the effects of the Post Office in 1937, “A community of feeling has

¹⁴⁴ Youju daigou shuji zhangcheng (Regulations Governing the Purchase of Books through the Post Office) as attachment to circular memo no. 1382 in SHAC137.7553-3; “Youju dai ding kanwu banshi xize” (Detailed rules on handling subscriptions at the Post Office) *Faling zhoukan* (Statutes weekly) 199 (April 24, 1934), 4-5; Chia-hua Chu, *China's Postal and Other Communications Services* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), 64.

¹⁴⁵ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, *Youju daigou shuji mulu, di'yi qi* (Catalogue of books purchasable through the Post Office) 2 vols (Shanghai: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, zhu Hu gongyingchu, 1935); *Youju daigou shuji mulu, diyi qi xubian* (Catalogue of books purchasable through the Post Office, first issue, supplement) 2 vols (Shanghai: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, zhu Hu gongyingchu, 1935); *You ju daigou shuji mulu: Di'er qi, di'yi hao* (Catalogue of books purchasable through the Post Office, second issue, volume one) (Shanghai: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, zhu Hu gongyingchu, 1935).

¹⁴⁶ Despite the Post Office's hopes, these services were only moderately successful. During the first year, the Post Office sold 1,300 books and took 4,500 magazine and 500 newspaper subscriptions. In its second year, sales improved to 5,300 books, 7,000 magazine, and 1,100 newspaper subscriptions, but then the onset of the War of Resistance ruined this particular service. Circular Memo. No. 1500 (Translation): Statistical Returns for Books and Other Publications Ordered on Behalf of the Public, Calling For. Director General Guo Xinsong, 19 February 1935 in SHAC137.160; *RWCPO, 1935-36*.

¹⁴⁷ Chia-hua Chu, *The Ministry of Communications in 1934* (Shanghai: China United Press, 1935), 3, 6.

¹⁴⁸ As discussed in Chapter 3, the Post Office subsidized the postage rates of all print matter.

developed between one province and another which was unknown a decade earlier, while the National Government has gained in prestige both at home and abroad.”¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Chu, *China's Postal*, 1-2.

Chapter 5

Policing the Public Sphere: State Censorship and the Chinese Post Office

At the center of nation-building are often shared discourses ranging over topics such as ethnic identity, customs, racial purity, and citizenship all oriented towards defining who belongs to the nation. In the modern world, these discourses are expressed within the realm between the state and civil society known as the public sphere.¹ Scholars often overemphasize the public's role in creating and shaping the public sphere thus obscuring the state's own vital contributions to its development.² As Habermas later wrote, "The structural transformation of the public sphere is embedded in the transformation of state and economy."³ As the Chinese state structurally transformed itself into a modern, centralizing state in the late nineteenth century, it began to redefine legitimate public speech and carry out new forms of censorship within the burgeoning public sphere.⁴ In this chapter, we shall consider how fundamental changes in the late Qing, warlord, and Republican-era states, but also state responses to new forms of media, contributed to the creation and institutionalization of censorship through the Post Office.

Censorship encompasses a number of state or public acts placing limits on personal or group expression on moral, political, religious, or other grounds. In the historiography of modern China, scholars have broadened the notion of censorship to include the murder, torture,

¹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989).

² e.g. William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); Mary B. Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986); David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

³ Jurgen Habermas, "Further Reflections on the Public Sphere," in *Habermas and the Public Sphere*, edited by Craig Calhoun and translated by Thomas Burger (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 430.

⁴ Some scholars, often within the context of discussions of state-sponsored "national" culture, give the state a significant role in the public sphere. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "Licensing Leisure: The Chinese Nationalists' Attempt to Regulate Shanghai, 1927-1949," *Journal of Asian Studies* 54: 1 (1995): 19-42; Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

or arrest of journalists and writers, the co-optation or bribing of editors, the burning of books or movies by the public, and the closure of newspapers and/or the destruction of their presses.

More prevalent than violent forms were versions of institutionalized, administrative censorship encompassing prepublication inspection, banned book lists, the expurgation of written material, and postal censorship of all forms of printed and private mail matter.

Scholars of late Qing and Republican China such as Lin Yutang and Lee-hsia Hsu Ting portray late Qing and Republican censorship as heavy and light, continual and sporadic revealing an underlying ambiguity about the definition of censorship and the ability of the state to carry it out effectively.⁵ Later scholars such as Lloyd E. Eastman argued, “the hand of the censor reached...all publications that diverged ideologically from, or were critical of, the leadership in Nanjing,” but also admitted that Nationalist censorship was “relatively light-handed and sporadic.”⁶ Stephen R. MacKinnon, echoing Eastman, states that with the rise of revolutionary nationalists came “heavy-handed censorship,” but it “was inconsistent and highly idiosyncratic.”⁷ The general view of the idiosyncratic nature of censorship in the Republican era is an effect of the types of sources previously available to scholars. The secretive nature of censoring institutions and the lack of relevant primary sources has forced historians to rely on evidence from censored authors or editors who naturally decried the injustice of state censorship. With newly available archival evidence from censoring institutions like the Post Office, we are able to now see that censorship of the written word during the late Qing and Republican era was both light-handed and consistent.

⁵ Lin Yutang, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China* (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, 1936); Lee-hsia Hsu Ting, *Government Control of the Press in China, 1900-1949* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard East Asian Studies, 1974), 164.

⁶ Lloyd E. Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution: China under Nationalist Rule, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), 25.

⁷ Stephen R. MacKinnon, “Toward a History of the Chinese Press in the Republican Period,” *Modern China* 23: 1 (January 1997), 4, 5, 7.

In studying state censorship two questions constantly arise – what forms of expression does the state deem outside the realm of legitimate public discourse and how does it carry out its censorship? The ever-shifting answers to these questions reveal fundamental changes in the nature of the state, its interaction with the public sphere, the organization of the bureaucracy, and state views on the boundaries of acceptable public utterance. From the late Qing to the National Government's evacuation to Taiwan, state-sponsored censorship was transformed from a general desire to maintain social stability by ridding the country of rebel elements through violent, uninstitutionalized and unsystematic means to more ideologically-informed checks on seditious, subversive, and traitorous elements through the placement of institutional controls on the circulation of information in the Post Office.

The shift from violent acts of suppression to institutional controls on circulation followed changing government definitions of seditious discourse and the advent of modern bureaucratic institutions able to control their dissemination. Beneath both were fundamental transformations in the governing ideology of the Chinese state itself. In late imperial China, the paternalistic, Confucianist state usually viewed only anti-dynastic utterances as aberrations to be met with violent suppression. Over the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, civil society began expressing itself more ideologically and forcefully in the public sphere through the development of anti-Manchu rhetoric in privately-owned, modern-style newspapers. Such modern forms of media were generally immune to individual acts of violence, but also became increasingly dependent on a state-controlled postal network for dissemination. This dependence provided the late Qing and early Republican governments with an expedient institutional means to control the spread of anti-Manchu sentiment or other illegitimate public discourses. By the 1920s and 1930s, under the National Government, violent suppression of seditious elements still took place

on a very small scale, but the centralized, bureaucratic nature of the central state meant that most censored publications simply lost their postal privileges.

Studying postal censorship offers a number of advantages vis-à-vis other censorship organs. First, it was the only institution to perform censoring functions from the late Qing through the Republican period allowing us to see both important breaks and long-term continuities in government policies and practices. Second, as a “national” rather than “central government” institution, the Post Office after 1911 was the only administrative entity carrying out censorship in territories outside the control of the Beijing or Nanjing governments. Third, as a institution specializing in the delivery of mail matter, only the Post Office had the ability to refuse postal transmission to both Chinese- and foreign-language books and periodicals published in the various international settlements and concessions that were otherwise immune from Chinese laws because of extraterritoriality. Finally, the adherence of the Post Office to the conventions of the Universal Postal Union gave the Chinese government the internationally-recognized right to censor publications published abroad before they entered the country.

Postal censorship was not unique to China. Shortly after most European countries introduced modern postal services, and introduced the idea of a state postal monopoly, they began using this new institution for espionage and censorship purposes. In the seventeenth century, the British “Secret Office,” the French *Cabinet Noir*, and the Hapsburg *Geheime Kabinets-Kanzlei* all started secretly opening mails and prohibiting the circulation of opposition newspapers.⁸ In the nineteenth century, many non-European countries established post offices as

⁸ Kenneth Ellis, *The Post Office in the Eighteenth Century: A Study in Administrative History* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 60-77; Karl de Leeuw, “The Black Chamber in the Dutch Republic during the War of the Spanish Succession and its Aftermath, 1707-1715,” *Historical Journal* 42: 1 (1999): 136-155; Peter Michalove and David Skipton, *Postal Censorship in Imperial Russia*, 2 vols. (Urbana, IL: J. H. Otten, 1989).

part of their modernization programs that carried out censorship.⁹ In the United States, postal censorship exploded after the Civil War with the passage of several legislative acts limiting the circulation of mails on the grounds of libel, obscenity, and espionage.¹⁰ Postal censorship itself was thus not particular to China, but the forces producing it and the forms it took were unique.

The Origins of Postal Censorship in the Qing Empire

Following the Japanese defeat of Qing forces in 1895, reformers and revolutionaries both at home and abroad began extensive anti-Manchu propaganda activities through newspapers and magazines. Fleeing abroad, many of the leading figures of the failed Hundred Days Reforms (1898) like Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao formed transnational reformist or revolutionary anti-Manchu organizations that published newspapers such as Liang's Yokohama-based *Journal of Pure Criticism* (清議報) (1898-1901). Domestically, young intellectuals like Zhang Binglin, Zou Rong, and Cai Yuanpei became increasingly radicalized and turned to more extreme, anti-Manchu rhetoric in their publications.¹¹ To counter the influence of the newspapers, and stop their circulation, the Qing government approached the Post Office in 1901 asking that mail be censored to "detect conspirators and break up riotous combinations."¹²

The Qing government's first request for postal censorship implied the inadequacy of old methods of suppression to deal with newer media forms like newspapers and transnational

⁹ Stanford J. Shaw and Ezel Kural Shaw, *History of the Ottoman Empire and Modern Turkey: Reform, Revolution, and Republic*, 2 vols. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1977), II: 229.

¹⁰ Jon Bekken, "'These Great and Dangerous Powers': Postal Censorship of the Press," *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 15: 1 (Winter 1991): 55-71; Jay A. Gertzman, "Postal Service Guardians of Public Morals and Erotica Mail Order Dealers of the Thirties: A Study in Administrative Authority in the United States," *Publishing History* 37 (1995): 83-110; Alex Nagy, "Word Wars at Home: U.S. Response to World War II Propaganda," *Journalism Quarterly* 67: 1 (1990): 207-213; Wayne E. Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

¹¹ On these radicals, see: Mary Backus Rankin, *Early Chinese Revolutionaries: Radical Intellectuals in Shanghai and Chekiang, 1902-1911* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 50-61.

¹² Robert Hart, I. G.'s Circulars, Circular No. 971, Postal No. 51, 29 June 1901 in SHAC137.2023-1.

revolutionary organizations. Inspector General of Posts Robert Hart sympathetically recognized the Post Office's responsibility to uphold government, but, also abhorred the prospect of censorship fearing it would undermine public trust and politicize the Post Office. Ultimately, Hart denied the government's request on the grounds that the Post Office was a "peculiar institution" owing a special duty to the public to maintain the "absolute inviolability" of the mails.¹³ The ability to refuse such a request was based on Hart's unique position as both a Qing government official and British citizen who considered the most powerful foreigner in China.¹⁴

Despite Hart's best efforts, postal censorship was thrust upon him in 1903 during the famous Mixed Court trial in Shanghai's International Settlement against the revolutionary journal *Subao* (蘇報).¹⁵ In May 1903, Chen Fan (陳範), owner of the *Subao*, hired the radically-inclined Zhang Shizhao (章士釗) to edit the newspaper. Zhang immediately published a series of articles filled with anti-Manchu invective. Affronted by the boldness of Zhang's articles, Qing officials pressured Settlement authorities to close the *Subao* offices and arrest Zhang Binglin, Zou Rong, and several other contributors. The newspaper offices were shuttered on 7 July 1903. By late July, while trial preparations were underway, former members of the *Subao*'s editorial staff including Zhang Shizhao himself, who had avoided arrest through personal connections, launched the *China National Gazette* (國民日日報). To give the newspaper additional protection, Lu Hesheng (盧和生), the publisher, tried to outfox the Qing authorities by having the paper fronted by a foreigner named A. Somoll to give it extraterritorial privilege. Somoll also registered the *Gazette* with the British Consulate so it had the support of the most

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Richard S. Horowitz, "Politics, Power and the Chinese Maritime Customs: The Qing Restoration and the Ascent of Robert Hart," *Modern Asian Studies* 40: 3 (2006): 549-581.

¹⁵ For an overview of the *Subao* case, see: John Lust, "The *Su-pao* Case: An Episode in the Early Chinese Nationalist Movement," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 27: 2 (1964): 408-429.

powerful foreign nation in the Settlement. Upon hearing of the “shameless audacity” of the publisher, Liangjiang Governor-General Wei Guangtao (魏光燾) ordered the Imperial Post Office to refuse transmission to the *National Gazette*.¹⁶ Hart reluctantly agreed on 7 October.¹⁷ The economic impact of the postal ban, its ultimate purpose being to deprive the publisher of circulation revenue, forced the newspaper to close in December.

British diplomatic pressure seems to have been partially responsible for Hart’s decision. During the negotiations leading up to the *Subao* trial, Wei Guangtao had cancelled the Mixed Court trial sending the fate of the arrested men into the hands of the foreign diplomatic body. During July and August, British and Italian diplomats alone fought Qing attempts to extradite Zhang and the others. It appears that British diplomatic officials pressured Hart to permit the censorship of the *China National Gazette* to ease tensions with the Beijing government and move an intransigent Wei Guangtao. Whatever the reason, Hart’s decision set an important precedent influencing Chinese censorship for the next fifty years.

The trial against the *Subao* resulted in the imprisonment of Zhang Binglin and Zou Rong and involved complicated questions of international law, the status of the International Settlement, and the composition of the Mixed Court, but the long-term effects of the case were decidedly murky. Most significantly, the case established the precedent of foreign jurisdiction in purely Chinese cases taking place within the territory of the International Settlement. At the same time, however, it established a legal precedent – a powerful symbol to a legalistic-inclined postal staff – for postal censorship against Chinese-language publications, but also against those published in the Settlement, registered with a foreign consulate, and owned by foreigners.

¹⁶ Ge Gongzhen, *Zhongguo baoxue shi* (History of Chinese journalism) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1928), 155.

¹⁷ Robert Hart, I. G.’s Circulars, Circular No. 1099, Postal No. 69, 7 October 1903 in SHAC137.2023-1.

Postal Censorship in the Late Qing, 1903-1911

As part of its structural transformation to a ministerial-style government in 1905-06 during the New Policies Reforms, the Qing government began promulgating a series of new laws defining illegal speech and sedition thus laying a new legal foundation for censorship. Under such laws, the Qing government forbid any form of libel, slander, or false accusation from appearing in print.¹⁸ The newly-established Police Bureau (巡警部) also issued its own definition of seditious utterance as slandering the court, absurdly criticizing dynastic policies, disturbing the peace, or undermining social customs.¹⁹ To enforce such regulations, the Qing government required all publishers, including foreigners, to register themselves and their works with the local police and the Bureau for Registering Publications. In January 1908, under the new Press Law, all reporters also had to apply for licenses, register with the authorities, and submit their proofs to the local police for prepublication censorship.²⁰ Pressure by the newspapers, however, forced the government not to enforce many of the censorship, registration, or licensing provisions.²¹

If the Qing government was too weak to enforce its own censorship regulations, the Post Office was strong enough to force registration. In late December 1908, the Post Office introduced a three-tiered newspaper classification system providing lower rates for registered publications.²² To officially register with the Post Office, editors had to obey the existing Qing law requiring a newspaper license. Once licensed and registered, any newspaper reported to the Post Office by the competent local authorities as containing seditious content or infringing on

¹⁸ Lü Guang and Pan Xianmo, eds., *Zhongguo xinwen fa gailun* (Introduction to Chinese press laws) (Taipei: Zhengzhong shuju, 1956), 99-104.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 104-105.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 105-108.

²¹ Ting, *Government Control of the Press*, 44-45.

²² I. G.'s Circulars, Circular No. 1242, Postal No. 83, IG Robert Hart, 26 April 1905 in SHAC137.2023-1. For the relevant tariff rates, see: Liu Chenghan and Xue Pinwen, *Zhongguo youzi kao* (A study of Chinese postage rates) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1957), 9-10.

press laws could to be handed over to the government.²³ Newspapers published abroad, too, came under the jurisdiction of postal censorship during this period. The Imperial Post Office, although not a full-fledged member until 1914, strictly adhered to all conventions of the Universal Postal Union (UPU), the governing body of international postal relations. At the 1906 Rome Congress, the delegates resolved to forbid the transmission of any articles between member states whose circulation was prohibited in the country of destination.²⁴

By linking the 1906 Rome convention of the UPU with the Post Office's newspaper registration requirements, the Qing government acquired an institutional means to suppress domestic and overseas newspapers. The Qing government immediately capitalized on these new avenues by requesting a postal ban on the *Bright China Daily* (光華日報) out of Rangoon.²⁵ Over the next year the Qing requested the Post Office detain two other overseas newspapers associated with Sun Zhongshan's Revolutionary Alliance.²⁶

While the Qing state still violently suppressed some reformist and revolutionary authors prior to 1911, censorship slowly shifted away from such acts towards institutional constraints on circulation. Protests by newspaper publishers and editors forced the Qing to abandon many of the legal provisions of their publication laws, but vigorously enforced postal regulations, and the accompanying economic benefits derived from registration at the Post Office, were enough to secure the compliance of most publishers.²⁷

²³ Postal Circular No. 218, Postal Secretary Piry, 24 December 1908 in SHAC137.2023-2.

²⁴ Article 16, Paragraph 3, Section 2(d) in Universal Postal Union, *Convention of Rome (26 May 1906)* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1907), 16.

²⁵ Postal Instructions No. 56, Postal Secretary Piry, 28 December 1908 in SHAC137.2023-2.

²⁶ Postal Instructions No. 60, Postal Secretary Piry, 24 February 1909; Postal Instructions No. 76, Postal Secretary Piry, 14 September 1909 in SHAC137.2023-2. The newspapers suppressed were the *Renaissance Daily* (中興日報) out of Singapore and the *Liberty News* (自由新報) from Honolulu.

²⁷ More radical publications who refused to register could only distribute their material through covert means – illegally through the restricted networks of the Minxinju or under “disguised cover” (偽裝封面) by wrapping their banned material inside other publications. For a general overview of the phenomenon of “disguised covers,” see: Huang Xia, “Guojia tushuguan zang geming lishi wenxian zhong de weizhuangben ji lu” (An exhaustive record of

Postal Censorship under Yuan Shikai, 1912-1916

During Yuan Shikai's presidency (1912-1916), postal censorship both through and, for the first time, in the Post Office became a common and distinctive feature of the political landscape.

Upon assuming the presidency, Yuan's Beijing government enacted a whole host of new press and publication laws. Many of the laws retained the licensing and registration requirements of the late Qing, but Yuan also redefined sedition.²⁸ Under Yuan's government, all publications advocating a change in the form of government, disturbing the peace, impairing public morals, or revealing state secrets were considered seditious.

The primary target of these laws were the publications of Sun Zhongshan's Nationalist Party and the associated pro-Nationalist southern governors. In the summer of 1913 many southern governors launched the Second Revolution to oust Yuan Shikai by declaring independence from Beijing. Yuan's superior forces dealt quickly with the military issue. Sun and many of his followers, however, fled to Japan where they began intense propaganda efforts to undermine Yuan's rule. To counter such propaganda, Yuan ordered the Ministry of Communications to instruct the Post Office to censor all Nationalist Party material coming through the Post Office, permit outside censors in Post Offices in places under martial law, and hand over all seditious printed matter to local officials.²⁹ Yuan also banned Chinese Revolutionary Party leaders Sun Zhongshan, Dai Jitao, Chen Qimei, Tian Tong, and Ju Zheng from using the mail at all.³⁰

disguised books in the collection of revolutionary historical materials held by the National Library), http://www.nlc.gov.cn/service/wjls/pdf/10/10_09_a4b8c2d1.pdf

²⁸ Lü and Pan, eds., *Zhongguo xinwen fa gailun*, 108-109.

²⁹ Circular No. 335, Postmaster General Piry, 24 November 1913 in SHAC137.2023-3.

³⁰ Mimeograph of a Circular Postal Despatch by Chief Secretary Destelan, 2 August 1915 in SHAC137.3072. The Republican government's passage of the Martial Law in December 1912 coupled with a little used 1910 postal circular allowing the detention of "the correspondence of criminals" served as the legal foundation for censoring the private mail of revolutionaries. Requests for the detention of criminal correspondence were made against figures such as Ying Dehong (應德閔), a former Governor of Jiangsu who handled the investigation of Song Jiaoren's

To strengthen postal censorship Yuan also ordered the Directorate General of Posts to promulgate more well-defined rules. The Directorate distributed the resulting “Regulations for the Censorship and Detention of Seditious Mail Matter” to all postmasters on 2 March 1915. The Regulations, consisting of eight articles, governed the censorship of mail matter until 1928 though its basic principles remained in effect until 1949. Five of the articles describe the duties of the various post offices in censorship matters: to assist in keeping seditious publications out of the mail, to detain previously banned periodicals, to permit mail censorship in places under martial law, to enforce postal regulations on the packaging of printed matter to facilitate inspection, and to keep the activities of censors confidential.³¹ The Directorate’s regulations thus continued to recognize the legal right of the government to censor mail, but postal administrators also sought to protect the reputation of the Post Office. Postal regulations required outside censors to physically mark all inspected mail, minimize delays to sorting, and avoid opening any foreign mail or sealed bags in transit.³²

To protect its reputation as a public service institution, the Post Office absolutely refused to define seditious mail matter. The legal right to determine what constituted seditious mail matter came from two external sources. First, all executive central, provincial, or county officials could define for their territorial area what was considered seditious content. After making such a determination, an official requested the Ministry of Interior to inform the Ministry of Communications of the objectionable publication. The Ministry of Communications then ordered the Post Office to ban the periodical after which the Directorate circularized all

assassination and Chen Taoyi (陳陶遺), a founding member of the literary pro-Republican Southern Society (南社). Memo. No. 313/4561, Chief Secretary Destelan to Beijing Postmaster, 24 March 1915 in SHAC137.3072; Memo. No. 2788/11811, Memorandum from Commissioner to Co-D.G. Destelan, 16 January 1924 in SHAC137.4685.

³¹ Circular No. 394, Postmaster General Piry, 2 March 1915 in SHAC137.2023-4.

³² Outside institutions frequently balked at the requirement to mark censored mail matter. Memo. No. 1159/5719, Yunnanfu Postal Commissioner to Co-D.G. Destelan, 8 November 1923 in SHAC137.4439 and Letter from C.I.C. to D.G. and D. D. G., 20 June 1935 in SHAC137(5).3568.

postmasters to detain the offending matter.³³ Yuan Shikai's government thus created a regular bureaucratic process for suppressing seditious mail matter. In that process, the Ministry of Communications played the pivotal role between local officials and the Post Office. The second external source for determining what seditious printed matter was came from censors placed in post offices. After December 1912, any territorial official with the legal right to declare martial law, or any military unit with the proper authority, could place censors in local post offices to inspect and detain seditious private mail matter.³⁴

The censors placed in post offices during Yuan Shikai's presidency, according to internal postal documents, performed their duties dismally. While foreign postmasters resented the inconvenience censors posed to the smooth working of their offices, they also expected the censors would conscientiously fulfill their duty. Instead, foreign postmasters frequently complained of the dilatory manner in which the censors behaved.³⁵ According to Shanghai Postal Commissioner J. M. C. Rousse, the censor placed at the Shanghai Head Office in the International Settlement only came to the office three times a week for half an hour each visit.³⁶ Rousse literally asked the censor to more thoroughly inspect the mail, but the censor flatly refused stating "his instructions were not to open too many letters." In October 1915 that censor

³³ For example, in March 1915 some unknown persons started sending Guangxi Civil Governor Zhang Wuqi (張鳴岐) propaganda pamphlets agitating against the 21 Demands. Zhang, who considered the pamphlets seditious, immediately telegraphed the Ministry requesting that all printed matter bearing on the China-Japan question be detained by the local post office. Memo. No. 220/28569, Chief Secretary Destelan to Guangxi Postal Commissioner, 24 March 1915 in SHAC137.3072.

Sending political opponents propaganda materials through the mail was a common tactic. In the United States abolitionists in the mid-1830s flooded the south with anti-slavery tracts galvanizing the proslavery constitutional movement and forcing the Post Office to censor all such materials. Susan Wyly-Jones, "The 1835 Anti-Abolition Meetings in the South: A New Look at the Controversy over the Abolition Postal Campaign," *Civil War History* 47: 4 (December 2001): 289-309.

³⁴ Memo. No. 786, Kaifeng Acting Postal Commissioner Osland-Hill to A. D. G. Destelan, 5 July 1915 in SHAC137.3546.

³⁵ The file SHAC137.3546 contains complaints from postmasters on the poor performance of the censors.

³⁶ In other cases, censors failed to appear for weeks at a time. D. G. of Posts draft petition to Ministry of Communications, 1919 in SHAC137.2143.

kept only six private letters and one newspaper out of roughly 2.8 million items of mail matter originating in Shanghai that month.³⁷

While censors placed in post offices resoundingly failed at their duties, postal bans proved more effective. With the debate over the 21 Demands, the increasing propaganda activities of Sun Zhongshan's Chinese Revolutionary Party, and Yuan Shikai's preparations for declaring a monarchy, 1915 was a particularly busy year for banning periodicals through the Post Office. Even in this year of heavy censorship, however, the government only banned 115 titles out of roughly 42 million pieces of printed matter posted for circulation.³⁸ Of the material banned there were 46 newspapers and magazines, 62 pamphlets or circulars, and seven books.

The most common targets of Yuan's postal bans during 1915 were seditious newspapers and pamphlets associated with Sun's Chinese Revolutionary Party in Japan and his associates in China. The newspapers were not censored for publishing specific articles, but for their anti-Yuan editorial line.³⁹ Another common target of postal censorship were anti-Yuan pamphlets either written anonymously or pseudonymously. In early January 1915, the Ministry of Communications banned an anonymous pamphlet entitled *An Evening's Talk with Zhao Bingjun* (趙秉鈞一夕話). A former premier of the Beijing Government, Zhao had been implicated in the assassination of Nationalist parliamentary leader Song Jiaoren and was himself poisoned in early

³⁷ Memo. No. 3184/6527, Despatch from Shanghai Postal Commissioner Rousse to A. D. G. Destelan, 19 November 1915 in SHAC137.3546.

³⁸ The 115 banned periodicals, pamphlets, and books as well as all their names can be found in SHAC137.3072 and 137.3838.

³⁹ A few of the overseas newspapers and magazines banned from the Post Office and related to the Revolutionary Party included *The People's Voice* (民口雜誌) out of San Francisco as well as the *Chinese Republic News* (民國公報) and the *Chinese Nationalist Weekly* (民氣週報), both from New York. Pro-Revolutionary Party newspapers published inside China banned from postal circulation included *Heaven's Bell* (天鐘報), the *People's Rights* (民權報), the *Patriotic Evening News* (愛國晚報), the *National Salvation Daily* (救亡報), and the *May Seventh* (五七報) newspaper.

1914 presumably to keep him quiet.⁴⁰ The title of the pamphlet suggests a fictional confession implicating Yuan in Song's assassination. The same month, the government also banned a pseudonymously written pamphlet entitled *The Will of Qiu Pizhen* (邱丕振遺書).⁴¹ Qiu, a former member of the Revolutionary Alliance, was assassinated in 1914 and considered a martyr of the anti-Yuan movement. The fictional text presumably contained a virulent attack on Yuan and his dictatorial regime.

Censorship under Yuan Shikai has long been considered particularly harsh, especially in light of his assassination or imprisonment of several famous political figures. The emphasis on the violent aspects of Yuan's censorship has overshadowed the considerable extent to which his government began using legal means to silence its critics. New, more stringent media laws coupled with detailed postal regulations on censorship created a sophisticated legal network for defining and banning seditious publications. Orders to suppress publications were made through regular bureaucratic channels rather than coming personally from the president. Within these legal parameters, Yuan used postal censorship not indiscriminately or ideologically, but carefully against those he and other officials deemed political radicals seditiously advocating the overthrow of his regime, attacking him personally, or criticizing sensitive policies like the 21 Demands. Despite the legal framework, postal censorship under Yuan Shikai was still relatively light. Out of roughly 150 million newspaper issues and articles of printed matter sent through the Post Office between 1912 and 1916, Yuan and other officials probably censored roughly 100 different titles each year, which is the same number banned by censors in the United States

⁴⁰ Mimeograph of a Circular Postal Despatch by Chief Secretary Destelan, 4 January 1915 in SHAC137.3072; Yan Shunshou, "Beiyang zhengfu jiaotongbu chajin Zhonghua Gemingdang xuanchuanpin shiliao yizu" (Materials on the National Revolutionary Party's propaganda materials banned by the Beiyang Government's Ministry of Communications), *Minguo dang'an* "Republican Archives" 1 (2000), 28.

⁴¹ Mimeograph of a Circular Postal Despatch by Chief Secretary Destelan, 20 January 1915 in SHAC137.3072.

during the same period.⁴² Most revealing about censorship under Yuan Shikai were the number of publications not censored – none of the often scandal-filled mosquito papers, none of the radical publications like *New Youth* (新青年), none of the commercial papers like *Shenbao* (申報), and none of the Western- or Japanese-language newspapers criticizing the central government.

Postal Censorship under the Warlords, 1916-1927

After Yuan Shikai's death in early 1916, the warlord period was epitomized by a weak, nominal, purely juridical central government whose "president" was usually the particular warlord controlling Beijing at the moment. Unlike during Yuan's era, there was little continuity in government policies or high officials. The succession of revolving presidents and cabinets who held little control over most of the country has led many commentators and historians since Lin Yutang to argue that all types of censorship between 1916 and 1927 declined in comparison to the Yuan era. Lin argued that as the central government grew weak, the press grew strong.⁴³ Lee-hsia Hsu Ting echoed Lin's conclusion arguing that the instability of the Beijing governments and the "warlord's stupidity" allowed new ideologies and radical publications to emerge in large numbers.⁴⁴

The history of postal censorship during the warlord period, however, complicates the overall impression that the weakness of the Beijing governments limited their use of censorship. Instead, the warlords expanded the use of censorship, but keep it from the public. The key to censorship under the warlords was the Ministry of Communications. No matter which warlord

⁴² Bekken, "These Great and Dangerous Powers," 64

⁴³ Lin, *A History of the Press*, 116.

⁴⁴ Ting, *Government Control of the Press*, 52, 56.

controlled Beijing, he allowed all other warlords to send orders through the Beijing Ministry of Communications to suppress seditious publications through the Post Office. Fearing negative public reaction most warlords also kept their censorship orders confidential. The warlords understood that public announcements of postal bans opened the government to criticism and negative publicity.⁴⁵ Collectively, the usual administrative arrangement with the Ministry, the use of secret censorship orders, and the introduction of several innovative practices allowed the warlords to increase the amount of censorship.

The centerpiece of warlord postal censorship was an increase in the number of censors installed in post offices. To maintain social stability, the warlords used these censors to halt the transmission of specific issues of newspapers or magazines rather than prohibit the circulation of the entire publication, as Yuan had done. With considerably larger numbers, the censors also worked much more efficiently. In August 1923, for example, there were twelve censors from three different institutions working in the Beijing Head Post Office. Unlike previous censors, these tended to attend to office duties more consistently. Whereas the Shanghai censors only detained a few letters and newspapers in 1915, the Beijing censors took 12,000 newspaper issues in August 1923 alone.⁴⁶ Placing censors in Post Offices also spread during the warlord era from cities like Shanghai and Beijing to smaller provincial capitals such as Taiyuan and Kunming.

The most important innovation in postal censorship during warlord years was the introduction of temporary postal bans on newspapers for specific articles rather than their general editorial policy. Publishers only discovered this kind of censorship after they received numerous complaints from their subscribers, but the publishers remained ignorant of whether their material

⁴⁵ Not infrequently, the outside institutions placing censors in post offices expressed concern that their activities might be made known opening them to attacks by the public. Memo. No. 1159/5719, Yunnanfu Postal Commissioner to Co-D.G. Destelan, 8 November 1923 in SHAC137.4439.

⁴⁶ Memo. No. 2630/11272, Beijing Postal Commissioner to Co-D.G. Destelan, 12 September 1923 in SHAC137.4439.

was censored or lost in the mail. Previously, all postal bans were permanent, but once the warlord regimes started targeting foreign and commercial newspapers and magazines they introduced the temporary ban to economically punish the newspapers with the loss of advertising and subscriber revenues. Such bans were not widespread during the warlord years, but established the precedent that the Nationalists would exploit in the near future. In September 1924, for example, the Tianjin Court of Martial Law placed temporary postal bans on the Chinese edition of the British-owned *Peking and Tientsin Times* (京津泰晤士報), the commercial newspaper *L'Impartial* (大公報), and the Japanese-owned, Chinese-language *Tianjin Daily News* (天津日日新聞), all for publishing seditious articles.⁴⁷ The bans occasioned no public protest by the editors and were quietly lifted two months later.

In contrast to Yuan, who placed postal bans on a wide range of regime opponents, the various warlord administrations focused most of the effort on the growing communist movement. With the rise of the Chinese Communist Party as a legitimate player in early 1920s politics, many warlords sought to limit their influence, especially over workers. In the early 1920s, post offices from around the country frequently notified the Directorate of the receipt of communist material passing through the mails, but usually the censors themselves simply confiscated such materials.⁴⁸ In the months following the famous February 4-7th strike along the Beijing-Wuhan railway, crushed by Wu Peifu and his warlord forces, various police and railroad authorities requested heavy censorship of all mail and printed matter coming to and from the railroad workers.⁴⁹ In June, the Police Department of the Railroad asked the postmaster at

⁴⁷ Memo. No. 2923/46543, Chief Secretary to the Tianjin Postal Commissioner J. Stirling, 12 November 1924 in SHAC137.4685.

⁴⁸ Memorandum No. 580/3343, Xi'an Acting Commissioner to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 17 July 1922 in SHAC137.4417.

⁴⁹ Memo. No. 2935/37827, Directorate Chief Secretary to Beijing Postal Commissioner, 5 June 1923 in SHAC137.4439.

Changxindian (長辛店), Hubei, the site of a successful railroad workers' strike in late August 1922 and one of the centers of the 1923 strike, to detain all copies of three communist publications: *Record of the Beijing-Hankou Bloodshed* (京漢流血記), *The Guide* (向導報), and *Workers' Weekly* (工人週刊).⁵⁰ Similar requests continued unabated throughout the summer of 1923.⁵¹ In early 1924 the assault on communist publications continued with bans against the Socialist Youth League's organ *Chinese Youth* (中國青年) and the *Young Workers' Monthly* (青年工人月刊).⁵²

Postal censorship did not decline during the warlord years, but the various warlords kept their censorship practices more confidential while simultaneously increasing the number of items inspected, confiscated, and banned. It appears, then, that the warlord era has been seen as a period of lax censorship because they used more sophisticated tactics than Yuan Shikai – buying off editors rather than killing them, using postal censorship rather than smashing presses – and not because they censored less material. Within an overall increase in the amount of material censored, the warlord administrations also introduced a number of innovative practices transforming postal censorship itself. First, the warlord controlling Beijing allowed his fellow militarists to utilize the Ministry of Communications to transmit censorship orders to the Post Office. Within the Post Office, warlords placed significantly greater numbers of censors who worked efficiently. Rather than target specific titles, censors usually simply confiscated individual issues. The warlord era also saw the introduction of temporary postal bans as a form of economic punishment of commercial and foreign-language publications.

⁵⁰ Translation of a letter from the Police Department of the Jing-Han Railway to the Changxindian Postmaster, 9 June 1923 in SHAC137.4439.

⁵¹ Memo. No. 3003/38636, Co-D.G. Destelan to Beijing Postal Commissioner, 13 July 1923; Memo No. 2394/38929, Co-D.G. Destelan to Zhili Postal Commissioner, 1 August 1923 in SHAC137.4439.

⁵² Memo. No. 4182/44450, Chief Secretary to Shanghai Postal Commissioner, 4 July 1924 and Memo. No. 2757/43886, Chief Secretary to Tianjin Postal Commissioner, 2 June 1924 in SHAC137.4685.

Postal Censorship of Chinese-Language Publications in the Nanjing Decade, 1927-1937

As the Nanjing decade began all forms of censorship reached, according to Edgar Snow, “an all-time severity” but the system itself was “completely chaotic.”⁵³ Supporting Snow were numerous articles and essays on censorship by writers like Lu Xun. In the fall of 1927 Nationalist censors confiscated several issues of Lu Xun’s *Brief Discourses* (語絲) magazine for articles criticizing the White Terror against the Communists. Lu responded by attacking the educational level of the censors: “they fuck up what should and shouldn’t be censored.”⁵⁴ Snow and Lu might bitterly complain about being censored, but the Nationalists knew who they wanted to censor, created new laws defining seditious speech, and utilized postal bans very effectively.

The effectiveness of Nationalist censorship stemmed from its re-organization of censoring bureaucracies and the promulgation of new media laws and regulations. During most of the Nanjing Decade, the Propaganda Bureau (宣傳部) of the Central Executive Committee of the Nationalist Party determined what could be censored. Censorship laws issued between 1927 and 1937, usually authored by the Propaganda Bureau, carefully defined what constituted seditious discourse, who could order postal bans, what organizations could place censors in post offices, and the Directorate’s role in enforcing censorship. Overall, Nationalist practices represent the final step from violent, nonideological to nonviolent, ideological censorship as represented by how the government conducted its policing of the public sphere.

The types of material censored through the Post Office during the Nanjing decade can be divided into two main categories, each having its own form of punishment, and each predominant in a specific time period. First, as the primary party office for policing ideological

⁵³ Edgar Snow, “The Ways of the Chinese Censor,” *Current History* 42 (May 1935), 381, 382.

⁵⁴ Lu Xun, “Kou si zakan” (On the detention of *Yu si*), *Yu si* 154 (22 October 1927): 267-272.

correctness, the Propaganda Bureau specifically targeted the political enemies of the Nationalist Party on the left and, infrequently noted, on the right during the period between 1927 and 1930. These ideological works, often advocating the overthrow of the National Government, were completely banned from the Post Office. Having swept its ideological enemies from the public sphere by 1930, the Nationalists utilized temporary postal bans on Chinese- and foreign-language commercial publications, designed to economically punish them for specific criticisms of government policy, in the period between 1930 and 1937. Overall, postal censorship under the Nationalist regime was not only “more ideological,” but also more effective.⁵⁵ The basis of that effectiveness started with broadly-written censorship laws.

From January 1928 to the end of 1930, the National Government and Post Office promulgated a series of new laws and regulations governing the content of publications. In January 1928, the Directorate General of Posts, not yet under Nationalist control, but in cooperation with the Central Executive Committee of the Nationalist Party (CEC), issued new postal censorship regulations.⁵⁶ Under the new regulations, the Ministries of War and the Interior as well as all provincial-level civilian and military authorities could independently define what constituted mail matter of a seditious nature. For the first time, the Nationalist Ministry of Interior also sent the Directorate regulations on decency standards, which allowed the government to suppress mail matter that “teaches lasciviousness and putrid vulgarity,” especially mosquito newspapers.⁵⁷ Finally, on 16 September 1929, the CEC promulgated the “Regulations Regarding Censorship of Mail Matter at Principal Cities and Towns throughout the Country,”

⁵⁵ Ting, *Government Control of the Press*, 124; Stephen R. MacKinnon, “Press Freedom and the Chinese Revolution in the 1930s,” in *Media and Revolution: Comparative Perspectives*, edited by Jeremy D. Popkin, 174-187 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), 183.

⁵⁶ Co-D.G. Circular Memo No. 2072, Co.-D.G. Destelan, 21 January 1928 in SHAC137(5).4201.

⁵⁷ Zhaochao guomin zhengfu jiaotongbu xunling di 512 hao, ling youzheng zongju, 23 May 1928 (Copy of Ministry of Communications instruction No. 512 to the D. G. of Posts) in SHAC137.288-3.

which made the Propaganda Bureau of the CEC the most powerful censorship organ in the country.⁵⁸ The Propaganda Bureau not only ordered postal bans, but also appointed a Chief Censor in every province to oversee censorship within post offices.

During the Nanjing decade, the central government implicitly acknowledged the Nationalist Party only controlled a small number of provinces. Like the Ministry of Communications under the warlords, the National Government, through the Ministries of Interior and Communications, permitted local power holders to place censors in their local post offices. Officially such censors were under the direction of the Propaganda Bureau, but in practice any central or local government, quasi-government, educational, or military institution could install censors in post offices. Occasionally, such an ad hoc administrative situation caused conflict between local Party Branch officials and local government offices, but in general both sides cooperated.⁵⁹ The institutions most eager to censor mail were military units, both in garrison and in the field, who sought to protect their soldiers from propaganda.⁶⁰ Schools also evinced deep concern about the reading matter received by their students often appointing censors to weed out seditious printed matter, especially during periods of student unrest.⁶¹ In important mail centers

⁵⁸ Circular Memo No. 308, Officiating D. G. Erik Tollefsen, 1 October 1929 in SHAC137.6272-3. The government issued similar regulations for small towns and counties in April 1930. “Ge xian shi youdian jiancha banfa,” *Zhongyang dangwu yuekan* (CEC Party Affairs Monthly) 22 (May 1930).

⁵⁹ Circular Memo. No. 205, Officiating Director Gen. Lin Shi, Co-Director General Tollefsen, 15 May 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2.

⁶⁰ Jiangxi youzheng guanliju mi cheng di 10/26 hao, Jiangxi youzheng guanliju juzhang Liu Yaoting to youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 8 April 1936 (Jiangxi head post office, confidential petition no. 10/26, Jiangxi Postal Director Liu Yaoting to D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.1086-1; Jiangxi youzheng guanliju mi cheng di 116/271, Jiangxi youzheng guanliju juzhang Liu Yaoting to youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 22 April 1937 (Jiangxi head post office, confidential petition no. 116/271, Jiangxi Postal Director Liu Yaoting), both in SHAC137.1086-1; Zhejiang youzheng guanliju mi cheng di 90 hao, Zhejiang youzheng guanliju juzhang Shimisi, 24 May 1937 (Zhejiang head post office, confidential petition no. 90, Zhejiang Postal Director Smith) in SHAC137.1084.

⁶¹ e.g. Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling mi zi di 32 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 8 April 1935 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular no. 32, confidential series, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137(5).6469; Jiangxi youzheng guanliju bangonghan di 33 hao, juzhang Liu Yaoting, 29 February 1936 (Jiangxi head post office, semi-official letter no. 33, Jiangxi Postal Director Liu Yaoting); Henan youzheng guanliju bangonghan di 14 hao, zanxing Henan youzheng guanlijuzhang Li Zhijun, 20 March 1936 (Henan head post office, semi-official letter no. 14, Acting Postal Director Li Zhijun), both in SHAC137.1086-1.

such as Shanghai, the Nationalists appointed as many as forty censors representing different parts of the government in the Head Post Office.⁶²

The Propaganda Bureau focused its attention on censoring the Nationalist Party's ideological enemies, which included Communists and anarchists on the far left, the Third Party and Reorganization Clique on the left, and the fascist-inclined Chinese Youth Party on the far right. Approximately ninety percent of all material subject to postal bans represented ideological opponents of the National Government.⁶³ When censoring its ideological enemies, the Propaganda Bureau's typical procedure was to distribute lists of offending publications along with their "reactionary status" (反動情形), explaining why they received a postal ban, and the publisher's location, if known, to the Post Office.⁶⁴ At other times, the Ministry of Communications simply forwarded orders to the Post Office from local officials to stop the transmission of specific titles, which sometimes contained an explanation for the suppression.⁶⁵

⁶² Wu Xunhou, "Huiyi zai youzheng jianchachu shi de qingkuang" (Memories of the situation in the postal inspection office) *Huangyan wenshi ziliao* (Huangyan literary and historical materials) 12 (1990); reprinted in *QGGJZXWSZL: YDSL*, I: 591-592.

⁶³ I will discuss such statistics in more detail below.

⁶⁴ For example, in August 1929, the Ministry forwarded a booklet entitled "Register of the names of reactionary publications suppressed by the CEC" to the Directorate containing some 173 individual titles banned from postal transmission. Circular Memo No. 269, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 12 August 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2. Usually, however, the list of suppressed publications was shorter. e.g. Zhejiang sheng zhengfu minzhengting xunling di 897 hao, minzhengting tingzhang Zhu Jiahua, 1 February 1929 (Zhejiang provincial government, civil governor's office, order no. 897, Civil Governor Zhu Jiahua), *Zhejiang sheng zhengfu gongbao* (Gazette of the Zhejiang provincial government) 517 (1 February 1929): 6-10; Zhejiang sheng zhengfu minzhengting xunling di 5159 hao, unsigned, 8 March 1929 (Zhejiang provincial government, civil governor's office, order no. 5159), *Zhejiang sheng zhengfu gongbao* 561 (26 March 1929): 8-13.

⁶⁵ Between 1927 and 1937 the Central Government used a rather small selection of specific terms when censoring Chinese- and foreign-language publications. While these terms do not necessarily constitute the actual reasons specific publications were placed under postal bans – those can probably never be known – they represent the government's thinking about sedition. The most common terms include "defamatory" (詆毀) or "reactionary" (反動) criticisms of the Nationalist Party or Government, "wanton" (肆意) or "malicious" portrayals of China and its people, "inciting" (煽惑) or "absurd" (荒謬) discussions of politics, especially Manzhouguo, "rumor mongering" (造謠), "attacking" (攻擊) or "slandering the Party-State" (侮蔑黨國), "propagandizing" (宣傳) Communism or other taboo political theories, and the catch-all phrases "of a seditious nature" (煽亂性質) and "injuring the interests of China" (損害中國利益).

Out of the ninety percent of the material banned for ideological reasons roughly seventy-five percent consisted of communist writings. Among the communist publications banned were official mouthpieces like *The Bolshevik* (布爾什維克) and *Red Flag* (紅旗), but also “communistic” publications such as *Moluo* (摩洛) and the *Masses Daily* (群眾日報).⁶⁶ The government also banned many pamphlets printed by the Communists within China or abroad such as *Resolutions of the Fourth Representatives Congress of the Red Workers International*.⁶⁷ The government even prohibited CCP works such as the *Textbook on Latinized New Chinese Language* (拉丁化新中國文字課本) from postal transmission.⁶⁸ Along with publications written or published directly by the CCP, the government also banned many books promoting proletarian or communistic literature including fictional works and magazines as disparate as literary sensationalist Liu Na’ou’s *Trolley Bus* (無軌列車) to magazines like the Esperanto-titled *Oazo* (Oasis 幻州).⁶⁹ To avoid detection and the blanket postal bans on all CCP writings, the Communists often tried to disguise the covers before attempting to send them through the mail.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Jiaotong xunling di 880 hao, ling youzheng zongju, jiaotong buzhang Wang Boqun, 19 March 1929 (Ministry order no. 880, commanding the D. G. of Posts, Minister of Communications Wang Boqun), *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette) 30 (17 April 1929): 16-17; Circular Memo No. 173, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, Co-D. G. Tollefsen, 27 March 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2; Circular Memo No. 635, Officiating D. G. Qian Chunqi, 7 April 1931 in SHAC137.6272-6.

⁶⁷ Circular Memo No. 174, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, Co-D. G. Tollefsen, 27 March 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2; Jiaotong xunling di 879 hao, ling youzheng zongju, jiaotong buzhang Wang Boqun, 19 March 1929 (Ministry order no. 879, commanding the D. G. of Posts, Minister of Communications Wang Boqun), *Jiaotong gongbao* 30 (17 April 1929): 15-16

⁶⁸ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 8 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 24 December 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo no. 8, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.9431.

⁶⁹ Circular Memo No. 269, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 12 August 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2.

⁷⁰ For example, in the 1930s *The Bolshevik* was found under titles such as *Research on Buddhism* (佛學研究) and the *Central Executive Committee Fortnightly* (中央半月刊). Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1218 hao, youzheng zongju daijuzhang Tang Baoshu, 22 December 1933 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular memo. no. 1218, Acting D. G. Tang Baoshu) in SHAC137.7553-2; Zhejiang sheng zhengfu minzhengting xunling di 6071 hao, minzhengting tingzhang Zhu Jiahua, 1 April 1929 (Zhejiang provincial government, civil governor’s office, order no. 6071, Governor Zhu Jiahua), *Zhejiang sheng zhengfu gongbao* 573 (10 April 1929): 8.

After the communists, the Propaganda Bureau targeted the anarchists and Youth Party most frequently. Anarchist publications ranging from newspapers like *The Orient* (東方) to pamphlets like *Anarchism and Practical Questions* (無政府主義與實際問題) to books such as *The Evening of the Squall* (暴風雨前夕) constituted about ten percent of the total number of periodicals forbidden from the post.⁷¹ The Chinese Youth Party, in the “mainstream” of the global fascist movement, was a threat to the National Government from the right.⁷² Between 1928 and 1930, the Government banned many of the Youth Party’s publications such as *Awakened Lion* (醒獅), *Thunder* (雷風), and *Masses* (群報) to control their propaganda activities, particularly among students.⁷³ Finally, a few publications of the Reorganization Faction within the Nationalist Party, led by Wang Jingwei and Chen Gongbo, were occasionally prohibited postal circulation such as *Revolutionary Commentary* (革命評論) and *Vanguard of the Masses* (民眾先鋒).⁷⁴

The Propaganda Bureau kept some statistics on the number of publications banned, but they are far from complete. Zhang Jinglu provides the most complete list of publications banned during the Nanjing decade, but many of the lists he provides are either incomplete, contain the same publication multiple times, or drastically underestimate the numbers suppressed. Zhang notes that between 1929 and 1936 the National Government banned 676 books in the social sciences with the majority, 366, being suppressed between 1929 and 1931.⁷⁵ Elsewhere, Zhang

⁷¹ Zhejiang sheng zhengfu minzhengting xunling di 1755 hao, minzhengting tingzhang Zhu Jiahua, February 1929 (Zhejiang provincial government, civil governor’s office, order no. 1755, Governor Zhu Jiahua), *Zhejiang sheng zhengfu gongbao* 525 (11 February 1929): 5.

⁷² Marilyn A. Levine, “Zeng Qi and the Frozen Revolution,” in Roger B. Jeans, ed., *Roads Not Taken: The Struggle of Opposition Parties in Twentieth-Century China* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1992): 225-240.

⁷³ Circular Memo No. 269, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 12 August 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2.

⁷⁴ “Zhongyang chajin fandong kanwu mingce” (Name list of reactionary publications banned by the CEC) in SHAC137.6272-2.

⁷⁵ Zhang Jinglu, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai chuban shiliao* (Historical materials on modern publishing in China) 4 Vols. (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1954), II: 205-254.

lists another 228 books banned in 1931, but not included in the previous figures while Li Mo counts only 285 “reactionary” publications banned between 1929 and 1931.⁷⁶ Suffice it to say, it is virtually impossible to determine the total number of works suppressed during the Nanjing decade by counting individual titles. Instead, the statistics provided by each of the various types of censorship organs give a more accurate picture of the overall percentage of titles experiencing some form of censorship.

The most comprehensive statistics on material censored during the early Nationalist period appear in the *Central Party Affairs Monthly* (中央黨務月刊).⁷⁷ The *Monthly* published brief reports on the activities of the Propaganda Bureau from July 1929 to April 1931, which was the busiest censorship period during the whole decade. The statistics produced by the Propaganda Bureau reveal several interesting features of the Nationalists’ censorship practices. First and foremost, the total number of publications experiencing some kind of censorship during these twenty months totaled 2,877, or 1.5%, out of a total of 193,329 issues inspected – a far greater number than shown by Zhang. The total percentage of publications censored ranged from a low of 0.84% in January 1930 to a high of 2.79% in March 1930, but the reports do not indicate the reason for this significant difference. Second, among the publications censored the majority were simple confiscations (扣留) rather than suppressions (查禁). That is, the censors only removed a single issue of the publication rather than suppressing the entire title. Frequently, the figures used by other scholars have been the number of publications “suppressed” thereby underestimating the total number of publications being censored. For

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, II: 173-189, IV: 153-182.

⁷⁷ The following statistics were gathered from: “Zhongyang Xuanchuanbu gongzuo jingguo” (Work activities of the Propaganda Bureau of the CEC) *Zhongyang dangwu yuekan* (CEC Party affairs monthly) 12-17, 19-22, 24-27, 29-33 (July 1929-April 1931).

example, even the Propaganda Bureau itself, when issuing other kinds of public reports, only gave the figures for publications suppressed.⁷⁸

After the National Government cleared the public sphere of publications by its ideological enemies – at least as much as it was able – it focused its attention in the period between 1930 and 1937 on policing commercial newspapers and magazines that criticized the government or Nationalist Party. When publishers or journalists pushed beyond acceptable limits of criticism – many criticisms were allowed to circulate – the National Government placed temporary postal bans on them. The period of a postal ban ranged from one day to several months depending on what message the government was trying to send and the recalcitrance of the editors. In contrast to bans on ideological newspapers, magazines, and books, the National Government usually gave more explicit reasons for suspending the postal privileges of commercial newspapers. The commercial publishers, in response to the postal bans, generally acquiesced to government demands apologizing, printing retractions, or firing the offending writers.

The government usually suspended the postal privileges of commercial newspapers because of specific criticisms or editorials against the government at important political moments.⁷⁹ During the Bandit Suppression Campaigns in Jiangxi, newspapers criticizing government military policy lost their mail privileges. In late June and early July 1932, the

⁷⁸ i.e. The following report only lists 89 publications “suppressed” for July-September 1930. Zhang Keming, comp., “Guomintang zhongxuanbu shencha 1930 nian 7 yue zhi 9 yue fen chubanwu zongbaogao (General report of the published materials inspected between July and September 1930 by the Propaganda Bureau of the CEC of the Nationalist Party), *Minguo dang'an* “Republican Archives” 3 (1991): 31-46.

⁷⁹ Although the government usually provided a reason for postal bans, we have little information about why the National Government suspended the postal privileges of certain publications. Some of the lesser known newspapers prohibited postal circulation include *Justice* (正報), *Brightness Weekly* (光明週刊), *Protect the Party Weekly* (護黨週報), *Haifeng Republican Daily* (海豐民國日報), *The Beacon* (燈塔週刊), *Young Soldiers* (青年軍人), *Political Commentary* (政治評論週刊), *Blue Sky and White Sun* (青天白日), *Publication World* (出版界), and *Youth Miscellany* (青年雜誌). Overseas publications included in this type are the American-based Chinese Constitutionalist Party’s (中國憲政黨) newspaper *The World* (世界日報), the Chinese Freemasons’ (致公黨) *Public Opinion* (公論晨報), and the *Hong Kong Searchlight* (香港探海燈小報).

popular *Shenbao*, edited by Shi Liangcai, published editorials suggesting the extermination campaigns were only exacerbating the problem of communism rather than reducing it. For these remarks, the Shanghai Garrison Headquarters ordered a stop to *Shenbao*'s use of the mails sometime in July. Nervous about the financial health of his newspaper, Shi dispatched a number of representatives to meet with Jiang Jieshi and other Nationalist leaders. After Shi agreed to alter his editorial policy and fire several of his writers, the government lifted the postal ban.⁸⁰

Following the establishment of Manzhouguo in 1932, any positive mention of its Emperor or suggestions to normalize relations brought about a postal ban. On 31 May 1934, the Propaganda Bureau suspended the postal privileges of the Nationalist Party's own *North China Press* (華北日報) for advocating the opening of railway services between north China and Manzhouguo.⁸¹ On 13 August 1934, the Tianjin-based newspaper *Social Welfare* (益世報) also received a postal ban for an editorial published on 10 August concerning the military situation in the north implicitly criticizing the Nationalist military authorities.⁸² Jiang Jieshi himself telegraphed the order banning *Social Welfare* for spreading "utterly groundless" views harboring a "malicious intent" to stir up tension between the Central Government and the Beiping Political Readjustment Committee (平政整會).⁸³ Jiang lifted the ban on 16 October 1934 when Liu

⁸⁰ Ma Yinliang, "Jianchi kangri fandui neizhan: Shi Liangcai zai yijiusaner nian" (Sustaining the anti-Japanese resistance, opposing the civil war: Shi Liangcai in 1932), *Shanghai wenshi ziliao xuanji* (Selected historical materials on Shanghai) 47 (1983): 78-87; Qian Zhisheng, "Shi Liangcai bei ansha an zhenxiang" (The real circumstances of the assassination of Shi Liangcai), *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* (Selections of literary and historical materials) 18 (1961): 153-161; Terry Narramore, "The Nationalists and the Daily Press: The Case of *Shen Bao*, 1927-1934" in *The Nationalists and Chinese Society, 1923-1937*, edited by John Fitzgerald (Melbourne: History Department, University of Melbourne, 1989): 107-132.

⁸¹ The government restored their postal privileges on 1 July after appointing a new manager. *Guowen zhoubao* (Kuo-wen weekly) 11: 23 (11 June 1934): 1-2.

⁸² "Zhanqu zhi zhengli" (Clearing up the militarized zone), *Yishi bao* (10 August 1934); "Ben bao jinyao qishi" (An important announcement from this paper), *Yishi bao* (16 October 1934).

⁸³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1371 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 15 August 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular memo. no. 1371, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.7553-3; Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 1 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 16 October 1934

Huoxuan, the general manager, agreed to hire a pro-Japanese editor named Zhu Zhenxin.⁸⁴ On 3 December 1935, the Beiping-Tianjin Garrison Headquarters placed a postal ban on the Tianjin-based *Dagong bao* (*L'Impartial* 大公報) for an editorial attacking Song Zheyuan's negotiations with the Japanese in north China. In this case, the ban was simply a warning and lifted only nine days later.⁸⁵

The Central Government also banned commercial newspapers for relatively minor incidents. On 20 August 1934 the *China Times* (時事新報) and *Beiping Morning News* (北平晨報) both published a joint telegram from several military authorities, which the News Censoring Offices at Shanghai and Beiping believed to be fabricated. On 7 September Jiang Jieshi ordered postal bans placed on both newspapers for their "unscrupulousness" in printing the questionable telegram.⁸⁶ To skirt the ban the publisher of the *China Times* made an agreement with the *China Press* (大陸報) to hide copies of his newspaper inside the *Press*.⁸⁷ The censors discovered the deceit and the *Press* was also prohibited from using the Post Office.⁸⁸

The Government's imposition of a postal ban usually achieved the desired result – retraction of the offending article, apology to the government, firing the journalist, the

(Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 1, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.9431.

⁸⁴ Liu Guifang, "Bijian Dagong bao de Yishi bao" (Shoulder to shoulder: *L'Impartial's Social Welfare*), full text at: <http://tianjin.enorth.com.cn/system/2005/02/18/000965835.shtml>

⁸⁵ "Sheping" (Editorial), *Dagong bao* (3, 4, and 12 December 1935).

⁸⁶ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1393 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 7 September 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular memo. no. 1393, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.7553-3; "Wo guo gedi xinwenjie dashi rizhi" (Record of important events in news circles throughout our country) *Baoxue jikan* (Newspaper studies quarterly) 1: 2 (1934), 173.

⁸⁷ While the *Beiping Morning News* was allowed to resume circulation through the mails on 1 November, the chicanery between the *Times* and *Press* kept them both out of the mails until March 1935. Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 4 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 1 November 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 4, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.9431; "Ben bao qishi" (An announcement by this newspaper), *Beiping Chenbao* (3 November 1934); Confidential Circular Memo. No. 35 (Translation): 'Postal transmission of the 'China Times' and 'China Press' to be resumed: Ministry's confidential Ling re, communicating,' 23 March 1935 in SHAC137.2251-18.

⁸⁸ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1399 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 14 September 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular memo. no. 1399, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.7553-3.

appointment of new editors – usually rendering it unnecessary to restrict newspapers a second time. Most commercial newspapers like the *Beiping Morning News*, the *China Times*, or *Shenbao* only experienced a single postal ban. In a few rare occasions, the Government had to punish a commercial newspaper more than once to make them more tractable. The only known exception to the low number of postal bans is the *Dagong bao*, which was banned six times between 1924 and 1939.⁸⁹ The *Dagong bao* probably survived its many brushes with the government because of its wide popularity and, after 1926, the intimate relationship between its editor Zhang Jiluan (張季鸞) and Jiang Jieshi.⁹⁰ Overall, postal bans declined on Chinese-language publications over the course of the Nanjing decade as a result of the government's effectiveness and the Post Office's efficiency.

Postal Censorship of Foreign Media in the Nanjing Decade

There were a few postal bans on foreign-language publications prior to the Nanjing decade, but the practice only began in earnest with the establishment of an ideological anti-imperialist Party-State. The purpose of postal bans on foreign-language media was not to excise offending statements, but to economically, and politically, punish them for printing news or opinions objectionable to central or local authorities. Bans on foreign-language media not only involved complicated questions about extraterritoriality and the role of foreigners in the Post Office, but

⁸⁹ The *Dagong bao* lost its postal privileges from 27 September-12 November 1924, on 24 April 1930, from 4 December-12 December 1935, sometime in December 1936, entirely by the Japanese from 4 August 1937, and temporarily by the National Government in Changsha starting on 7 March 1939. Memo No. 2605/18442, Zhili Postal Commissioner John Stirling to Co-D.G., 27 September 1924 in SHAC137.4683; Memo. No 2923/46543, Chief Secretary to the Tianjin Postal Commissioner, 12 November 1924 in SHAC137.4685; *Dagong bao*, “Shelun” (Editorial), 25 April 1930; *Dagong bao*, “Sheping” (Editorial), 4 and 12 December 1935 and Zhang Pengzhou, “Dagong bao dashiji” (Chronology of the *Dagong bao*), *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* (Newspaper research materials) 7 (1981), 200; Wang, “The Independent Press,” 229; Jiaotong youzheng mi tongdaidian di 606 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 8 June 1939 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, confidential circular mail telegram no. 606, Director General of Posts Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6275-3.

⁹⁰ Wang, “The Independent Press.”

also occasioned considerable public discussion on the nature of the Nationalist regime's style of censorship and foreigners as participants in the Chinese public sphere.⁹¹ Unlike Chinese editors who feared reprisal, Western journalists and publishers felt no compunction about criticizing the National Government for its "heavy-handed" censorship. Beneath that anger, however, was a begrudging acknowledgement that the Nationalists had learned well how to legally muzzle the foreign press.

China's entrance into the Universal Postal Union in 1914 and the "Resolution Regarding Foreign Postal Agencies" crafted at the Washington Conference on Naval Limitation in 1922 laid the groundwork for the censorship of foreign-language media. The conventions of the Universal Postal Union forbid the transmission between countries of any publication prohibited in the country of destination. The British colonial government in India, for example, utilized this provision when it requested the Chinese Post Office refuse transmission to several "seditious" Chinese and Indian newspapers from entering India and the Straights Settlements in the 1910s and 1920s.⁹² The conventions of the Union also outlawed the establishment of post offices by a foreign government within the territory of another member country, which gave the Directorate a legal basis for attacking the Foreign Post Offices in China, as discussed in Chapter 2. Once the Chinese and foreign powers signed the "Resolution Regarding Foreign Postal Agencies" in late 1922, all foreign mail matter was forced into the Chinese Post Office where it could be censored.

Nationalist attempts to suppress foreign criticism of their efforts to unify the country began during the Northern Expedition. This first ban occasioned widespread discussion among

⁹¹ Rudolf G. Wagner, "The Role of the Foreign Community in the Chinese Public Sphere," *China Quarterly* 142 (June 1995): 423-443.

⁹² e.g. In 1915, the colonial government of India requested the Chinese Post Office prohibit the transmission of the weekly *Mutiny (Gaddar)*, published by the Hindustani Association of the Pacific Coast, through China because it was said to be a "violently seditious" publication. Memo. No. 2753/6929, Guangzhou Postal Commissioner C. H. Shields to Acting A. D. G. Destelan, 21 June 1915 in SHAC137.3072.

the foreign press and severe censure of the foreign postal commissioner involved. On 29 July 1927 Jiang Jieshi ordered Generals Yang Hu (楊虎) and Chen Qun (陳群) of the Political Training Headquarters of the Second Route Army to order the Post Office to refuse postal transmission to the British settler community's *North China Daily News* for publishing stories "prejudicing our military plans."⁹³ Shanghai Postal Commissioner C. H. Shields, a British citizen himself, feared the ban would negatively impact the prestige of the Post Office, but felt duty bound to carry out the orders of the Nationalist military authorities.⁹⁴ Since it was only a suspension of postal privileges, the publishers of the *Daily News* and *North China Herald*, the weekly condensed version of the *News*, continued to publish their newspaper within the Shanghai International Settlement. The editors wrote several articles viciously attacking both the Post Office and Commissioner Shields. Despite the legality of the postal ban, the editors claimed it was "personal and informal." The British community in Shanghai, they wrote, was astonished Shields failed in his moral obligation to the Treaty Powers by choosing to serve "Nationalist prejudice."⁹⁵ A letter to the editor even questioned Shields' "manliness" for bowing to his Chinese employers while another claimed the Nationalist authorities had "prostituted" the foreign-controlled Post Office.⁹⁶

Other foreign newspapers like the *Beijing and Tianjin Times* publicly supported the *Daily News* claiming all postal bans were illegal, especially when based on "trumped-up" charges. Demonstrating their lack of understanding of the sophistication of the Nationalists' postal ban, the *Times* claimed the postal authorities had no jurisdiction over a British-controlled paper

⁹³ "Zhaolu Guomin gemingjun di'er lu zong zhihui bu zhengzhi xunlianbu lai han" (Letter from the Training Department of the General Headquarters of the Second Route Army of the National Revolutionary Army) signed by Yang Hu and Chen Qun as Enclosure to Memo. No. 5769/9779, Shanghai Postal Commissioner C. H. Shields to Co-D. G. Destelan, 4 August 1927 in SHAC137.7816.

⁹⁴ Memo. No. 5769/9779, Shanghai Postal Commissioner C. H. Shields to Co-D. G. Destelan, 4 August 1927 in SHAC137.7816

⁹⁵ *NCH*, 6 August 1927.

⁹⁶ *NCH*, 13 August 1927.

published in the Settlement.⁹⁷ Of course, the Nationalists were not interfering in the publication of the *Daily News*, just its circulation. Finally, on 12 September 1927 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs lifted the ban on the *North China Daily News*.⁹⁸ The editor admitted the ban “[gave] the circulation department no little inconvenience in getting the newspaper out of Shanghai.”⁹⁹

On 23 January 1929, the Propaganda Bureau order a postal ban on the *North China Star* (華北明星). The *North China Star*, published in Tianjin by Dr. Charles James Fox, was refused postal transmission for “rumormongering detrimental to the Party-State,” but the offending article was not named.¹⁰⁰ Much of the public discourse following the ban resembled the *Daily News* case. In his editorials, Fox argued that as an American institution his newspaper enjoyed extraterritorial protection making the ban an illegal confiscation of his property.¹⁰¹ A week after the initiation of the ban, Fox attacked the government for violating three “fundamental principles”: first, a postal ban without a hearing “violates the most elemental principles of justice”; second, the *Star* enjoys extraterritorial rights making the ban a violation of the “Comity of Nations”; third, the ban violates the freedom of the press.¹⁰² After the ban dragged on for several weeks, Fox and his brother, Albert W. Fox of the *Washington Post*, solicited assistance from Senator William E. Borah to pressure the Chinese government. The powerful Idaho senator repeated Fox’s argument that the ban was a “flagrant violation” and demanded a hearing.¹⁰³ Also supporting Fox, the *China Press* of Shanghai claimed postal bans were “along the line of

⁹⁷ *Beijing and Tianjin Times*, 12 August 1927.

⁹⁸ Memo. No. 5807/9824, Shanghai Postal Commissioner Shields to Co-D. G. Destelan, 14 September 1927 in SHAC137.7816.

⁹⁹ *North China Daily News and Herald, China’s Attempt to Muzzle the Foreign Press: An Account of the Endeavors of Nanking to Suppress the Truth about Affairs in China* (Shanghai: North China Daily News and Herald, Ltd., 1929), 9.

¹⁰⁰ Circular Memo. No. 133, D. G. Liu Shufan and Officiating Co-D. G. C. H. Shields, 29 January 1929 in SHAC137.288-3.

¹⁰¹ *North China Star*, 6 & 20 February 1929.

¹⁰² *North China Star*, 13 February 1929.

¹⁰³ *North China Star*, 11 March 1929.

Russian methods and perhaps Turkish...not in accord with the practice of most Western nations nor Japan.”¹⁰⁴

Reuter’s News Agency discovered the offending article in the *North China Star* – it was a despatch written by D. C. Bess, Beijing correspondent of the United Press, published on 17 December 1928 and quoting Beijing rumors that Jiang Jieshi was about to be ousted.¹⁰⁵ Chinese readers of the *North China Star* and other newspapers, while regretting the severity of the postal ban, blamed the “prejudice and ignorance” of foreign journalists for giving currency to “fantastic” rumors.¹⁰⁶ The publication of similar “false information” was also the cause of a two-day ban on the British-owed, Hankou-based *Central China Post* in May 1930.¹⁰⁷

As with the *Daily News*, the postal ban fulfilled its purpose leading Fox to admit that he had been “knocked on the head” and his newspaper had lost a “considerable part of...[its] circulation.”¹⁰⁸ Apparently worried about the effect the postal ban was having on congressional members in Washington, the Chinese Legation announced the lifting of the ban on March 21st noting the intervention of both the American Legation in Beijing and Dr. C. T. Wang, Fox’s personal friend, as vital to the restoration of the newspaper’s postal privileges.¹⁰⁹

Two weeks after the ban was lifted from the *North China Star*, the Propaganda Bureau suspended the postal privileges of the *North China Daily News* and *Herald* for a second time on 11 April 1929. The internal order banning the newspaper refused it postal transmission for three articles damaging to the Party and government: an article on 26 November 1928 written by T. K. Chen calling the government “scoundrels,” a letter stating all foreigners should flee Nanjing,

¹⁰⁴ *North China Star*, 20 March 1929.

¹⁰⁵ “Kuomintang Upset Predicted to Come Within Sixty Days,” *North China Star*, 17 December 1929.

¹⁰⁶ *North China Star*, 10 & 18 February 1929.

¹⁰⁷ *NCH*, 20 May 1930.

¹⁰⁸ *North China Star*, 20 February 1929; *Shanghai Times*, 22 February 1929.

¹⁰⁹ *NCH*, 30 March 1929; the ban was not officially lifted until 27 March. Circular Memo. No. 176, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi and Co-D. G. Tollefsen, 27 March 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2.

and, most importantly, an article in late March in which George Sokolsky “vilified” the Party and told “wantonly absurd” lies about the Third National Congress of the Nationalist Party.¹¹⁰ This time the postal ban was only part of the attack by the government on the *Daily News*. On 18 April Ye Chucang (葉楚傖), chief of the Propaganda Bureau, introduced resolutions to the Standing Committee of the CEC to deport Sokolsky, Hallett Abend of the *New York Times*, and Charles Dailey of the *Chicago Tribune* for making ridiculous statements in their columns and creating “baseless sensations...detrimental to the interests of the Chinese nation.”¹¹¹ The American-owned *China Weekly Review* supported the government’s decision, “There is a world of difference between freedom of the press and license. No sovereign country would put up for a minute with the constant attacks and pin-pricking attitude of a foreign newspaper.”¹¹² The *China Critic*, a Chinese-owned, English-language magazine, declared that the decision to deport Sokolsky and ban the newspaper had been received with the “greatest satisfaction.”¹¹³

Having been banned a second time, the editors of the *North China Daily News* launched a more aggressive campaign against the National Government and their perceived enemies. The postal ban on a British-owned newspaper was probably not the work of “autocratic despots” in Nanjing alone, the British settler newspapers speculated, but part of a larger cabal against them by the Chinese government and pro-Nationalist American journalists from Missouri.¹¹⁴ The *Beijing and Tianjin Times* noted the appointment of “the dean of American newspapermen in the Orient” Thomas F. Millard from Missouri as “Publicity Advisor” to the National Government

¹¹⁰ Circular Memo. No. 197, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi and Co-D. G. E. Tollefsen, 3 May 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2.

¹¹¹ “KMT Action Against Mr. Sokolsky and the *North-China Daily News*,” *China Weekly Review* 48: 9 (27 April 1929): 352-353. On George Sokolsky and the efforts to deport him, see: Warren I. Cohen, *The Chinese Connection: Roger S. Greene, Thomas W. Lamont, George E. Sokolsky and American-East Asian Relations* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 166-168.

¹¹² *China Weekly Review* 48: 9 (27 April 1929): 352-353.

¹¹³ *China Critic*, 25 April 1929.

¹¹⁴ *North China Daily News and Herald*, *China’s Attempt to Muzzle the Foreign Press*, 12, 14.

shortly before the order to deport the three journalists.¹¹⁵ Millard, who had been deported by the British from South Africa during the Boer War, seemed to be taking his revenge. The *Beijing and Tianjin Times* also commented upon the “violently anti-British attitude” in Missouri native J. B. Powell’s *China Weekly Review*. Powell, argued the *Daily News*, “has for some time past been virtually a Nationalist organ” exploiting every piece of information “detrimental to British and other foreign interests.”¹¹⁶ There was in fact a “Missouri News Monopoly” according to Edgar Snow, one of its members, made up of several dozen journalists educated at the University of Missouri including Agnes Smedley and the famous newspaperman-cum-promoter Carl Crow.¹¹⁷ There was also long-standing enmity between the British *North China Daily News*, who derisively called the Missourians “Corn Cobbers,” and two American papers, the Millard-edited *China Press* and Powell-edited *China Weekly Review*, but no evidence exists for a larger cabal.¹¹⁸ The cabal theme, however, died hard. In 1943, Hallett Abend of the *New York Times* wrote of a decade-long “well-organized cabal” against him by the National Government and its Propaganda Bureau, “a sort of Gestapo for control of the mind.”¹¹⁹ Ironically, when the U.S. government censored Abend’s articles in the *Saturday Evening Post* he made no public complaint about the censorship.¹²⁰

A new wrinkle appeared in early May when the Nationalist News Agency reported that the editor of the *Daily News* issued a verbal statement to the Chinese government of his “change

¹¹⁵ *Peking and Tientsin Times*, 6 May 1929. Millard was indeed appointed “Adviser to the Government of the Republic of China” by mid-April 1929. *China Critic* 12: 16 (18 April 1929), 316.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ On the Missouri School of Journalism in China, see: John Maxwell Hamilton, “The Missouri News Monopoly and American Altruism in China: Thomas F. F. Millard, J. B. Powell, and Edgar Snow,” *The Pacific Historical Review* 55: 1 (February 1986): 27-48.

¹¹⁸ The National Government also banned Carl Crow’s *Shanghai Evening Post and Mercury* (大美晚報) twice in the 1930s. *NCH*, 25 March 1930. Zhongguo Guomindang zhongyang weiyuanhui xuanchuanbu gonghan di 1584 hao, 15 May 1936 (Chinese Nationalist Party, Central Executive Committee, Propaganda Bureau, letter no. 1584) in SHAC137(5).6481.

¹¹⁹ Hallett Abend, *My Life in China, 1926-1941* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1943), 98, 132, 141.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 266.

of policy.”¹²¹ This was a face-saving measure by the Chinese government used time-and-again when censoring Chinese-language publications. When the postal ban had lasted long enough, but the editors were still recalcitrant, the government would simply announce the editors had apologized and were going to change their editorial line. The *Daily News* publicly denied any change in policy not wanting to appear apologetic to the Nationalists. This stubborn refusal to accept the government’s claim extended the postal ban by two months. Only on 15 August was the postal ban finally lifted.¹²² A similar exchange took place in 1931 concerning Hallett Abend of the *New York Times*. After two years of mutual recrimination between Abend and the government, back channel negotiations led Abend to write a letter of “regret” for the “misunderstanding” leading to his loss of press privileges in China. With this letter in hand, Foreign Minister C. T. Wang announced Abend’s “sincere regrets on behalf of himself and the *New York Times* for unfair and false news reports concerning China.” Furious, Abend threatened Reuters, who had published Wang’s letter in full, with a lawsuit and cajoled other newspapers to print “corrections” of Wang’s statement. In response, the National Government announced that each side had their own interpretation of the meaning of Abend’s letter.¹²³

Japanese newspapers, too, were subject to Nationalist postal bans. During the Northern Expedition, labor organizers succeeded in establishing postal workers’ unions in most important Head Post Offices. After the Ji’nan Incident, in which the Japanese clashed with Nationalist forces marching towards Beijing, postal workers’ unions across the country surreptitiously applied anti-Japanese propaganda to mail matter.¹²⁴ Although postal authorities kept a lid on such activities, the Beijing Postal Workers’ Union started confiscating and burning the Japanese-

¹²¹ *NCDN*, 8 June 1929.

¹²² Circular Memo. No. 272, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 15 August 1929 in SHAC137.6272-2.

¹²³ Abend, *My Life in China*, 125-132.

¹²⁴ Memo. No. 14/10068, Shanghai Postal Commissioner C. H. Shields to Nanjing D. G. Liu Shufan, 8 May 1928 in SHAC137.8156.

owned, Beijing-based *Shuntian Times* (順天時報), which was considered the unofficial voice of the Japanese embassy.¹²⁵ The Union's repeated confiscations forced high-level talks between Japanese Acting Minister to China Shigemitsu Mamoru (重光葵) and Beiping Major He Qigong (何其鞏).¹²⁶ In a circular letter to all foreign ministers in China, the Japanese Minister argued that the workers' actions violated the 1922 Washington Conference resolution that China maintain an efficient postal service.¹²⁷ Behind the scenes representatives of the National Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Mayor He all tried to stop the workers' actions, as did the Beiping Postal Commissioner, to no avail. The National Government and Nationalist Party separately ordered the Beiping Garrison Headquarters and the local Party branch to stop the workers, but both institutions felt handcuffed by their sympathy with the workers. Minister of Communications Wang Boqun (王伯群) felt that the workers' acts were motivated by "patriotism." To solve the problem, Wang recommended enforcing an official ban on the newspaper, which would give the Japanese "no grounds for complaint."¹²⁸

Although nearly forty Japanese publishers printed newspapers and magazines in China in the late 1920s, only a few actually lost their postal privileges. In late December 1929, Jiang Jieshi ordered a permanent postal ban on the *Shanghai Nichi Nichi Shimbun* (上海日日新聞) for an "absurd editorial."¹²⁹ In response to the publisher's continued obstinacy, the government ordered a termination of all mail and telegraphic privileges for the newspaper's offices.¹³⁰

According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, after the ban on all forms of communications the

¹²⁵ Translation: Petition submitted by the Beiping Postal Workers' Union to Minister of Communications Wang Boqun, August 1928 in SHAC137.2251-13.

¹²⁶ *NCH*, 6 October 1928. Jiaotongbu zhiling di 1257 hao, jiaotongbu buzhang Wang Boqun, 22 September 1928 (Ministry of Communications instruction no. 1257, Minister Wang Boqun) in SHAC137.2251-13.

¹²⁷ *NCH*, 6 October 1928.

¹²⁸ Confidential Letter No. 584 from the Ministry of Communications to the Central Nationalist Party Headquarters, late September 1928 in SHAC137.2251-13.

¹²⁹ Circular Memo No. 363, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 31 December 1929 in SHAC137.6272-3.

¹³⁰ Circular Memo No. 386, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 20 February 1930 in SHAC137.6272-3.

editor repeatedly expressed repentance and Japanese Consul Uemura in Beijing vouched for the content of the newspaper.¹³¹ With the desired result achieved, the Propaganda Bureau lifted the postal ban in late April 1930.¹³² Less than two months later, however, the *Shanghai Nichi Nichi Shimbun* was once again found “publishing false reports with the object of stirring up disturbances and agitating the people” and was permanently banned from the post office.¹³³ This give-and-take process was repeated in 1931 with the Propaganda Bureau banning any article penned by the Japanese News Agency (日本聯合社) after expelling its correspondent from Nanjing. After eight months, the Agency apologized to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs for “having published fabricated news in its press despatches.”¹³⁴

After the Manchurian Incident on 18 September 1931, the Chinese government placed postal bans on a number of publications for carrying positive coverage of the Japanese invasion and mid-1932 establishment of Manzhouguo. Explicitly targeted were Japanese-language and Japanese-controlled newspapers in Manchuria. As tensions rose throughout 1931, the Propaganda Bureau banned the *Shandong News* (山東新報) and the *Tianjin Daily* (天津日報) for publishing “fabricated news reports.”¹³⁵ After the Japanese occupied the northeastern provinces, the Bureau banned seven newspapers – several formerly Chinese-owned, but taken over by the Japanese authorities – the *Manchuria Nippo* (滿洲報) and *Taidong Daily* (泰東日報) out of Dalian, the *Taihoku Nippo* (大北日報) out of Seattle, and the *Northeast Daily* (東北日報),

¹³¹ “Jiaotongbu xunling di 1220 hao, ling youzheng zongju, jiaotongbu buzhang Wang Boqun, 15 April 1930 (Ministry of Communications order no. 1220, instructing the Directorate General of Posts, Minister of Communications Wang Boqun),” *Jiaotong gongbao* 137 (26 April 1930): 9-10.

¹³² Circular Memo. No. 437, Officiating D. G. Lin Shi, 30 April 1930 in SHAC137.2251-11.

¹³³ Circular Memo. No. 471, D. G. Wei Yifu, 22 June 1930 in SHAC137.6272-4.

¹³⁴ Circular Memo. No. 611, D. G. Qian Chunqi, 11 March 1931 in SHAC137.6272-6; Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 755 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Qian Chunqi, 8 October 1931 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular memo. no. 755, D. G. Qian Chunqi) in SHAC137.288-25.

¹³⁵ Circular Memo. No. 609, D. G. Qian Chunqi, 11 March 1931 in SHAC137.6272-6; Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 724 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Qian Chunqi, 13 August 1931 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 724) in SHAC137.288-25.

Gazette of the Three Eastern Provinces (東三省公報), the *Shengjing Times* (盛京時報), and the *Awakening Times* (醒時報) all published in Shenyang.¹³⁶

In the aftermath of the Manchurian Incident, Japanese newspapers were not the only ones who lost their postal privileges for either implicitly or explicitly supporting Japan's actions. On 23 December 1932 the National Government delivered, said the British-owned *North China Daily News*, “a much-needed chastisement” to American George Bronson Rea's *Far Eastern Review*.¹³⁷ According to a government spokesperson, Rea had been hired as an adviser to the Manzhouguo government and was “actively engaged in malicious propaganda against China.”¹³⁸ Rea's cause was not helped when the Japanese Association in China published a booklet entitled *Presenting Japan's Side of the Case* consisting entirely of reprints of Rea and H. G. W. Woodhead's newspaper articles celebrating Japan's efforts to teach China a “lesson” in Manchuria.¹³⁹ In April 1934 the Ministry of Foreign Affairs also banned the *Weekly Graphic*, edited by Edward Dunn, as a “propaganda publication” for “eulogizing the bogus Manzhouguo.”¹⁴⁰

The postal ban occasioning the most public controversy concerned the magazine *Oriental Affairs* and its owner H. G. W. Woodhead, who was the British editor of the *China Year Book* series and a well-known advocate of a hawkish policy towards the National Government. On 16 May 1934, the English-language *People's Tribune*, a magazine sponsored by Wang Jingwei and the Reorganization Clique, demanded a postal ban on *Oriental Affairs* for “pages of praise of Pu

¹³⁶ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 765 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Qian Chunqi, 22 October 1931 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 765, D. G. Qian Chunqi) in SHAC137.288-25.

¹³⁷ *NCH*, 28 December 1932.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ Japanese Association in China, *Presenting Japan's Side of the Case* (Shanghai: Japanese Association in China, 1931); George Bronson Rea, *Manchukuo: Back to First Principles!* (Geneva: Kundig, 1932).

¹⁴⁰ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1296 hao, daili youzheng zongju juzhang Tang Baoshu, 28 April 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular memo. no. 1296, Officiating D. G. Tang Baoshu) in SHAC137.7553-3.

Yi, his ‘Empire,’ his protectors, and his parasites of various nationalities.”¹⁴¹ In addition to Woodhead’s articles, the *People’s Tribune* may also have also been seeking retribution for the British ban on its circulation in Southeast Asia in 1927 and early 1934.¹⁴² Within two weeks, Wang Jingwei, as Minister of Foreign Affairs, suspended the postal privileges of *Oriental Affairs* for “slandering the Party and Government and injuring the interests of China.”¹⁴³

With the public backing of the *North China Daily News*, Woodhead immediately responded to the ban by launching a public relations campaign against both the Chinese government and the *People’s Tribune*. Woodhead began the campaign by characterizing the Chinese government and Post Office as criminals who illegally “filched” his magazine and postage.¹⁴⁴ He also demanded an opportunity to “vindicate” himself in an extraterritorial British Court where the Chinese government would not be able to produce a “tittle” of real evidence of his subversive activities in support of Manzhouguo.¹⁴⁵ Not surprisingly, the *Daily News* championed Woodhead’s cause supporting his demand for a hearing in a British Court.¹⁴⁶ The *People’s Tribune* tackled the demand for a trial by clearly and cogently setting out that the ban was not an infringement of extraterritorial treaty rights, but simply Chinese laws being applied in Chinese territory.¹⁴⁷ Rather than respect the law, Woodhead and his ilk emptied “vials of wrath” on the law-abiding Chinese government. *Tribune* editor Tang Leang-li also explained that the British colonial authorities in British Malaya and Burma banned his magazine without a trial

¹⁴¹ “Extra-Territorial Rights and Responsibilities,” *The People’s Tribune* 6: 10 (16 May 1934): 521-523.

¹⁴² Circular Memo. No. 1987, Co-D. G. Destelan, 8 August 1927 in SHAC137-2023-23.

¹⁴³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1310 hao, daili juzhang Tang Baoshu, 1 June 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, circular memo. no. 1310, Officiating D. G. Tang Baoshu) in SHAC137.7553-3.

¹⁴⁴ *NCH*, 27 June 1934.

¹⁴⁵ *NCH*, 4 July 1934.

¹⁴⁶ *NCH*, 27 June 1934.

¹⁴⁷ “Mr. Woodhead’s Charges of Inconsistency,” *The People’s Tribune* 7: 2 (16 July 1934), 55.

even though none of his articles were “calculated to bring about the downfall of the British Empire.”¹⁴⁸

British and Chinese readers both responded passionately to the ban on *Oriental Affairs*. A British reader, responded to Tang Leang-li, called the *Tribune* a magazine that “publish[s] mere vituperative mudslinging articles that present no facts” while *Oriental Affairs* was a “sober highly-cultured magazine whose every article is crammed with important facts and based on logic” – but, the reader lamented, in China “the jingoes control.”¹⁴⁹ Chinese readers thought Woodhead “supersensitive” to criticisms of his magazine, especially when he saw politics through “colored glasses” by supporting the establishment of Manzhouguo.¹⁵⁰ A certain “Lady Champion” leveled the charge that Woodhead deserved the postal ban because he lived under “benign skies” in extraterritorially-protected Shanghai and still engaged in “pernicious propaganda inimical to the best interests of the Chinese republic.”¹⁵¹

The winner of the public debate between Woodhead and supporters of the postal ban appears to have been the Chinese readers. In late September 1934 Woodhead noted that it had been three months since the ban was effected against his magazine.¹⁵² The Chinese government had not bent and when Woodhead tried extralegal means to avoid the ban by having the Goldsby King Memorial Hospital in Zhenjiang mail out copies of *Oriental Affairs*, the Post Office immediately ordered all offices to take special care to continue detaining the publication.¹⁵³ This order of the Post Office, issued on 13 October, was the last word on the *Oriental Affairs* case.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ “Banned from the Mails for Telling the Truth,” *The People’s Tribune* 7: 7 (1 October 1934), 294; *NCH*, 18 July 1934.

¹⁵⁰ *NCDN*, 25 June 1934.

¹⁵¹ *NCDN*, 5 July 1934.

¹⁵² *Oriental Affairs* 2: 10 (September 1934).

¹⁵³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 1425 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 13 October 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 1425, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6284-1.

In addition to newspapers and magazines, foreign-language books were occasionally banned from circulation through the Post Office. In 1934 the National Government banned the book *Ways That Are Dark: The Truth About China* by Ralph Townsend for its “seditious nature.”¹⁵⁴ Townsend’s essentializing work takes every opportunity to criticize the Chinese and declares he hopes the “Japs beat hell out of them.” The Chinese must have been particular prescient because Townsend, as a member of the “Japanese Committee on Trade and Information,” later pled guilty in U.S. Federal District Court to being an agent of the Japanese government. Other books banned included Agnes Smedley’s *China’s Red Army Marches* and Viktor Yakhontoff’s *The Chinese Soviets*. The Chinese Government found both of them seditious for their positive portrayal of Chinese communism.¹⁵⁵ In special cases, the National Government banned magazines like *Asia* for specific articles. *Asia* received a postal ban for an article entitled “China’s Secret Blood Brothers” implicating the Blue Shirts in the assassinations of Secretary General of Academic Sinica Yang Quan (楊銓), Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Tang Youren (唐有壬), and an attempt on the life of Executive Yuan President Wang Jingwei.¹⁵⁶

The vitriolic discourses by Western publishers living in China attacked the Post Office and National Government through three main tropes. First, the foreign-language newspapers used discourses portraying the Chinese government as “inscrutable” in their use of obscure and secret methods to censor a “free” Western press while attacking the foreign Postal Commissioners as lacking in “manliness” for taking orders from their Chinese superiors. The

¹⁵⁴ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 3 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 27 October 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 3, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.9431.

¹⁵⁵ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 3 hao, 27 October 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 3, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.9431 and Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongchi di 7 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 15 December 1934 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular memo. no. 7, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.9431.

¹⁵⁶ Confidential Circular Memo No. 65 (Translation): “Magazine ‘Asia’ to be prohibited postal transmission, directing,” 29 March 1936 in SHAC137.2251-18; Wilbur Burton, “China’s Secret Blood Brothers,” *Asia* (May 1936): 308-310.

second trope was a vindictive and anti-imperialist Chinese government bent on using illegal means to circumvent and undermine Western treaty rights and who refused to take Western newspapers into court for a “fair hearing.” Third, and infrequently seen, was the trope of conspiracy. In this discourse the Western publishers often imagined darker forces at work against their publications – whether it be a sinister cabal between the Chinese government and anti-British journalists from Missouri or rival Chinese publications, many of the foreign publishers saw bogymen behind the postal bans.

The Nationalists’ rhetoric of anti-imperialism provided a rationale for censoring foreign-language publications deemed threatening to Chinese national interests. The only method for censoring foreign-language publications otherwise protected by extraterritorial treaty rights was using the Post Office to place institutional controls on their circulation. The Chinese government’s legal use of postal censorship demonstrates an important limitation to the system of extraterritorial rights – when a foreign manufactured object past into Chinese territory, whether the object was industrial or intellectual in orientation, it became subject to Chinese laws despite claims to the contrary. Overall, the suspension of postal privileges of Western newspapers was rare. Seen from the institutional perspective of the Post Office, the National Government targeted the most aggressively critical foreign newspapers so that the others might silence themselves.

Wartime Postal Censorship, 1937-1945

The exigencies of war transformed the relationship between postal and other forms of censorship. In the Nanjing decade, the central and local governments used postal censorship primarily as a method for limiting the circulation of seditious publications as defined by the

Bureau of Propaganda. During the War of Resistance, however, the Military Affairs Commission became the most powerful government office and had administrative oversight of all censorship offices. Along with elevating the Military Affairs Commission, the National Government also revised most of its media-related laws to reflect new wartime conditions. Rather than sedition, most of the new laws aimed at detecting “traitorous” information. According to Lee-hsia Hsu Ting, Chongqing censors used these regulations to rule over publishers with an “iron fist,” but period observers also noted that censorship was still sporadic.¹⁵⁷ Foreign reporters told tales about whole despatches being censored, but statistics from the Ministry of Information show that less than one percent of all words despatched by foreign journalists were actually deleted.¹⁵⁸ From the Post Office’s perspective, the wartime hierarchy of censorship bureaucracies and regulations was clear; their mission within the system was to inspect private mail matter in search of traitorous information.¹⁵⁹

In late 1935, as the Japanese continued encroaching in North China, Jiang Jieshi replaced the Propaganda Bureau of the Central Executive Committee as the government’s most powerful censoring organ with several institutions controlled by his Military Affairs Commission. As Chairman of the Commission, Jiang had the power to appoint all censors to “suppress plots by reactionaries, track espionage by the enemy, prevent danger to the nation, halt disturbances of

¹⁵⁷ Ting, *Government Control of the Press*, Chapter VI; Office of Strategic Services, *Scope and Operation of Censorship in China* (Washington: Office of Strategic Services, Research and Analysis Branch, 1944).

¹⁵⁸ Chinese Ministry of Information, *China Handbook, 1937-1945: A Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China in Eight Years of War, Revised and Enlarged with 1946 Supplement* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1947), 511-512.

¹⁵⁹ The various wartime governments did ban a few seditious publications. The National Government banned communist magazines like the *Red Flag* and collaborationist publications such as *Wuhu News*. Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongdaidian di 593 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 26 May 1939 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular mail telegram no. 593, D. G. Guo Xinsong); Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongdaidian di 606 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 8 June 1939 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular mail telegram no. 606, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6275-3.

the peace, forestall damage to the national defense, and undermine threats to foreign affairs.”¹⁶⁰ For operational purposes, Jiang delegated actual censoring authority to Chen Lifu’s Bureau of Investigations and Statistics (調查統計局). The Bureau’s duties included establishing Mail Censorship Offices (郵件檢查所) in all important cities.¹⁶¹ After the war began, Jiang once again reorganized the government offices handling censorship in late 1937. The newly-established Ministry of Information (新聞局) headed up by Tanggu Truce signatory General Xiong Bin (熊斌) administered the Wartime News Censorship Bureau (戰時新聞檢查局); CC Clique leader and newspaperman Pan Gongzhan (潘公展) oversaw the CEC Book and Magazine Inspection Committee (中央圖書雜誌審查委員會), and Jin Bin (金斌), the former head of the Third Office of the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics, managed the Special Censorate (特檢處).¹⁶² With the reorganization of censoring institutions, the National Government and Directorate General of Posts also revised their censorship regulations to reflect the new wartime realities. In late October 1937, the Bureau of Investigations and Statistics distributed the “Temporary Method for Postal and Telegraph Censorship Offices during the Emergency Period” giving local martial law authorities complete control over censors appointed by the Bureau and

¹⁶⁰ “Youdian jianchan shixing guize” (Regulations governing the enforcement of censorship on mail matter and telegrams,” 13 November 1935. The text of these regulations can be found in: Peng Ming, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai shi ziliao xuanji* (Selections of materials from modern Chinese history), Vol. 4 (1931-1937) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1989), 269-270.

¹⁶¹ The duties of the Mail Censorship Offices were to prohibit all mail from transmission that (1) involved reactionary parties and cliques; (2) provoked or intended to divide the Nationalist Party’s efforts; (3) threatened the Republic, national defense, or foreign relations; (4) spread rumors deluding the people; (5) leaked state secrets; (6) were written by traitors or bandits (i. e. Communists); (7) contained espionage; or (8) referred to national defense. Peng Ming, ed., *Zhongguo xiandai shi ziliao xuanji* (Selections of materials from modern Chinese history), Vol. 4 (1931-1937) (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1989), 269-270.

¹⁶² Wang Lingxiao, *Zhongguo Guomindang xinwen zhengce zhi yanjiu, 1928-1945* “A Study of the Kuomintang’s Mass Media Policy, 1928-1945” (Taipei: Jindai Zhongguo chubanshe, 1996).

ordering that copies of all suspicious letters be forwarded for review.¹⁶³ This Method, however, was only an expedient measure until such time as more permanent censorship regulations could be enacted after an important government reorganization.

In August 1938, the Military Affairs Commission once again reorganized several special branches of the party and government. This would be the last major restructuring of the censorship offices for the duration of the war. Jiang Jieshi reorganized the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics into three separate, but interrelated offices – the Bureau of Statistics and Investigation of the Military Affairs Commission (軍事委員會統計調查局), otherwise known as the Juntong, under the leadership of General Dai Li and in charge of espionage, code breaking, information analysis, and paramilitary operations;¹⁶⁴ the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics of the Central Executive Committee (中央執行委員會調查統計局), known as the Zhongtong, headed by Chen Lifu, but under the day-to-day control of Xu Enzeng (徐恩曾) and with oversight of all party related activities; and the Special Postal and Telegraph Censorate (特種郵電檢查處), the least well known of the three, under Jin Bin and in charge of all mail and telegraph censorship in both free and occupied China.¹⁶⁵

Shortly after the establishment of the Special Censorate in September 1938, it issued a revised version of the 1937 postal censorship regulations as well as issued new ones pertaining to the formation of mail censorship offices, both of which outlined the Post Office's new censoring

¹⁶³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongdaidian di 209 hao, fu juzhang Xu Changcheng daixing, 28 October 1937 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular mail telegram no. 209, D. D. G. Xu Changcheng [徐昌成], Acting D.G.) in SHAC137.6275-1.

¹⁶⁴ For an overview of the Juntong, see: Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Spymaster: Dai Li and the Chinese Secret Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); for a general history of the Zhongtong, see: Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshanghui Jiangsu sheng weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao yanjiu weiyuanhui, ed., *Zhongtong neimu* (The inside story of the Zhongtong) (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1987).

¹⁶⁵ The creation of the Special Censorate itself was conveyed to the Directorate in Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongling changzi di 108 hao, fu juzhang daixing, 13 September 1938 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, confidential circular, ordinary series, no. 108) in SHAC137.6282.

functions. Instead of searching for seditious newspapers and magazines, the Post Office was tasked with the inspecting private mail for traitorous information. Traitorous information included anything related to enemy espionage, the activities of traitors, attempts to divide efforts in the War of Resistance, material threatening the Republic, information undermining national defense, rumors designed to upset local peace, and leaks of military or government secrets.¹⁶⁶

With these new regulations, the institutions placing censors in post offices expanded as the government sought to tighten its control over the flow of vital military information. The Special Censorate controlled the appointment of censors in any place where they had an office, but in all other areas, usually rural villages and small towns, local officials could appoint censors under the stipulations of the martial law and in concert with the 1938 “Provisional Regulations Governing Censorship of Mail and Telegrams by the Party Branches or Civil or Military Authorities at Places Where No Censoring Offices are Established.”¹⁶⁷ In larger cities, a hierarchy of censorship offices existed within similarly ranked post offices. The staff of such offices, none of whom were postal employees, consisted of an office manager, examiners, technicians, censors, general clerks, and secretaries. Each staff member had specifically enumerated duties such as the technicians who developed methods to open and close mails

¹⁶⁶ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongling changzi di 107 hao, fu juzhang Xu Changcheng daixing, 7 September 1938 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular, ordinary series no. 107, D. D. G. Xu Changcheng, Acting D.G.) in SHAC137.6282. The Military Affairs Commission revised both of these regulations again in June 1939, but only made one substantive change by adding radio content to the material subject to censorship. Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongling changzi di 116 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 22 July 1939 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular, ordinary series no. 116, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6282.

¹⁶⁷ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongling changzi di 109 hao, fu juzhang Xu Changcheng daixing, 29 September 1938 (Minister of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular, ordinary series no. 109, D. D. G. Xu Changcheng, Acting D.G.); Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongling changzi di 115 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 14 July 1939 (Minister of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular, ordinary series no. 115, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6282; Youzheng zongju mi zhi 85/1633, Zhejiang youzheng guanlijū, 28 May 1938 (Directorate General of Posts confidential directive no. 85/1633 to the Zhejiang head post office) in SHAC137.1084.

undetected. In rural areas, however, local officials usually only appointed one or two censors to perform all the necessary duties.

During the war, the Directorate General of Posts also worked out a number of ad hoc agreements with the Japanese military and its allied North China collaborationist regimes to maintain administrative authority over most post offices in occupied China, as discussed in Chapter 1.¹⁶⁸ The Japanese and North China regimes were willing to permit the continued operation of the Directorate in occupied zones because of the considerable cost and administrative expertise necessary to operate an extensive postal service and the difficulty of sustaining lines of communication on constantly shifting battlefields.¹⁶⁹ Prior to the Japanese takeover, which was an informal and incremental process only completed in 1944, the Free China Directorate appointed foreign postal commissioners to head offices in occupied zones. It was a strategy designed to keep the Japanese and North China regimes from taking control of the post offices and to curb their various demands for greater autonomy, especially in the realm of postal censorship.

Most of the censors appointed by the Chongqing, Japanese, and North China governments to work in post offices were military rather than civilian. For example, in Hunan between August 1939 and May 1940, fourteen military units such as the Headquarters of the 70th Army and the Political Department of the 52nd Army installed censors in local post offices.¹⁷⁰ These censors were unrelated to the Military Post (軍郵) system run by the Rear Area

¹⁶⁸ Circular S/O No. 15, Letter from D. G. of Posts (Shanghai Working Office), D. D. G. Chapelain, 23 December 1939 to D. G. Guo Xinsong in Kunming in SHAC137.2251-20.

¹⁶⁹ Liao Dexiu, “Kangshi xianqu youzheng de weichi yu kanghou jieshou gaikuang” “Wartime Postal Service in Japanese-Occupied Areas and Their Postwar Takeover,” *Jindai Zhongguo* “Modern China Bimonthly” 90 (1 August 1992): 61-87; Yang Jiayu, “Kangzhan shiqi Guo tong qu yu lunxianqu zhijian tongyou wenti shulüe” (An analysis of the problem of postal communication between the Guomindang and occupied areas during the War of Resistance), *Shanxi shida xuebao (shehui kexue ban)* “Journal of Shanxi Teacher’s University (Social Science Edition)” 27: 4 (October 2000): 86-90.

¹⁷⁰ Hunan youzheng guanliju mi cheng di 262/28896 hao, Hunan youzheng guanliju juzhang, 31 August 1939 (Hunan head post office confidential petition no. 262/28896, Hunan Postal Director) in SHAC137.1088-1 & 2.

Mobilization Department of the Military Affairs Commission (軍事委員會後方勤務部) and were usually somewhat educated soldiers assigned the duties.¹⁷¹ Post Office records of Japanese installed as censors shows they were virtually the same type as those appointed by the Chongqing authorities – route armies, self-defense units, police departments, and county governments.¹⁷² The Directorate ensured identical rules applied to all censors – Chinese or Japanese – working in post offices such as affixing censorship marks on all opened mails, but the Post Office did allow Chinese censors behind the frontlines could use secret impressions.¹⁷³

Little is known about the Chongqing-appointed secret censors working behind enemy lines, but the following example seems representative.¹⁷⁴ In 1937, two officials of the Yunxiao County (雲霄縣) government, a place about equidistant between Shantou and Xiamen and in the occupied zone, recommended primary school principal Chen Fengqi to the Special Censorate as a possible secret postal censor. Shortly thereafter, the Special Censorate appointed Chen an official Mail and Telegraph Censor (郵電檢查員) giving him a special code name, “River Swan,” and a censor’s identity card, badge, and seal. Chen’s superior was Chief of the Special Censorate Jin Bin who was replaced by Li Xiaobai (李肖白), code-named “Thunder Shock,” in 1941. During the war, the Special Censorate maintained Mail Censorship Offices in Fuzhou and

¹⁷¹ On the Military Post and its relationship to the Directorate, see: Lu Shengkui, *Junyou yanjiu* (Research on the military postal service) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu jiaotong yanjiusuo, 1959) and An Guoji, *Kangzhan junyou shi: Zhonghua youzheng bashi zhounian jinian* (History of the military post during the war of resistance: Commemorating the 80th anniversary of the Chinese postal service) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1976).

¹⁷² Confidential S.O. No. 728, Nanjing Postal Director to D. D. G. Chapelain, Shanghai Working Office, 25 January 1943 in SHAC137.5899.

¹⁷³ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongling changzi di 117 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 19 August 1939 (Minister of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular, ordinary series no. 117, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6282; Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju mi tongdaidian di 316 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 21 June 1938 (Ministry of Communications, D. G. of Posts, confidential circular mail telegram no. 316, D. G. Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6275-1.

¹⁷⁴ For an overview of the wartime censorship regime from a participant, see: Li Bangxun, “Tewu jigou de youdian jiancha huodong” (Mail and telegram censorship activities of the special services) (1963) in *Wenshi ziliao cunqao xuanbian 14 tegong zuzhi* (Historical and literary materials, draft collection no. 14: Secret services), edited by Quanguo zhengxie wenshi ziliao wenyuan hui, ed., 2 vols. (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2002).

Xiamen to oversee the activities of censors in the surrounding rural counties. When Japanese activities in Xiamen became too threatening, the Mail Censorship Office moved to Zhangzhou from where it directly controlled Chen and his activities. Chen's main duty was to carry out censorship of mail matter written by Japanese, known collaborators, traitors, and other objectionable groups. He worked from 4 p.m. everyday opening letters and inspecting their contents in a hidden room inside the post office. After inspecting the contents of a letter, Chen placed his censorship mark, in his case a small "S," on top of the stamp, which was then obliterated by a postal employee with the goal of hiding the mark. If and when traitorous material was found, Chen carefully copied the contents of the letters and forwarded them to the Zhangzhou Office for final decision. If ordered, Chen destroyed the traitorous letter and the Zhangzhou Office forwarded its copy to the Special Censorate in Chongqing for filing and intelligence purposes.¹⁷⁵

Postal employees in occupied areas cooperated fully with censors appointed by the Chongqing-based National Government, but used go-slow or obstructionist methods, as much as possible without endangering themselves, with censors placed by the Japanese or collaborationist governments. The Japanese censors frequently objected to post office regulations requiring all opened letters to be duly marked as censored, especially in places like Nanjing where they inspected between 80 and 90 percent of all letters. In October 1940, the Japanese Gendarmerie in Nanjing physically threatened the foreign Jiangsu Postal Director, an effective threat given the Japanese arrest and detention of several postal workers in other districts, to keep quiet about their activities.¹⁷⁶ Some of the more rapacious Japanese censors based in small towns harassed

¹⁷⁵ Chen Fengqi, "Kangzhan zhong wo danren youcha gongzuo de huiyi" (Recollections on my work as a postal censor during the war), *Yunxiao wenshi ziliao* (Historical and literary materials of Yunxiao) 13 (1989): 136-137.

¹⁷⁶ S/O No. 84, Nanjing Postal Commissioner to D. D. G. Chapelain, Shanghai Working Office, 28 October 1940 in SHAC137.5894.

postmasters demanding expensive gifts – a scroll signed by Li Hongzhang in one case – as well as tobacco, wine money, and luxurious dinners.¹⁷⁷ Some postal employees, including the well-known essayist Tang Tao (唐弢), publicly complained about Japanese censorship, but most of the staff remained cordial, if appropriately distant.¹⁷⁸

The sum total of letters seized by the Chongqing, Japanese, and collaborationist governments during eight years of war must have run into the millions, which was still only a tiny fraction of the 6.3 billion pieces of mail matter handled by the Post Office over this period.¹⁷⁹ Although no cumulative statistics on mail matter seized have ever been found, each Head Office did maintain detailed figures in their seizure memos, which were records of all mails confiscated by the censors in local post offices and forwarded to each Head Office at the end of every month. For example, out of 7.5 million letters handled by post offices in occupied and unoccupied Anhui in 1942, employees of the Special Censorate and local military units confiscated twenty thousand individual letters for various reasons.¹⁸⁰

The web of wartime censorship remains difficult to untangle, but several aspects demonstrate important changes in the development of postal censorship. The introduction and widespread application of prepublication censorship of newspapers, magazines, and books during the war fundamentally altered the role of the post office within the complex, interrelated censorship network. Wartime necessity and the proliferation of different types of censoring

¹⁷⁷ Enclosure to Nanjing-D.G. Working Office, Confidential S/O No. 141, 21 December 1940; Copy of Zhenjiang-Nanjing Confidential S/O No. 87, 18 December 1940 in SHAC137.5895; Shanghai youzheng guanliju gonghan di 218/90268 hao, Shanghai youzheng guanliju juzhang Zhapeilin, 28 June 1943 (Shanghai Head Post Office, Letter no. 218/90268, Shanghai Postal Director Chapelain) in SHAC137.5679.

¹⁷⁸ Tang Tao, “Youjian jiancha” (Mail censorship) in *Tang Tao wenji* (The collected works of Tang Tao) (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 1995), II: 76-78; Dong Zicai, “Ri wei shiqi de Jingxing youzheng ju” (The Jingxing post office during the puppet and Japanese periods), *Shijiazhuang wenshi ziliao* (Literary and historical materials from Shijiazhuang) 9 (1989): 109-115; reprinted *QGGJZXWSZL: YDSL*, I: 157-160.

¹⁷⁹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhongguo youzheng tongji huiji* (Collection of Chinese postal service statistics) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1956), 121.

¹⁸⁰ Seizure Memos Nos. 5, 8, 9, 15, 16, 19, 20, 22, 24, 26, 27 all in 1942 and 1/15 in 1943 in SHAC137.1155.

institutions pushed the Post Office towards specializing in the inspection of letter mails. Instead of seditious content, postal censors sought “traitorous” information contained within private letters, especially as it related to military operations. As the war progressed, the number of institutions who could place censors in post offices also expanded to include thousands of military censors. Not only did the Chongqing government appoint censors during the war, but so did the Japanese and North China regimes. The rather unusual administrative position of the Directorate vis-à-vis its offices in occupied China wherein the Directorate maintained actual control until late 1943, and nominal control until 1945, forced postal administrators to forge ad hoc agreements with the occupation authorities permitting the installation of enemy censors in a Chinese government institution, but such arrangements also permitted the Chongqing government to place secret censors in offices in the occupied areas.

Postal Censorship during the Civil War, 1945-1949

After the Japanese surrender the confused state of government affairs, the constant movement of troops, and major reforms and administrative adjustments inside the Post Office make it difficult to determine the exact nature or general features of older forms of postal censorship. Starting in January 1947, the National Government apparently stopped banning specific publications. Instead, all mail, not just suspicious letters or seditious publications, passing into Communist areas had to be strictly censored.¹⁸¹ By August, when the Communist military forces started gaining momentum, the National Government abandoned attempts to censor the mail and instituted a total postal blockade of all communist-held areas.¹⁸² After blockading the north for a

¹⁸¹ Yuan Wuzhen, “Minzhu geming shiqi Guo-Gong liangqu tongyou de qiyuan jiqi yanbian” (The origin and evolution of postal connections between the Guomindang and Communist areas during the democratic revolution,” *Xi’an youdian xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of Xi’an telecommunications university) 7: 4 (September 2002), 13.

¹⁸² Ibid.

solid year, public pressure began to increase on the government. The Post Office, too, asked the central government to re-open postal communications to “meet the needs of the public.”¹⁸³

Nationalist and Communist representatives finally met at the North-South Postal Communication Conference in Beiping in April 1949 to create a working procedure for the exchange of mails, including the elimination of postal censorship. Continuing reverses on the battlefield, however, and the retreat of most Nationalist offices to Guangzhou in mid-1949 forced the Executive Yuan to abrogate the conference agreements and reinstitute the blockade, which remained in effect in Nationalist held areas on the mainland until January 1950.¹⁸⁴

Conclusion

Between 1903 and 1949 the Post Office gradually became the most important censorship institution within the government for policing the public sphere. The advent and spread of modern publishing required the late Qing, Beiyang, warlord, and Nationalist governments to restructure themselves in order to fully utilize the Post Office to place institutional controls on the circulation of seditious or objectionable printed matter. Starting with the transformation of the late imperial state into a ministerial-style government, the New Policies reformers began creating the necessary legal mechanisms for defining legitimate speech, established a bureaucratic hierarchy within the censorship regime, promulgated postal regulations to carry out censorship, and assigned responsibility for policing the public sphere.

The creation of this rational-legal censorship regime in the late Qing began the long-term transition from violent to generally non-violent means of censorship. From the state's

¹⁸³ Wang Yuwen, “Jiefang qianxi Guo-Gong liangqu tongyou banli gaikuang” (Mail exchange between the Communist and Nationalist areas on the eve of liberation), *Lishi dang'an* “Historical Archives” 1 (1989), 120.

¹⁸⁴ The newly established Taipei D. G. of Posts maintained a Working Office in Chongqing under Postal Director Huang Jiade until 6 January 1950. Xue Pinwen, *Youzheng zuzhi yan'ge* (The evolution of postal service organization) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1966), 9.

perspective, violent forms of suppression are best suited to silencing individuals or small revolutionary groups. As the public sphere continued to develop in the late Qing and early Republic with the spread of modern media forms like newspapers, magazines, and books, the state increasingly relied on the Post Office to censor seditious speech. In the late Qing and under Yuan Shikai, the government targeted radical groups expressly advocating the overthrow of the government; however, during the warlord years, the rulers of Beijing structured their administrative practices to allow the Ministry of Communications to be used by any local militarist to suppress locally-defined sedition. With the establishment of the Nationalist Party-State in 1927, the Propaganda Bureau of the Central Executive Committee became the primary institution defining legitimate speech. Not surprisingly, the Bureau used its powers to target ideological enemies such as the Communists, anarchists, and the fascistic Youth Party.

Along with attempts to ban its ideological enemies from the public sphere, the National Government also regularized the use of temporary postal bans against commercial and foreign-language publications. Such bans were usually imposed for specific offensive articles. By suspending the postal privileges of offending publishers, the National Government was using censorship to economically punish its critics. Public reactions to such tactics were split between Chinese and foreigners. While Chinese publishers tended to remain silent for fear of further reprisals, foreigners publicly complained about the censorship – even though it was both legal and avoided infringing on extraterritorial rights – through discourses describing the Nationalist regime as corrupt (inconsistent) and personalist (heavy-handed). It is these discourses, rather than research through the relevant institutions, that have continued to shape our perceptions of censorship in the Nanjing decade.

During the War of Resistance, the National Government reorganized itself elevating the Military Affairs Commission to the most powerful political office in the country. Under the Military Affairs Commission, Jiang Jieshi created a host of new censorship institutions. Within this new censorship regime, the function of the Post Office changed dramatically. With other government institutions conducting prepublication inspections of printed matter – relieving the Post Office from censoring newspapers and magazines – censors placed in the Post Office by outside institutions focused their work on inspecting private mail matter for “traitorous” information. With the need to inspect hundreds of millions of letters each year, the government granted wide-ranging powers to local civilian and military offices to place such censors in post offices. Because of the unusual administrative presence of the Directorate in the occupied zones, the Japanese military and North China collaborationist regimes could also place their censors in the Post Office. The Special Censorate, in charge of wartime postal censorship, also took advantage of the situation by placing secret censors in post offices in occupied China. Even with an expanded cadre of local censors, however, officials could not begin to inspect the billions of articles of mail matter passing through the Post Office during eight years of war.

The historiographical construct of Chinese censorship in the early twentieth century as both heavy and sporadic, this chapter has also shown, derives from a reliance on statements from the censored authors. There were particular moments of “heavy” formal censorship, notably the Yuan Shikai era and the first years of Nationalist rule, but the amount of material censored remained fairly constant over the entire period as a tiny fraction of the published material circulating throughout the country. Indeed, far more effective than any form of censorship in early twentieth-century China was the threat it implied forcing writers and publishers to silence or censor themselves.

Chapter 6
Advertising, Publicity, and Uniformed Bodies:
The Institutional Identity of the Chinese Post Office

In the late Qing and throughout the Republican period the inception and development of new state administrative institutions like the Post Office coincided with the emergence of various innovative practices broadly related to publicity, or what later came to be called public relations, helping to simultaneously create new notions of institution building and state formation. Prior to the late nineteenth century, Chinese views on limited government and state secrecy meant that imperial institutions paid little attention to creating institutional identities, publishing extensive information on their activities, or advertising their functions and services. In direct response to the growth of a public sphere and as part of larger global and local trends towards “good government” – that is, increasing levels of government accountability to its citizenry – we begin to detect a subtle but growing sensitivity in China to the values of government transparency and the dissemination of information to the public.

In studies of the Chinese public sphere, scholars have focused exclusively on the formation of the public sphere in civil society overlooking the state’s reaction to these developments – notwithstanding direct responses to specific local grievances – through its own structural reforms and use of innovative practices.¹ As social groups and elites who agitated for political and economic reforms began spreading new types of information, and sought to discursively attack the various state regimes, these governments responded with their own publicity campaigns through the creation of statistical bureaux, government information offices,

¹ By and large, Western scholars of China have approached the public sphere by exclusively focusing on the social mechanisms at its core, but ignore the state’s larger structural reforms in response to its appearance. On the public sphere in China, see: Mary B. Rankin, “Some Observations on a Chinese Public Sphere,” *Modern China* 19: 2 (1993): 158-182; William T. Rowe, “The Public Sphere in Modern China,” *Modern China* 16: 3 (1990): 309-329; Philip C. C. Huang, “‘Public Sphere’/‘Civil Society’ in China?: The Third Realm between State and Society,” *Modern China* 19: 2 (April 1993): 216-240.

government-run news agencies, propaganda or “publicity” offices, the publication of government and ministerial gazettes, the hiring of foreign public relations experts, the empanelling of special commissions to report on “social problems,” and so on. Modern notions of government openness and transparency materialized, and were partially fostered by, contemporary advertising practices, new conceptions of institutional identity, an appreciation of the value of public information, and fresh perspectives on the relationship between state-making and public opinion. In other words, the late Qing and Republican states began to understand the value of a sophisticated and systematic communications system of public relations to the pursuit of their political agenda of establishing viable administrative institutions, and, concomitantly, the modern state.

Most studies of institution building focus on internal bureaucratization, the socialization of institutional members, and the creation of an organizational culture.² These Weberian-inspired studies have correctly pointed out the importance of centralization, physical control over the territory of the state, state autonomy from interest groups, and internationally-recognized sovereignty over the areas claimed by the state as vital to the development of a “legitimate” state. While some of these studies have noted the importance of relations between government institutions, they have largely ignored the interrelationship between a broadly defined publicity- and publicly-oriented “media” and institution building as a contributory factor in the creation of the modern state.

As both a new government institution in the late Qing responding to the public sphere and an institution finely-attuned to the importance of communications, the modern Chinese Post

² Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, translated, edited, and introduced by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 196-244. The secondary literature on institution building and bureaucratization in China is growing. The best study on the Republican era is Julia C. Strauss, *Strong Institutions in Weak Polities: State Building in Republican China, 1927-1940* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

Office provides an excellent avenue to approach the complex relations between the public, state-sponsored public relations, and institutional identity as they emerged in the twentieth century.³

The Post Office is one of the more peculiar institutions of the modern state in that it requires a corporate identity immediately recognizable to the public in order to create consumer confidence in the state's ability to efficiently handle a wide range of customer services while protecting the inviolability of the mails. Considering that modern postal services were all but foreign to the vast majority of Chinese, a positive corporate identity and the values it expressed played a significant role in the acceptance and development of postal business and the perception of Post Office as an effective branch of the state.

From its inception, the Post Office faced the considerable task of building an institutional identity. Institutional identity consists of three main criteria – a claimed set of central characteristics, a claimed distinctiveness from similar organizations, and a claimed temporal continuity.⁴ The Post Office's corporate identity helped it foster a favorable public reputation by fulfilling these three criteria. The ways in which the Post Office "advertised" its corporate identity to the public – as well as engaged the public sphere within civil society – included yearly institutional reports, direct print advertising, signage, and public announcements as well as a whole host of visual and written "media" including corporate ephemera, the use of institutional colors, the uniformed bodies of mailmen, the vehicles used by the Post Office, the iconography of stamps and slogans of commemorative postmarks, the architectural styles of post offices, and postal flags.

³ Institutional or corporate identity construction is a rather new historical field. The works that have inspired and guided the following discussion include: Richard S. Tedlow, *Keeping the Corporate Image: Public Relations and Business, 1900-1950* (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1979); David E. Nye, *Image Worlds: Corporate Identities at General Electric, 1890-1930* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

⁴ Stuart Albert and David A. Whetten, "Organizational Identity," in *Research in Organizational Behavior*, Volume 7, edited by L. L. Cummings and Barry M. Staw (Greenwich, CT: JAI Press, 1985), 265.

This chapter will focus specifically on the construction of the Post Office's corporate identity through the yearly *Working Reports*, advertising, its use of color branding, the uniforms worn by postal workers, and behavioral regulations for postal staff. These various "media" – print, color, clothing, and bodies – were just some of the ways the Post Office engaged the public. Overall, the Post Office's efforts at broadly-defined public relations aimed at fostering a public perception of and reputation for the Post Office as modern, competitive, innovative, efficient, service-oriented, and trustworthy. Postal officials created continuous and repeated associations between the Post Office and certain symbols, colors, and values to construct this unique and enduring corporate identity.

The Background of the Working Reports

The dual challenges of Western encroachment and internal rebellion in the nineteenth century pushed an ever growing segment of Chinese officialdom towards reform. While the general shape of the subsequent reform periods is well known – the Tongzhi Restoration (1862-1874) bleeding over into the longer Self-Strengthening Movement (1862-1895) followed by the brief Hundred Days' Reforms (1898) and concluding with the New Policies Reforms (1901-1911) – what has often been overlooked in histories of these various efforts was the need for and production of information by the government.⁵ As in European history, the advent of government reforms coincided with growing appetite for information, or more accurate

⁵ Some of the better studies of these reform movements include: Meribeth E. Cameron, *The Reform Movement in China, 1898-1912* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1931); Mary Clabaugh Wright, *The Last Stand of Chinese Conservatism: The T'ung-ch'ih Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1957); Paul Cohen and John Schrecker, eds., *Reform in Nineteenth-Century China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Douglas R. Reynolds, *China, 1898-1912: The Xinzheng Revolution and Japan* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian Studies, Harvard University Press, 1993); Peter Zarrow and Rebecca E. Karl, eds., *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2002).

information, on the condition of the country – its population, its trades, its land, its tax base, and so on.

Historians of Europe remain conflicted over the exact origins of this information revolution. Paul Slack sees the rise of “political arithmetic,” or the reasoned use of figures for things related to government, in seventeenth century England as the “pioneering phase” in the modern use of information. With a slightly different emphasis, Daniel Headrick argues that “information technologies” only “came of age” in the eighteenth century when various techniques such as graphs, statistical tables, and encyclopedias were created to manage large amounts of information in rather simple forms. Edward Higgs pushes the rise of the “Information State” to the late Victorian period when declining British global hegemony forced the government to utilize information for social control.⁶ In the Qing, the demand for systematically collected data and statistics went hand-in-hand with broader efforts to modernize the empire at the end of the nineteenth century.

The last two decades of the Qing dynasty saw an explosion in the collection, production, and use of information. During Court Reforms of 1895-98, the Guangxu Emperor authorized the establishment of a central government printing office and other reformers founded at least 62 others.⁷ During the reform summer of 1898, one historian claims, Kang Youwei’s main activity was not carrying out reforms, but “supplying information” collected from abroad and around the

⁶ Paul Slack, “Government and Information in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Past and Present* (August 2004), 33; Daniel R. Headrick, *When Information Came of Age: Technologies of Knowledge in the Age of Reason and Revolution, 1700-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000); Edward Higgs, “The Rise of the Information State: The Development of Central State Surveillance of the Citizen in England, 1500-2000,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 14: 2 (June 2001), 183.

⁷ Lü Xiaobo, “Court-Sponsored Reforms, 1895-1898,” in *China, 1895-1912: State-Sponsored Reforms and China’s Late-Qing Revolution, Selected Essays from Zhongguo Jindai Shi*, edited and translated by Douglas R. Reynolds (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 54.

country in support of his ideas.⁸ The vast amounts of information Kang presented to the Guangxu Emperor was not randomly produced, but carefully selected to advocate needed reforms. That summer the Guangxu Emperor also authorized the publication of new-style government newspapers.

At the beginning of the New Policies Reforms in 1901, Yuan Shikai began publishing the first widely-read new-style government gazette to “spread information, enlighten opinions, and improve communications.”⁹ Called the *Northern Ocean Official Gazette* (北洋官報), Yuan’s magazine continued to contain official government news, as the centuries-old *dibao* (*Metropolitan Gazette*, 邸報) had done, but also disseminated information on foreign news, politics, scholarship, contemporary affairs, industry, and other topics. It became the new “voice of the government.”¹⁰ It was, as one historian puts it, innovative in “making public” all legislation to the citizenry.¹¹

Yuan’s gazette inaugurated what Roswell Britton called a “*guanbao* vogue” that swept the country.¹² Over the next decade nearly one hundred government gazettes appeared.¹³ Various explanations can be offered for this “vogue” – government competition with the private press, as reformist vehicles for creating a public constituency against government conservatives, to coordinate reform efforts, or to inform the citizenry in preparation for constitutional rule. As

⁸ Young-tsu Wong, “Revisionism Reconsidered: Kang Youwei and the Reform Movement of 1898,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 51: 3 (August 1992), 526.

⁹ Several “official gazettes” existed prior to 1901, but there is little information on them. This quote from the first issue of the *Beiyang guanbao* is translated in Andrew J. Nathan, “The Late Ch’ing Press: Role, Audience and Impact,” *Proceedings of the International Conference on Sinology* (1980), 1291.

¹⁰ Quoted in Barbara Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?: Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai’s News Media, 1872-1912* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2004), 237.

¹¹ Xu Jianping, “Qingmo Zhili difang guanbao de xingqi jiqi zhengzhi biaoda” (The rise of Zhili local official gazettes in the late Qing and their political expressions), *Lishi dang’an* (Historical archives) 2 (2007), 92.

¹² Roswell S. Britton, *The Chinese Periodical Press, 1800-1912* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh, 1933), 108.

¹³ For an incomplete list of the new government gazettes published in the late Qing, see: Roger Thompson, “New-Style Gazettes and Provincial Reports in Post-Boxer China: An Introduction and Assessment,” *Late Imperial China* 8: 2 (December 1987), 92-95.

the generalist new-style government gazettes proliferated newly-established central government ministries also started publishing more narrowly self-interested gazettes on their activities. In 1906, the newly-established Ministry of Agriculture, Industry, and Commerce immediately started publishing the *Commercial Affairs Official Gazette*, the Ministry of Education established the *Ministry of Education Gazette*, and the Ministry of Posts and Communications started issuing the *Communications Gazette*. What we seen, then, is a gradual shift from general government gazettes to ministerial gazettes.¹⁴

Coinciding with the appearance of the gazettes, all types of information-gathering and disseminating institutions were established such as statistical and information offices, sociology departments, a new census bureau, cartographic societies, weather monitoring stations, chambers of commerce, news agencies, inspection teams, and public relations offices. The new emphasis on information stemmed from the now prevalent assumption that to govern effectively, the state must have better knowledge of the country and its people. Epitomizing this new need for information, He Minhun, the Nationalist Party-appointed mayor of Nanjing in 1927 wrote, “In order to improve the lives of the people, build a state, and revive the nation, we must first understand social conditions. In order to understand social conditions we must first conduct surveys.”¹⁵

From the early Tongzhi period through the early years of the Republic constitutes the first stage in the so-called information revolution in China. Massive amounts of information were assembled and disseminated through all sorts of government, public, and private institutions.

¹⁴ Mittler, *A Newspaper for China?*, 237-238; Nathan, “The Late Ch’ing Press,” 1292; Li Siyi, “Qingmo 10 nian guanbao huodong gaimao” (A general picture of the government gazette activities in the last ten years of the Qing), *Xinwen yanjiu ziliao* (Research materials on newspapers) 55 (1991), 130; Zhang Xiaoli, “Qingmo ‘Xinzheng’ shiqi de difang guanbao” (Local official gazettes in the late Qing ‘New Policies’ period), *Fujian luntan: Renwen shehui kexue ban* “Fujian Tribune: A Literature, History, and Philosophy Bimonthly” 11 (2005): 31-35.

¹⁵ Quoted in Zvia Lipkin, *Useless to the State: “Social Problems” and Social Engineering in Nationalist Nanjing, 1927-1937* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 45.

New forms of information systems were introduced like statistics, graphs, maps, encyclopedia, modern dictionaries, public archives, and photographic series. The importance and efforts of the government to collect all kinds information suggests that information itself became fetishized – that simply collecting it was a “public good.” On an individual basis, each of the information-packed government gazettes and reports contains qualitative narratives and quantitative statistics professing institutional origins, ideology, operational rationale, and identity making them the best source to study corporate institutional identity in Republican China.

The Working Reports, Public Information, and Corporate Identity

From 1904 to 1943, the Post Office published its *Reports on the Working of the Chinese Post Office* (中國郵政事務總論) containing qualitative descriptions and quantitative evidence on the general state of the Post Office and its development.¹⁶ This form of a publicly available report on the progress of a state institution probably originated with the Imperial Maritime Customs Service when they started issuing a wide range of trade reports in the 1850s.¹⁷ The annual *Working Reports* were published in a large format (8½” x 11”), on imported heavily bonded paper, and printed in English, Chinese, and bilingual editions with high-quality photographs and copious statistics, tables, and graphs. Most significantly, the Inspectorate made the *Working*

¹⁶ The official name of these Reports changed several times. For convenience sake I shall refer to them simply as the *Working Reports*. Inspectorate General of Posts, *Report on the Working of the Imperial Post Office* (Shanghai: Supply Department, 1905-1911); Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, *Report on the Working of the Chinese Post Office* (Shanghai: Supply Department of the Directorate General of Posts, 1912-1943). For Chinese versions, see: Zhang Zhihe and Hu Zhongyuan, eds., *Zhongguo youzheng shiwu zonglun* (Reports on the working of the Chinese Post Office), 3 vols. (Beijing: Yanshan chubanshe, 1995).

The first *Working Report* was actually an internal document. Postal Secretary’s Report on the year 1902, 7 April 1903 in SHAC137.5277.

¹⁷ Thomas P. Lyons, *China Maritime Customs and China’s Trade Statistics, 1859-1948* (Trumansburg, NY: Willow Creek of Trumansburg, 2003).

Reports available for purchase at all Post Offices indicating their goals of informing and influencing the public and governmental perception of the Post Office.

The *Working Reports* served several important functions. As a form of public relations, they contained a fairly consistent narrative arch making them a manifestation of institutional identity. They also informed both the public and government of postal progress to demonstrate the value of the Post Office as the communications institution holding together the empire/state. Finally, they provided government officials and researchers with statistical evidence of the growth of the postal network. In other words, they were a form of publicity designed to provide information “in the public interest.” The Directorate did not publish a catalog of all postal happenings or statistics, but purposefully collected, selected, and manipulated both their narratives and statistics in order to, among other things, create and shape a manifestly positive identity for the Post Office by repeatedly emphasizing the qualities of progress (“extension,” in postal terms), competitiveness, efficiency, innovation, and uniqueness. The *Working Reports*, to borrow Ricour’s apt phrase, were “a synthesis of the heterogeneous” crafting an intelligible story of modernization and institutional growth out of the total of postal events.¹⁸

The Structure of the Working Reports

The narrative structure of the *Working Reports* consists of two symbiotic sections plotting the development of the Chinese Post Office as a triumphalist march towards modernization and the creation of a modern Chinese nation-state. The discursive structure utilized both qualitative narratives describing postal progress and quantitative statistical series verifying, but magnifying, the narratives. Each of these representational forms – narrative and statistics – measured and

¹⁸ Paul Ricour, *Time and Narrative*, Vol. 1, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 66.

constructed reality in different ways seeking to convince different reading publics, or the same reading publics in different ways, of the value and identity of the Post Office. The narratives and statistics of the *Working Reports* thus, in Hayden White's terms, gave an "illusory coherence" to postal history and identity.¹⁹

The narratives embodied in the *Working Reports* are structured to work through persuasion. They engage their reading public by making "rational" arguments demonstrating the positive qualities of the Post Office while supporting its conclusions by using the rhetorical device of human interest stories. For example, a discussion of parcel post expansion is supported by mention of parcels sent by a German hair-net business in Shandong in 1910 received prepared hair from Germany or a rise in money orders as a result of the Chinese Labor Corps operating in Europe during World War I.²⁰

Supporting the narratives throughout the *Working Reports* are numerous "objective" quantifiers such as enumerated figures, statistical tables, and illustrative graphs, each functioning differently in the narratives. Enumerated figures reveal fairly straightforward conclusions – 4,958 letters seized from the Minxinju in 1923 as against 5,425 in 1922; therefore, the Post Office is effectively undercutting its main competitor. Statistical tables, something relatively new in Chinese history, condensed large numbers of figures into simple comparative and readily comprehensible formats.²¹ The statistical tables in the *Working Reports*, usually arranged in a time series and broken down by postal district, gave "objective" evidence supporting narrative

¹⁹ Hayden White, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), ix.

²⁰ *RWCPO*, 1910, 6; *RWCPO*, 1917, 11.

²¹ In 1873 the Imperial Maritime Customs Service was the first Qing institution to collect modern statistics. The Post Office was second starting in 1897. Andrea Eberhard-Bréard, "Robert Hart and China's Statistical Revolution," *Modern Asian Studies* 40: 3 (2006): 605-629. It was not until 1905 that the Qing government established its own statistical office when it created the Office for Examining Political Conditions in preparation for constitutional rule, which contained a Statistical Bureau. Chen Yong, "Qingmo zhengfu tongji jigou de shezhi jiqi diaocha huodong" (The establishment of government statistical organizations in the late Qing and their investigatory activities), *Diaoyan shijie* "The World of Survey and Research" 8 (2005): 47-49.

conclusions, allowed geographical patterns to emerge, and helped demonstrate larger conclusions that would otherwise have remained inchoate in the narratives. The final step in the Post Office's use of numbers was to introduce diagrams and graphs in 1917. The significance of diagrams and graphs stems from their transformation of statistics and numbers into visual images making them more memorable, accessible, and comprehensible to the public.

Over the course of the *Working Reports*, the functional relationship between narratives and statistics remained consistent, but their relative percentages reversed. Up to 1910 about two-thirds of the *Working Reports* consisted of sweeping narratives punctuated with examples from various districts. As early as 1906 the narratives start being divided according to region (e.g. North China) and topic (e.g. Routes). In 1913 national narratives give way to more detailed accounts by postal district (界) “to show in a clearer manner the work done.”²² The percentage of statistical tables also starts to increase. In 1917 the Directorate split the *Reports* into three parts – an overview with some statistics, district reports, and statistical tables and graphs – that “affords a better arrangement and one more convenient for reference.”²³ From the late 1910s, then, the *Reports* began shifting away from long narratives in favor of topical reports with enumerated figures, shorter district reports, and more statistical tables. Starting in 1920 the Directorate decided to add statistical tables to each district report “to make each district's activities and accomplishments clearer,” but still maintained a separate section on national statistics.²⁴ In 1930 when the Directorate switched from calendar to fiscal year reports the provincial narratives were dropped in favor of more statistics and graphs. By the mid-1930s the *Working Reports* contained only the briefest of narratives followed entirely by detailed information on various aspects of postal development (e.g. Air-Mail Lines) with the remainder of

²² *RWCPO*, 1913, 1.

²³ *RWCPO*, 1917, 1.

²⁴ *RWCPO* (Chinese version), 1920, 1: 571.

the report, two-thirds, given entirely over to statistical tables, diagrams, and graphs. The growing importance of statistics is also attested to by the Post Office's publication of several volumes of them.²⁵

The prevalence of statistics over narratives by the late 1920s and early 1930s indicates several long-term trends. The gradual stabilization and continued dissemination of the Directorate's narrative of postal history and identity characteristics allowed it to focus more on "objective" evidence to reinforce pre-existing popular notions of its identity. The reliance on statistics itself was part of a growing acknowledgement by both the general public and government officials on the truth effects of "objective" numbers. The structure of statistical tables as time series, minimally covering several years, also helped overcome the inherent weakness of narratives that only evaluated a single year's progress. As the Post Office matured it became more bureaucratized and impersonal thus reducing the necessity for biographic-like narratives to define itself. Although bureaucratization and institutionalization usually require more intense communication between management and labor, or institution and public, the Post Office addressed these needs not through the *Working Reports*, but in other types of publications aimed at "informing" their various publics like official and semi-official magazines.²⁶

Narratives in the Working Reports

The "content" of corporate postal identity in the *Working Reports* relies on the repeated use of thematic elements to emphasize its central characteristics. Nowhere does the Post Office

²⁵ Youchuan bu, *Youchuan bu di-yi ci tongji biao* (The first statistical tables of the Ministry of Posts and Communications) (Beijing: Youchuan bu tongji ju, 1907); *Zhonghua minguo yuannian jiaotong bu tongji tubiao* (Statistical tables and graphs of the Ministry of Communications in the first year of the Republic of China) (Beijing: Jiaotong bu tongji ke, 1918); Jiaotong bu zongwusi di-liu ke, ed., *Zhongguo youzheng tongji zhuankan* (Statistics of the Chinese Post Office) (Nanjing: Jiaotong bu yinshuasuo, 1931).

²⁶ e.g. *Chuhui fuwu* (Savings and remittance services) (Chongqing, 1941-1948); *Xiandai youzheng* (The modern postal service) (Guiyang, Chongqing, 1939-1941; Second Series 1947-1949).

specifically discuss its identity, but by studying its repeated use of keywords, narrative structuring, and rhetorical techniques we can determine a small number of self-defining themes related to postal identity consistently recycled in the *Working Reports*. The keywords and broad themes found time and again are progress, competition, innovation, efficiency, and uniqueness.

Key to understanding any identity – institutional or otherwise – are self-constructed origin narratives. Twice in the history of the *Working Reports*, in the first issue in 1904 and on the 25th anniversary of the Post Office in 1921, the Post Office published a history of its founding and early development. Both origin narratives in the *Working Reports* emphasize Robert Hart as the founder of the Imperial Post Office. The text of the 1904 version closely follows overviews of postal pre-history written by Hart himself in 1886 and 1896.²⁷ The narratives argue that the carriage of Legation mails by the newly-established Zongli Yamen in the 1860s proved too onerous for that young institution. The Yamen “found it convenient” to transfer these duties to the Imperial Maritime Customs Service. The duties attendant upon handling the Legation mails forced Hart to create Postal Departments (郵務處) in various Customs Houses. The success of the Customs in handling this small amount of mail somehow “commended itself” to the Yamen, the narratives argue, as the kernel of a nation-wide system. During the negotiations to resolve the famous Margary Affair in 1876, the Yamen authorized Hart to inform British Minister Sir Thomas Wade that it was willing to sanction the establishment of a national postal service if a postal clause could be inserted into the final

²⁷ Postal No. 576, Inspector General Hart to the Ningbo Commissioner Kopsch, 17 March 1886 in SHAC137.5277; I.G.’s Circulars, Postal Series, No. 7, Robert Hart, 9 April 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1. The 1896 Circular was published in the official *Documents Illustrative of the Origin, Development, and Activities of the Chinese Customs Service*, 7 vols. (Shanghai: Inspectorate General of Customs, 1937-1940), II: 42. Many of the phrases and quotations in the *Reports* came directly from Hart’s versions.

version of the Qufu Convention.²⁸ An unexplained “conspiracy of silence” by the British, however, thwarted Hart’s plans.²⁹ Hart was then buoyed by a promise from Zhili Viceroy Li Hongzhang who would “father” the idea of a modern postal service “after it proved a success.” Hart then turned over control of the Customs Post, as it was soon to be known, to Tianjin Customs Commissioner Gustav Detring, who not only continued the postal experiment, but helped found the short lived Sino-Foreign Letter Office (華洋書信館) (1878-1882) for Chinese correspondence.³⁰ Over the next twenty years Hart continued to recommend the creation of a national postal system to the government, but with the Qing unwilling to “undertake national responsibilities” his overtures fell on deaf ears. Finally in 1896, although the narratives studiously avoid mentioning why, the Guangxu Emperor issued an Imperial Decree establishing the Imperial Post Office “to be organized on Western lines” under the administration of Hart, who now became Inspector General of Posts.

Hart immediately confronted significant challenges, the narratives contend. The Qing government failed to give him the legal authority, financial support, or state monopoly the task necessitated. Instead, the infant Service was faced with powerfully entrenched bureaucratic interests supporting the “immemorial” postal relay system and the commercially-popular Minxinju, both of whom “girded up their loins” for the coming competition. To overcome these entrenched interests, Hart with the “pace of the tortoise” and “prescient perspicacity,” slowly undermined support for the postal relay system and Minxinju. By his retirement, Hart had laid the foundation of the Imperial Post Office as a successful national institution.

²⁸ On the Margary Affair and subsequent Convention, see: Shen-tsu Wang, *The Margary Affair and the Chefoo Agreement* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940).

²⁹ Hart first used this phrase in: I.G.’s Circulars, Postal No. 9, Robert Hart, 30 April 1896 in SHAC137.2023-1.

³⁰ On the history of the Sino-Foreign Letter Office, see: You Yu, “Zhonghua youzheng shi: Huayang shuxinguan, chuangan guojia youzheng” (History of the Chinese postal service: The Sino-Foreign Letter Office, the beginning of the national postal service), *Youzheng yanjiu* 50 (December 1993): 77-101.

The above narratives on the origin of the Imperial Post Office is significant for postal identity in a number of ways. The narratives make Robert Hart, probably the most well-known foreign civil servant in the late Qing, the central character who is represented as a singular visionary with the audacity to create a large-scale national institution in the midst of complicated processes of industrialization and centralization. Mythologizing and lionizing Hart as an “inventor hero,” a narrative trope originating during the English Industrial Revolution, helped dramatize institutional developments yet distill them in understandable personal terms. Postal Secretary Théophile Piry (1851-1917) and Co-Director General Henri Picard-Destelan (1878-?), who authored the origin narratives, reduced the great complexities of the founding and development of the Post Office to the hagiographic figure of a foreign bureaucratic hero who not only understood and appreciated the fundamental role of communications in the modern world, but who could look beyond the parochial views and corrupt practices of Chinese officials to create what China needed, rather than what it wanted.

The foreign administrators of the Post Office implicitly sought to shape the parameters of popular conceptions and historical work on the establishment of the Post Office through their origin narratives.³¹ With the postal archives closed, the origin narratives in the *Working Reports* constituted the only authoritative source on the early years of postal history.³² Both the popular contemporary press and early historical works incorporated wholesale the Post Office’s own origin narratives emphasizing Hart’s long-term efforts within the Qing bureaucracy to foster a national post.³³ Hart did lobby for the establishment of a national postal service, but only

³¹ Robert Bickers has recently written about the extraordinary steps taken by Customs officials to control access to its archives in order to shape historical narratives of the Service. “Purloined Letters: History and the Chinese Maritime Customs Service,” *Modern Asian Studies* 40: 3 (2006): 691-723.

³² None of the Postal Secretaries, Co-Directors General, or Directors General published autobiographies or insider accounts of the history of the Post Office.

³³ *NCH*, 25 July 1914; Paul Henry King, *Notes on the Chinese Postal Service* (London: Office of “Stamp Collecting,” 1917), 5-6; Morse, *Postal Development*, 62-65; Warren M. S. Yang, *The Chinese Postal Service: A*

teleologically was he the “father” of the Post Office. A significant number of suggestions to create a modern postal service came from Qing officials and reformers, as discussed in Chapter 3. Nor was mention made in the origin narratives of the suggested possibilities of transforming Guo Songtao’s (郭嵩燾) Central Office for Government Despatches (文報總局), established in 1878, into a national service, or copying the modern postal service created by the Taiwan Governor Liu Mingchuan (劉銘傳), or grafting it on to the postal relay system. Hart was not the founder of the Post Office or even the key decision-maker. Even the Treaty Port press credited Zhang Zhidong with the establishment of the Post Office.³⁴ From the moment Postal Departments appeared in 1878, Hart had delegated almost all authority to a number of Customs Commissioners like Detring and Henry Kopsch. Hart admitted in 1899 that he could no longer pay any attention to postal work.³⁵ Instead, Postal Secretaries Kopsch, Jules A. van Aalst, and Piry would formulate and carry out all important policies. The postal origin narratives try to influence the historical record by crediting Hart to the exclusion of Chinese officials and Postal Secretaries. The narratives simplify and personalize an otherwise complex and impersonal process by numerous people, Chinese and foreign, working on the idea of a national post office. Complexity and impersonal process, however, are found in the key elements of postal identity – progress, competition, innovation, efficiency, and uniqueness.

Historical Survey (Taipei: Directorate General of Posts, 1969), 8-10; Ying-wan Cheng, *Postal Communication in China and Its Modernization, 1860-1896* (Cambridge, MA: East Asian Research Center, Harvard University Press, 1970), 63-66, 70-77.

Almost all Chinese historians agree with the idea that Hart founded the Post Office. The question for them is not who founded the Post Office, but for what purpose. Generally speaking, mainland scholars, especially from the 1950s through the 1980s viewed Hart as a tool of Western imperialism. Zhongguo jindai jingji shi ziliao congkan bianji wenyuanhui, ed., *Zhongguo haiguan yu youzheng* (The Chinese customs administration and the postal service) (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1983). This interpretation still carries some weight among younger scholars who additionally argue that Hart founded the IPO, but then “retarded” its progress. Wang Jianhua and Jiang Hongwei, “Lüelun Hede yu wan Qing Zhongguo guojia youzheng” (A brief discussion of Sir Robert Hart and the late Qing Chinese national postal service), *Suzhou daxue xuebao* (Suzhou university journal) 1 (2000): 89-93.

³⁴ NCH, 17 April 1896.

³⁵ Circular No. 873, Postal No. 44, I. G. Robert Hart, 3 January 1899 in SHAC137.2023-1.

Progress as institutional growth, or “extension” in postal terms, is probably the most important and oft-repeated theme of identity highlighted in the *Working Reports*. The term used in the Chinese-language version of the *Reports* is the neologism “*kuokai*” (擴開) meaning both “expansion” and “opening” as in post roads, but often used generally to refer to the progressive development of the entire Service. Virtually all *Working Reports* begin with an overview of the year’s activities emphasizing “progress” over the previous year. The Post Office used two common rhetorical techniques to convey this idea. First, announcements of progress were presaged with various obstacles overcome – to suggest, as in the 1921 *Report* – “adverse conditions were only strengthening the Postal fabric.” Or, “the conditions during the year were far from being favorable to postal enterprise and progress,” but there were “advances recorded in all directions,” as stated the 1913 *Report*. A random sample of “every manner of hampering restriction” overcome by the Post Office would include outbreaks of plague, currency destabilization, warlord conflicts, natural disasters, and war with Japan. The 1924 *Report* put it succinctly, “The history of the Chinese Postal Service has ever been a record of advancement in face of difficulties, and obstacles successfully overcome.” The second rhetorical technique was to reiterate Hart’s *festina lente* policy demonstrating the Post Office’s slow, cautious approach to expansion – the 1923 *Report* characterizes the Post Office as “quietly and methodically progressing” and others mention the Post Office’s “quiet methods and steady progress” (1910), its “peaceful penetration,” (1921), and avoidance of “any tendency to overtax its strength by abnormal expansion” (1912). Only in the 1930s with rising postal deficits is there a new emphasis on “a policy of retrenchment,” “radical reforms,” and “strenuous efforts” towards progress. Suffice it to say, anything “significant of progress” (1902) is noted in the *Reports*.

The theme of progress was central to postal identity not only as a singular positive quality, but also as a contributing factor to its competitiveness. The rhetorical device used to emphasize competitiveness is to mention government and commercial obstacles overcome. The Qing government's decision to withhold a postal monopoly from the Imperial Post Office forced it into competition with the other five existing postal services – the postal relay system, the Minxinju, the Qiaopiju, Wenbaoju, and the Foreign Post Offices. The Post Office often couched its policies and decisions in terms of competition with one of these postal services. Extension of routes, for example, was designed to supplant the “antiquated” postal relay system” (1921). The Minxinju were constantly on the “war-path” and when verbal “cajolery” failed the Post Office drastically cut its postage rates “as the only way to kill competition.” “It is through competition and long and persevering efforts,” the *Report* states for 1904, “that the [other postal] systems must be gradually superseded.” The Post Office honed its competitive edge by constantly introducing new services: insured parcels and letters to protect business users, a “late-posting” system for steamer mails, an “express” service for the speedy delivery of letters, and a system of special collectors who made rounds to all large commercial firms past midnight to challenge the Minxinju. The theme of competitiveness portrayed the Post Office as a streamlined, efficient institution that used a variety of methods to improve its public services while undermining its self-interested or profit-driven competitors.

A third feature of postal identity was innovation. Innovations – the creation of new services – signified the modern and progressive orientation of the Post Office. The Post Office offered “not a few innovations” resulting in a dizzying array of specialized services tailored to different clientele.³⁶ Signaling this trope were often self-congratulatory statements stating the innovations were “for the benefit of the common people” or “for the convenience of the public.”

³⁶ *NCH*, 15 July 1911.

In addition to the examples mentioned above, a few examples of the more unique innovations will suffice. Upon demand for lower rates by large newspaper concerns in 1904, the Post Office introduced a three-class system of newspaper rates offering well-established newspapers with large circulation figures financial discounts.³⁷ The *Working Reports* rationalized the decision by arguing discount newspaper rates were “for the benefit of inland places where civilization is backward and business stagnant.” For the same reason, the Directorate later began accepting magazine subscriptions and selling books through all Post Offices.³⁸ In 1922 the Post Office adopted internationally-recognized photo identification cards to facilitate banking, overseas travel, and other activities requiring identification.³⁹ Other innovations included the sale of special “judicial stamps” to pay legal fines, a Legal Attest Letter system by which duplicate copies of letters could be deposited at Post Offices, and a system for delivering judicial writs.⁴⁰ In order to facilitate the transmission of facsimile reproductions of drawings and signatures, the Directorate experimentally introduced telautograph machines, the precursor to the modern fax, in 1927. After World War II, postal innovations rapidly multiplied including Mobile Post Offices, Postal Kiosks, 24-hour Post Offices, letter writing services for the illiterate, and Holiday Post Offices that never closed.⁴¹ These innovations often proved financially taxing, but considerations of reputation and identity trumped purely economic concerns. As the Directorate put it, “Although the Post Office has economic and other difficulties, it will continually seek

³⁷ I.G.’s Circulars, Circular No. 1242, Postal No. 83, Robert Hart, 26 April 1905 in SHAC137-2023-1.

³⁸ “Youju dai ding kanwu banshi xize” (Detailed rules on handling subscriptions at the Post Office), *Faling zhoukan* (Statutes weekly) 199 (April 24, 1934): 4-5; Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1382 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong, 28 August 1934 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts Circular Memo No. 1382, Director General Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.7553-3.

³⁹ Circular No. 525, Co-Director General Destelan, 10 November 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5.

⁴⁰ Co.-D.G. Circular S/O No. 878, Co-Director General Destelan, 17 August 1922 in SHAC137.2198-1; Chu Chia-hua, *China’s Postal and Other Communications Services* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co, 1937), 68; *RWCPO*, 1936/37, 6.

⁴¹ Sa-liu niandu Shanghai youqu gongzuo jiantao baogao (Report reviewing the work in the Shanghai postal district, 1947) in SHAC137.83.

improvement and expansion through innovative measures and the promotion of extensive plans to serve the public need in order to secure its goodwill.”⁴²

Innovations in external services were often buttressed by improvements in internal working methods, which in the parlance of institutional identity refers to efficiency, scientific management, and clear hierarchical organization. Unlike many institutions that did not publicize changes in their internal working rules, the Post Office referred to many of their procedural changes and improvements in the *Working Reports* showing themselves “the pride and model of efficiency.”⁴³ Efficiency as a theme of postal identity referred to such varied activities as improvements in accounting methods, district reorganization, establishing an inspection system, simplifying statistics, creating a Postal Supply Department, standardizing weights, and introducing new types of postal forms. All of these improvements, noted the *Working Reports*, were a “strong coefficient of the various Service undertakings that make for efficiency and economy.”⁴⁴

Efficiency also referred to the phenomenon of economizing in material used to conduct postal business. Beginning in 1917, and lasting until 1943, the *Working Reports* carried a special section on “Equipment”. This section was dedicated to discussing both the material purchased and items manufactured by the Directorate. For example, the 1931-1932 *Report* informs the reader that gunny sacks were previously used to despatch mails, but because they were “uneconomical” canvas bags were substituted. Other reports, such as that for 1936-1937, provide a laundry list of items issued by the Supply Department: 18 Night watchman’s clocks, 76,733½ yards of green jeans for making postal uniforms, 103,950 gallons of gasoline consumed, and so on. While such figures seem to simply indicate the activities of the Supply

⁴² Xingzheng yuan xinwen ju, *Jinri youzheng* (Today’s post office) (Nanjing: Xingzheng yuan xinwen ju, 1947), 24.

⁴³ *NCH*, 8 September 1927.

⁴⁴ *RWCPO*, 1922, 3.

Department, the details and specifics provided suggest a more significant purpose within the narrative structure of the *Working Reports*. This purpose is to indicate efficiency and economy thus proving the Directorate's conservative financial credentials by displaying exact figures for materials used. As Minister of Communications Wang Boqun declared in 1927, "Service to the public requires that the importance of efficiency and economy should be fully emphasized. The public should, therefore, be given the best possible service through the elimination of corrupt and wasteful practices."⁴⁵

The last theme of identity found scattered throughout the *Working Reports* is the Post Office's unique mission – a mission conceptualized not only from the perspective of a communications system, but also through individual services rendered. The Post Office envisioned its primary mission to create a national network bringing every city, town, and village into contact with each other and the wider world, especially during the centrifugal warlord years. As the Directorate wrote in 1921, "It is impossible to conceive to what extent the course of the country's history during the past decade would have varied had not the National Post existed....The unifying influence of the National Post is undeniable." The result of this mission, in the words of Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua (朱家驊), was that "a community of feeling has developed between one province and another."⁴⁶ The creation of a nationwide network was only the preliminary step to serving the public by transmitting its mail matter. The transmission of mail matter, argued the *Working Reports*, fulfilled many ancillary goals. The carriage of newspapers, for example, "denotes a striking movement in the intellectual and education development of this wonderful country" (1910). Particularly important was the extension of rural delivery to bring "cultural influences of the outer world to isolated groups of

⁴⁵ Chu, *China's Postal and Other Communications Services*, 11.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

folks” (1921) and “foster cultural development” at inland places (1934-1935). The Post Office also perceived its unique mission to provide safe and convenient financial services like money orders to the lower classes keeping them free from “risk and capricious exactions” by money forwarding agencies like the Minxinju, Shanxi banks, and other money shops. The Post Office started offering savings accounts in 1919 to “encourage thrift” among the populace.⁴⁷ Thrift and financial protection also motivated the introduction of Postal Simple Life Insurance in 1935, which was designed to “extend the benefits of life insurance to people of small means.”⁴⁸

The *Working Reports* served several functions in the formation of a corporate postal identity. First, their incorporation of both qualitative narratives and quantitative statistics portrayed the Post Office as an open and informative institution providing wide-ranging and important information in the public interest. Second, they created a particular kind of origin story crediting Robert Hart as the sole “inventor” of the modern Chinese postal service in order to personalize and simplify a complex and otherwise impersonal bureaucracy. Third, they repeatedly emphasized certain characteristics such as progressiveness (i.e. “extension”), competitiveness, innovativeness, efficiency, and uniqueness as the core characteristics of postal identity with each being framed within the concept of public service. The *North China Herald* put it succinctly, “The service is efficient, progressive, and enterprising.”⁴⁹ The *Working Reports*, however, were only one print medium through which the Post Office distributed its identity.

⁴⁷ *RWCPOSB*, 1919, 1.

⁴⁸ *RWCPOSB*, 1924, 5.

⁴⁹ *NCH*, 10 February 1917.

Advertising and Publicizing Identity: “Public Information” and the Post Office

While many late Qing and Republican era government institutions ignored advertising, new-style communications systems controlled by the state like the Post Office, the telegraphs, the telephones, and radio stations all relied on informational advertising and small promotional items to introduce their products to the public. The types and placement of Post Office advertisements highlights the various media practices it used to engage the public sphere. The Post Office’s advertising and promotional efforts show the permeable border between “public information” and advertising at their simultaneous inception in China.⁵⁰ While any visual evidence of the Post Office –stamps, mail matter, or pillar-boxes – could be considered “advertising,” what concerns us here are “formal” advertisements in printed matter or on other printed forms.

In the early years of the Imperial Post Office administrators focused their attention on informational advertising. Consisting of free advertisements placed in Treaty Port foreign- and Chinese-language newspapers, the content of this advertising consisted of things like steamer schedules, announcements of scheduled mail arrivals and closures, and descriptions of how to use services like registered mail or postal money orders. This early advertising was specifically designed to habituate customers to the postal schedule and provide important information, especially for business customers, on the correct procedures for utilizing different services.

⁵⁰ On the history of advertising in China, see: Karl Gerth, *China Made: Consumer Culture and the Creation of the Nation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003); Sherman Cochran, ed., *Inventing Nanjing Road: Commercial Culture in Shanghai, 1900-1945* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999); on calendar posters, see: Ellen Johnston Laing, *Selling Happiness: Calendar Posters and Visual Culture in Early Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2004); on the interaction of foreign and Chinese techniques in advertising, see: Sherman Cochran, “Transnational Origins of Advertising in Early Twentieth-Century China,” in *Inventing Nanjing Road*, ed. Sherman Cochran, 37-58; Chen Pei’ai, *Zhongwai guanggao shi: Zhan zai dangdai shijiao de quanmian huigu* (A history of Sino-Foreign advertising: a retrospective from a contemporary viewpoint) (Beijing: Zhongguo wujia chubanshe, 1997). For an overview of the newest work on advertising, see: Guo Jin, “Jin ershi nian minguo guanggao yanjiu shuping” (A review of research on advertising during the Republic of China over the last twenty years), *Guanggao daguan* (Spectacles of advertising) 2 (2007): 91-95.

The Post Office also engaged in a public relations practice called “puffery.” Puffery refers to the publication of articles that appear to be independent news gathered by journalists, but which are actually either thinly-disguised advertisements or “puff pieces” written by journalists based on Post Office news releases. To facilitate this practice, the Post Office provided free tariff schedules, “Notifications” of new services, and copies of the *Working Reports* to most of the popular and well-established Treaty Port foreign- and Chinese-language newspapers. The Post Office hoped that such information would receive either direct publication or positive comment. Most newspapers did print tariff schedules and postal notifications as information “in the public interest” and the number of free advertisements as “news” must have run into the thousands. In the decade between 1919 and 1928, for example, the leading Chinese newspaper *Shenbao* averaged around twenty positive stories per year on the Post Office plus freely printing Postal Notifications.⁵¹ *Shenbao* covered such topics as the first airmail flights between Beijing and Tianjin, the expansion of postal services in various cities, the promulgation of new postal regulations, the debut of postal trucks, and positive comparisons of postal income and expenditure. The press also carried positive coverage of postal developments by copying almost verbatim from the *Working Reports*.⁵²

As a supplement to “free” informational advertising, the Post Office engaged in promotional campaigns in the form of low-cost postcards and giveaways. Following the example set by the Treaty Port Local Post Offices, the Imperial Post Office printed special pre-stamped postcards for sale to the public at nominal costs. The cards carried the English and Chinese name of the Post Office, had decorative borders, and were issued in both vertical and

⁵¹ These numbers were calculated from *Shenbao suoyin, 1919-1928* (Index to Shen bao), 5 vols (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, 1987-1991).

⁵² e.g. *NCH*, 15 August 1908; *Shenbao*, 16 July 1919, 13 March 1928.

horizontal versions for Chinese and foreign writing habits, respectively.⁵³ The cheap price of the postcards, less than commercial postcards and sold at all Offices and Agencies throughout the country, made them quite popular. The Post Office also distributed free promotional materials. Postal calendars for 1906 were printed in Beijing and distributed free of charge throughout the city proving a “successful means of advertising” to a “large and interested public...the cheap rates and simple methods of the Imperial Post Office.”⁵⁴ This successful strategy was followed again the next year.

Some of the most popular low-cost promotional items sold by the Post Office serving as advertisements were provincial postal route maps and the *Postal Atlas*. Post Offices started selling loose-leaf provincial postal route maps to the public in the late 1890s.⁵⁵ These route maps served as a form of postal advertising, demonstrating the growth and extent of the postal network, and were widely purchased by both the public and government.⁵⁶ National route maps also came free of charge with every *Working Report*. Thousands of Chinese and foreigners purchased them as the most accurate maps of local areas.⁵⁷ The Imperial Post Office maps proved extremely popular not only because they described the main routes, but also because they were constantly updated and enlarged. Although these route maps were not “placed” as advertisements in other media, the Post Office sold them below cost, two copper cash in the

⁵³ The Inspectorate used the unusual phrase “Great Qing Post Office” (大清郵政) for the Chinese and English rendering of Imperial Post Office because the Emperor and Zongli Yamen objected to the word “Office” (局) on printed forms. Inspector General Hart to Postal Secretary, Postal No. 12/Staff No. 5511, 16 September 1896 in R. A. de Villard, *Feila'er shou gao: Qingdai youzheng, youpiao, minxin pian beiwang lu* (Proposed stamps and postcards for the Imperial Chinese Post) (1896; reprint, Beijing: Renmin youdian chubanshe, 1991), 70.

⁵⁴ Postal Circular No. 151, Postal Secretary Piry, 1 December 1906 in SHAC137.2023-2.

⁵⁵ The route maps showed postal establishments, distances, and day-and-night courier lines.

⁵⁶ Groups as disparate as the War Office in Chengdu during the Republican Revolution and the British-American Tobacco Company purchased hundreds of route maps. Enclosure in P.M.G. Memo. No. 2907/178, District Postmaster Ritchie, 18 November 1913, SHAC137.3419.

⁵⁷ The popularity of postal route maps has a long history in China. A typical example of an empire-wide Qing route book is Wang Xiqi, *Yizhan lucheng* (Postal relay station routes) (Shanghai: Zhuyi tang, 1877). Postal route books were published in the late Ming and throughout the Qing. In the Qing period the Ministry of War ordered the compilation and publication of provincial postal route books in 1751, 1775, 1802, 1822, and the late 1880s.

1910s, to publicize the extent of the postal net. Even in such relatively small ports as Yichang hundreds of updated maps were often pre-ordered by the public or sold out immediately.⁵⁸ In addition to route maps, the Post Office also published a *Postal Atlas* (清代郵政輿圖) periodically starting in 1908.⁵⁹ To publicize the extent of the postal network the Post Office gave presentation copies to high officials throughout the empire.⁶⁰ The second edition of the *Atlas* in 1919 was also distributed freely to all military and civilian provincial governors, and the heads of the internal affairs, financial, foreign affairs, and legal bureaux in every province. All foreign legations in China and internationally-known geographic research institutions such as the Royal Geographic Society and Société de Géographie also received complimentary copies.⁶¹ The 1933 and 1936 *Atlases* sold for a paltry \$12, identical to the 1908 price, with government officials receiving greater discounts.⁶²

Maps, free announcements, notifications, and copies of the *Working Reports* were supplemented, starting in the early 1920s, with cleverly placed publicity “articles” in various types of popular and academic journals serving to shape the public perception of the Post Office as a dynamic, modern institution. These articles, many authored by postal staff, appeared in both English and Chinese-language books, magazines, and journals as varied as the *West China*

⁵⁸ Enclosure in P.M.G. Memo. No. 2907/178, District Postmaster Ritchie, 18 November 1913 in SHAC137.3419. On pre-ordering the maps, see: S/O No. 41, Yichang Postmaster to Associate Director General Destelan, 2 June 1917 in SHAC137.2187. Few of these route maps remain in existence having been printed on thin paper. The Second Historical Archives in Nanjing (SHAC137.7736, 137.8756, 137.4351, 137.4569) probably has the most extensive collection.

⁵⁹ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhonghua youzheng yutu* “China Postal Atlas, showing the Postal Establishments and Postal Routes in Each Province” (Beijing: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1908; Shanghai: Youzheng zongju, gongyingchu, 1919, 1933, 1936).

⁶⁰ Postal Circular No. 142, Postal Secretary Piry, 23 July 1906 and Postal Circular No. 186, Officiating Postal Secretary A. E. Hippisley, 31 March 1908 in SHAC137.2023-2.

⁶¹ Despatch No. 3001/46613, Co-Director Destelan to Zhili Postal Commissioner, 4 July 1919 and loose telegrams in SHAC137.4092.

⁶² *NCH*, 22 November 1933. Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongling changzi di 1994 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong, 5 December 1936 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular, General Series, No. 1994, Director General Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.6273-2.

Missionary News and the *Practical Guidebook to Beijing*.⁶³ From the late 1920s through the 1940s these types of articles as well as items planted in guidebooks, directories, and yearbooks multiplied rapidly. Besides generalist overviews, postal employees also wrote articles on postal history or specific policy issues.⁶⁴ Most often these postal employees, like Chen Shiyin, were not “outed” as semi-official voices of the Post Office, but the content of their articles implies they had access to materials restricted to postal employees.⁶⁵ Other employee-scholars like Zhang Liangren wrote extensively for commercial presses and popular journals.⁶⁶

In addition to thinly-veiled articles authored by postal employees, the Post Office also engaged in puffery and directly wrote anonymous overviews of postal history and development for popular yearbooks. The well-known *China Year Book*, edited by H. G. W. Woodhead, always carried a section on the Chinese Post Office heavily indebted to the narratives and statistical tables provided in the *Working Reports*, usually even quoting from them directly.⁶⁷ The *Shenbao Year Book* also contains coverage of postal development drawn from the Directorate’s narratives.⁶⁸ The Chinese Ministry of Information’s *China Handbook* series specifically cites the Directorate as the source of their information on the Post Office and the

⁶³ For examples of articles authored by postal employees, see: *Dongfang zazhi* (Eastern miscellany) 5: 7 (1908), 11-13; V. Smith, “The Chinese Postal Service (With Special Reference to Szechwan),” *West China Missionary News* (May 1922): 5-14. Thanks to Jeff Kyong-McClain for pointing out this reference. Xu Ke, *Shiyong Beijing zhinan* (Practical guidebook to Beijing) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1926), 6-17.

⁶⁴ e.g. Director General Guo Xinsong, “Woguo youzheng jinzhuang yu jianglai” (The present and future of our country’s postal service), *Jiaotong zazhi* “Journal of Communications” 2: 11 (September 1934): 21-24.

⁶⁵ Chen Shiyin, “Zhongguo jinnian youzheng shiye gaiguan” (A general survey of postal service undertakings in recent years), *Dongfang zazhi* “Eastern Miscellany” 31: 16 (August 16, 1934): 79-86.

⁶⁶ Zhang Liangren, *Zhongguo youzheng* (The Chinese post office) 3 vols (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1935-1936); *Youzheng changshi wenda* (Questions and answers about the postal service) 3 vols (Shanghai: Youzheng tushu chubanshe, 1936); “Zhongguo lidai you zhi gaiyao” (A historical survey of the postal system in China), *Dongfang zazhi* “Eastern Miscellany” 32: 1 (January 1, 1935): 7-16; “Zhongguo yougong yundong gaikuang” (The situation of the Chinese postal workers movement), *Laogong yuekan* (Labor monthly) 2-3 (March 1, 1936): 1-8.

⁶⁷ H. G. W. Woodhead, ed., *China Year Book* (Shanghai: North China Daily News & Herald, 1912-14, 1916, 1919-1936, 1938-1939).

⁶⁸ e.g. Shenbao guan, ed., *Shenbao nianjian* (Shenbao yearbook) (Shanghai: Shenbao, 1935), N: 85-88.

Directorate literally wrote the postal section of the Shanghai Commercial Press's *Chinese Year Book*.⁶⁹

Post Office Advertising, 1930s-1940s

After 1927, the Post Office was often in debt. One of the Directorate's responses was to increase its advertising and promotional efforts. Its advertising methods in the 1930s and early 1940s were still not designed to persuade customers to utilize basic postal services. Instead, their purpose was to offset growing deficits and raise revenues by advertising new niche services, creating more commemorative stamps and other items for philatelists, allowing other companies to advertise on postal printed matter, and supporting local products to increase the use of parcel post. Maintaining a surplus had its own rationale, but profitability was, said Executive Yuan President Wang Jingwei, vital "in order to forestall foreigners mocking us" for driving a formerly revenue-generating Service into debt.⁷⁰

At the National Postal Conference in Nanjing in early September 1934 Fujian Postal Commissioner J. A. Greenfield proposed the Post Office adopt modern "business practices."⁷¹ Greenfield's proposal epitomized a shift in the overall psychology of the upper-level staff. In early 1935 the Directorate introduced a number of new practices starting with the establishment of an "Advertising Section" in the Supply Department to solicit advertising copy for postal publications.⁷² The first of these new-style publications appeared on 30 June 1935 as the

⁶⁹ Chinese Ministry of Information, comp., *China Handbook, 1937-1945: A Comprehensive Survey of Major Developments in China in Eight Years of War* (New York: The MacMillan Company), 245-250; Draft manuscript of inclusion in the 1940 edition of the *Chinese Year Book*, SHAC137(5).2731. Ch'ao-ying Shih and Chi-hsien Chang, comps, *Chinese Year Book* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1940).

⁷⁰ Jiaotong bu youzheng si, ed., *Youzheng huiyi huibian* (Collection on the Post Office Conference) (Nanjing: Jiaotong bu youzheng si, 1934), 17.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

⁷² Shanghai shi nianjian weiyuanhui, *Shanghai shi nianjian* (Yearbook of Shanghai City) (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1936), M265-266.

Guidebook to the Post Office selling for the nominal price of five cents – the same as first-class postage – and intended to “help the public understand the Post Office’s services and other capabilities.”⁷³ According to the Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua there was a “great demand” for advertising space in the *Guidebook*.⁷⁴ At least two-thirds of the *Guidebook*’s 125 pages consist of advertisements for companies as diverse as the Stencil Paper Company of Vienna, the Shanghai Business Equipment Corporation, the Standard Oil Company, the KLIM Milk Company, Eveready Batteries, Omega watches, Westinghouse, RCA, and Ford. Apparently some District Head Offices also published similar guidebooks containing advertising for local companies.⁷⁵ The idea of selling space in official postal publications to raise advertising revenues also carried over into advertisements on stamp booklets, postcards, postal forms, and other types of postal publications like Shanghai’s Daily Mail List, which was a flyer announcing the schedules for mail arrivals and despatches distributed free throughout the city.⁷⁶ By accepting outside advertising on publically-funded postal materials, the Directorate began adopting more modern business practices designed to enlarge the postal purse.

In the 1930s the Post Office also began promoting a more extensive use of parcel post by advertising local products across the country, reforming complex parcel post procedures, negotiating with the Maritime Customs to place inspectors in Post Offices, and lobbying provincial governors to eliminate taxes on parcels.⁷⁷ In 1935 the Directorate also sent investigators to various companies to evaluate their production capabilities, prices, and their

⁷³ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, ed., *Youzheng bianlan* (Guidebook to the postal service) (Shanghai: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1935).

⁷⁴ Chu, *China’s Postal and Other Communications Services*, 64-65.

⁷⁵ Although I have not read one of these publications, a picture of the cover of a *Guidebook to the Post Office* published by the Zhejiang Head Post Office can be seen in: Nanjing shi youzheng ju, Nanjing shi jiyou xiehui, and Zhongguo di’er lishi dang’anguan, comp., *Zhonghua youzheng tuji, 1912-1949* (Photographs of the Chinese postal service, 1912-1949) (Beijing: Renmin youdian chubanshe, 1996), 107.

⁷⁶ Postal Supply Department, Incoming, 1934-1935 in SHAC137.2462-3.

⁷⁷ Chu, *China’s Postal and Other Communications Services*, 61.

marketing and distribution networks. The studies culminated in a book-length commercial handbook entitled *Directory of Local Products for Places with Postal Connections in China* distributed across the country to promote the use of parcel post.⁷⁸

After World War II, the Chinese Post Office faced massive internal debt and external hyperinflation. In response, the Post Office aggressively starting using a number of ingenious techniques to increase the use of the mails. The Directorate negotiated with various national newspapers requesting they carry opinion polls. The idea was for the public to mail their answers to the newspapers thus increasing postal revenues.⁷⁹ The Post Office also inserted public questionnaires into newspapers like the *Central Daily* (中央日報) allowing readers to circle their answers and then mail the clippings back to the Post Office.⁸⁰ In late 1947, the Post Office also convinced several newspapers to begin publishing sections entitled “Post Office: Questions and Answers” in their newspapers. The public would mail their questions to the newspapers thus increasing postal revenues. These special sections appeared on a weekly basis throughout late 1947 and early 1948 in the *Central Daily*, the *Peace Daily*, the *Great Strength Daily*, the *National Salvation Daily*, and the *New People’s Daily*. The newspapers, who liked anything contributing to greater readership, colluded with the Post Office in this revenue-generating practice while telling their readers the series was designed to “increase their postal knowledge.”⁸¹

⁷⁸ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, ed., *Zhongguo tongyou difang wuchan zhi* (Directory of local products in places with postal connections in China) (Shanghai: Shanghai yinshuguan, 1937).

⁷⁹ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju xunling juhui tongzhi di 1583 hao, dai juzhang Gu Chunfan), 7 November 1947 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts Circular No. 1583, Office Series, Acting Director General Gu Chunfan) in SHAC137.5505.

⁸⁰ For a copy of a separate questionnaire, see: SHAC137(5).4241. *Zhongyang ribao* (Central daily), 15 September 1947.

⁸¹ Ibid.

Promoting philatelic activities also increased in the postwar era.⁸² Philately had a long history in China going back to 1879 and, judging by the number of philatelic magazines, was one of the most popular hobbies of the Republican era.⁸³ Commemorative stamps and cancellers serve multiple purposes such as memorializing politically significant people, events, or anniversaries, but the primary purpose from the perspective of postal administrations was their revenue-generating potential. As the Directorate wrote, “Whenever commemorative stamps are issued, philatelists are always the first buyers because they treasure them.”⁸⁴ The Directorate encouraged philatelists to literally engage in what Susan Stewart has termed the “aestheticization of use value” by collecting stamps rather than using them.⁸⁵ Between 1896 and 1944, the Post Office issued fifteen commemorative stamps, but to bolster its income it produced no less than sixteen in the immediate postwar period. The Post Office thus profited by the sale of the stamp without having to incur the expense of transmitting the letter. The Directorate also produced small cardstock sheets for affixing the various denominations of a given issue to encourage completists.⁸⁶ The postwar philatelic activities of the Post Office culminated in the 20 March 1948 Stamp Exhibition held in Nanjing to commemorate National Postal Day. After the Exhibition, the Directorate established special “Philatelic Rooms” in large Post Office where

⁸² On the history and activity of Chinese philatelic groups and associations, see: Jiang Zhifang, *Jiyou liushi nian* (60 years of philately) (Hong Kong: Nanyue chubanshe, 1981); Li Yimin, *Zhongguo jiyou shihua* (Historical stories about Chinese philately) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993).

⁸³ A sample of the more popular philatelic journals includes: *You qu* (Philately delights), 1926-1937; *Youxue yuekan* (Chinese philatelic society monthly) (Shanghai: Chinese Philatelic Society, 1928-1932); Jiaxu youpiao hui, *Jiaxu youkan* (Publication of the Jiaxu philately association, 1934-1949); *Suzhou you kan* (Suzhou philately journal), 1936-?.

⁸⁴ “Wei ni faxing Xin Shenghuo yundong jinian youpiao cheng qing jian he shi xun you zhe lu qian cheng di 19 hao,” 14 June 1935 (Petition No. 19, Concerning the suggested plan to issue a commemorative stamp for the New Life Movement) in SHAC137.7765.

⁸⁵ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 151.

⁸⁶ Various samples of the card stock forms can be found in SHAC137(5).4241.

collectors could have their questions answered and purchase rare stamps.⁸⁷ Plans were also underway to create a national postal museum in Nanjing to attract tourists.⁸⁸

The Post Office also understood the physical appearance of its offices as a form of advertising. To draw attention from pedestrians, the Head Post Offices in Shanghai, Beijing, Nanjing, and Tianjin created department store-style display windows. Postal designers created several versions of displays coinciding with the “Movement to Eradicate Dead Letters,” which the Directorate launched in 1947. In one window titled “The Miserable Conditions of Dead Letters” a number of undeliverable letters lie in rows like corpses and are bookended by cardboard cutouts of human skulls. For the campaign to promote airmail, the Nanjing Post Office displayed a large picture of camels carrying mails below the message “Speed, Speed, Speed” encouraging customers to switch to airmail.⁸⁹

Green is the Color of Posts: Color Branding and Institutional Identity

The most unique and instantly recognizable feature of postal advertising, and identity, in the early twentieth century was the use of green and yellow as representative institutional colors (代表色). Modern postal services throughout the world often chose and maintained the use of institutional colors to make themselves easily identifiable through color branding. Color branding is the consistent and repetitive association between a color and an object or institution in order to create its color identity. Quite often a representative color is the most stable aspect of an institutional identity – e.g. Coca-Cola red or McDonald’s yellow. Usually color branding

⁸⁷ Nanjing shi youzheng ju, et. al., *Zhonghua youzheng tuji*, 135.

⁸⁸ “Youzheng bowuguan jingchang zhengji wenwu ban” (Method for the regular collection of materials for the Postal Museum), attachment to Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongling di 1974 hao, 14 October 1948 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 1974) in SHAC137.5498; the proposed postal museum did not open until 1966 in Taipei. Yan Xing, *Youzheng bowuguan jianwen zaji* (Informational notes on the Postal Museum) (Taipei: Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, 1983).

⁸⁹ For images of the display windows, see: Nanjing shi youzheng ju, *Zhonghua youzheng tuji*, 100-103.

draws upon on a society's cultural associations between specific colors and values; however, at other times the process is reversed and colors become emblematic of values through color branding. The Chinese Post Office's choice of green and yellow was a manifestation of the latter phenomenon.

The Imperial Post Office started using green and yellow as institutional colors at least by 1906. Over the next decades the Post Office used its institutional colors on all forms of postal ephemera, building facades, uniforms, postal badges, service-owned vehicles, postal flags, and printed matter. The long-term relationship between green and the Post Office demonstrates the importance of using a distinctive color over an extended period for establishing a strong and stable institutional identity.⁹⁰ While postal identity changed over the Republican era, the relationship between the Post Office and green did not. Over time the public started to associate postal green with other elements of postal identity through the process of transference. In the process of transference those elements of postal identity accepted by the public were then emblemized by postal green. Green and other elements of postal identity were thus locked in a constant process of negotiation and renegotiation in the public mind. Within this process, the Post Office was generally successful in linking its institutional values to postal green.

*"We are Working in a Green Atmosphere"*⁹¹

From at least 1906 onward, the Post Office used green and yellow on its tens of thousands of pillar boxes and all other types of postal property.⁹² Usually the postmasters painted the door frames, doors, window shutters, or half-pillars fronting the smaller postal establishments postal

⁹⁰ Albert and Whetten, "Organizational Identity," 265.

⁹¹ Zhang Wang, "Yougong yu Shijieyu" (Postal workers and Esperanto), *Shanghai yougong* (Shanghai postal workers) 7: 3-4 (September 20, 1934), 29.

⁹² There is no known rationale for Postal Secretary Piry choosing green and yellow as postal colors. It is quite possible the choice was made for the simple purpose of making the Post Offices easier to locate in the cityscape.

green. A new sub-office on Shanghai's Nanjing Road was opened in the summer of 1909 – it was painted green with “Chinese yellow” lettering and images of missives to several Viceroys and the Minister of Posts and Communications on the front doors.⁹³ The Imperial Post Office went to extra lengths with its Nanjing Road sub-office in order to compete for attention with the richly ornamented traditional Chinese shops lining China's most famous shopping street, but even “dated and countrified” rural Post Offices framed their doors with green pillars.⁹⁴

Green postal vehicles and conveyances were a daily sight on Chinese streets. All service-owned vehicles including hand carts, tricycles, horse-driven mail-vans, motorcycles, trucks, and mobile post offices used the institutional colors. More than the other vehicle, green postal bicycles invited public comment. As the first large government institution to purchase them in 1908, green bicycles became linked in the public imagination to the Post Office.⁹⁵ As early as 1911, the sight of postmen and their green bicycles was “very familiar” to the general public.⁹⁶ By the 1930s, the Post Office had some 1,400 green bicycles traversing urban roads and rural paths across the country.⁹⁷ Even fictional writers liked to identify postmen by their green bicycles.⁹⁸

⁹³ *NCH*, 3 July 1909.

⁹⁴ For a description of Nanjing Road around 1910, see: Jon W. Huebner, “Architecture and History in Shanghai's Central District” *Journal of Oriental Studies* 26: 2 (1988), 222; Ma Yuncheng, “Wei-Man shiqi de Acheng youzhengju” (The Acheng Post Office during the puppet Manzhouguo period) in *Acheng wenshi liao* (Acheng literary and historical materials) 2 (1986), reprint, *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, 1: 14.

⁹⁵ For a brief overview of the introduction of the bicycle in China, see: Amir Moghaddass Esfehani, “The Bicycle's Long Way to China: The Appropriation of Cycling as a Foreign Cultural Technique (1860-1940)” *Cycle History* 13 (2003): 94-102. Some scholars incorrectly date the Post Office's use of bicycles to 1911. Xu Tao, “The Popularization of Bicycles and Modern Shanghai,” *Frontiers of History in China* 3: 1 (2008), 121.

⁹⁶ *NCH*, 29 July 1911.

⁹⁷ *RWCPO* (Chinese version), 1908, 1: 134.

⁹⁸ Ye Cao, “Lao yougong” (Old postal worker) in Ye Cao, *Bai zhuang* (Cypress village) (Nanjing: Dulu chubanshe, 1946), 145-146.

Green appeared on all manner of other postal property. In 1931, the Directorate decided that a green postal flag should represent the Post Office.⁹⁹ A green postal pennant was also issued for use on mail-carrying ships. Postal workers even used the flag as a sign of collective identity by emphasizing their “unity under the green postal flag.”¹⁰⁰ The famous *Postal Atlas* was always “attractively and neatly bound in Post Office green.”¹⁰¹ Both green and yellow stamp booklets were put on sale in 1917 for collectors.¹⁰² In 1937 the Directorate started selling children’s savings banks at Post Offices throughout Shanghai “painted green and in every way miniatures of the P.O. pillar letter box.”¹⁰³ The Directorate also distributed small green cardboard hand-held postal scales for weighing letters to businessmen.¹⁰⁴ The attention to green even carried over onto the lettering on postal examination booklets for prospective employees.¹⁰⁵

The most successful feature of postal color branding, if measured by public comment, was the green uniforms of postal workers; however, it was on uniforms that the Post Office used green inconsistently. The exact date Postal Secretary Piry chose green uniforms for outdoor staff is unknown, but by 1911 they were frequently seen on the streets of Shanghai and in out-of-the-way places.¹⁰⁶ By 1917 a combination of factors, including the negative economic effects of World War I, made green drill difficult and costly to procure. Co-Director General Destelan decided to switch the colors of postal uniforms from green to navy blue, but switched back to

⁹⁹ On the role of postal flags as markers of institutional identity and their contribution to Republican era state-making, see: Lane J. Harris, “Standard Messages: Institutional Identity and Symbolism in Chinese Postal Flags, 1896-1949,” *Raven: A Journal of Vexillology* 15 (Fall 2008): 81-106.

¹⁰⁰ “Nü yougong zhi ye” (Female postal workers’ page), *Zhonghua yougong* (Chinese postal workers), New Series 1: 1 (May 1947), 30.

¹⁰¹ *NCH*, 22 November 1933.

¹⁰² *RWCPO*, 1917, 10.

¹⁰³ *NCH*, 22 March 1937.

¹⁰⁴ Nanjing shi youzheng ju, *Zhonghua youzheng tuji, 1912-1949*, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Jiangsu youzheng guanliju cheng di 8/4915 hao, Jiangsu youzheng juzhang, 30 October 1948 (Petition No. 8/4915 from the Jiangsu Postal Director, Jiangsu Postal Director), 30 October 1948 in SHAC137.5436.

¹⁰⁶ *NCH*, 29 July 1911. Dong Mingqian, “Tan Qingchao, Minguo shiqi Da’an xian de youzheng he youpiao xingshi qingkuang” (Discussing the circumstances of the Qing dynasty and Republican era Da’an county post office and postage stamp performance), *Da’an wenshi ziliao* (Da’an literary and historical materials) 2 (1985); reprint, *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, 1: 36.

green in 1918 as the economy improved.¹⁰⁷ Still concerned about the postal economy, Destelan circularized all Postal Commissioners requesting their opinion on the pros and cons of green versus blue for uniforms in mid-1921.¹⁰⁸ Some Postal Commissioners argued that blue uniforms would be more economical and “more national” since most common workers wore blue-colored clothing.¹⁰⁹ Others more concerned about a distinctive postal identity questioned whether being “national” was an important issue. Blue-clothed postal workers, they argued, might be “mistaken for soldiers” and they would “lose their identity and merge into the common crowd.”¹¹⁰ Despite the strong arguments for a distinctive and unique postal identity, Destelan decided to adopt blue uniforms to save money.¹¹¹

In early 1926 Co-Director General Destelan was once again reconsidering the color of uniforms.¹¹² Rather than ask the opinions of foreign Postal Commissioners, Destelan requested they solicit input from their men. The postmen responded with five reasons why green was better: “(1) Green is the Postal color; (2) Green looks smarter than blue; (3) Postmen have worn green for many years and are now easily recognized; (4) most laborers wear blue clothes and blue is the uniform of ‘boys’ in certain firms whereas postmen in green are distinctive; (5) Green does not fade so easily as blue.”¹¹³ The postmen were seeking a “distinctive” and “easily recognized” identity that conferred a special status upon them within the public eye and among the working classes. Looking “smarter” is a subjective evaluation, but their comments reveal

¹⁰⁷ No. 503/9883, W. Sichuan Postal Commissioner to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 29 June 1921 in SHAC137.6996.

¹⁰⁸ Tianjin ju youwuzhang Talide cheng Beijing youzheng zongju zongban guanyu zhifu de baogao, 1 June 1921 (Tianjin Postal Commissioner Tolliday submitting a report on uniforms to the Co-Director General of the Beijing Directorate General of Posts), reprinted in Qiu Runxi, et al. ed., *Tianjin youzheng shiliao* (Historical materials on the postal service of Tianjin) 5 vols (Beijing: Beijing hangkong hangtian daxue chubanshe, 1988-1992), 3: 454-456.

¹⁰⁹ No. 297/1025, Dihua Postal Commissioner to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 9 July 1921 in SHAC137.6996.

¹¹⁰ No. 2481/3615, Nanjing Postal Commissioner Stapleton-Cotton to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 16 August 1921 in SHAC137.6996.

¹¹¹ Instruction No. 267, Additions and Amendments to Instructions: No. 63, Co-D.G. Destelan, 31 December 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5.

¹¹² *NCH*, 29 May 1926.

¹¹³ S.O. No. 2030, from Acting Shanghai Postal Commissioner Shields to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 17 December 1926 in SHAC137.2183-8.

how postal workers positioned themselves within the working-class hierarchy – a hierarchy they partially saw through clothing. Contrasting themselves to “most laborers” and “boys” the postal workers revealed both an elitist and patriarchal attitude towards other workers who wore faded blue jackets. The strong feelings of the postal workers must have persuaded Destelan for green uniforms remained standard through the Republican era.¹¹⁴

The unique and recognizable identity color branded onto the “lower” ranks of postal workers manifested itself in a number of nicknames and references to their green clothing. Quite commonly postmen were referred to as “green-coated functionaries,” “green-clad postmen,” “green-clothed comrades,” or described as wearing something “like a soldier’s uniform, but in ‘faded green.’”¹¹⁵ The most popular association, and one considered an “honor” and “special distinction” to the postmen, was being called “messengers in green” (綠衣使者).¹¹⁶ Calling postmen “messengers in green” was a reference to the idiom “a green-clad angel” (綠衣天使). The idiom originated during the Five Dynasties period (907-960) when Wang Renyu (王仁裕) recorded a story about a famous parrot during the time of the Xuanzong Emperor (712-756). In Chang’an a wealthy man named Yang Chongyi taught his green parrot to speak like a scholar. When Yang’s wife and her paramour murdered Yang, the parrot told the county magistrate everything it had seen. Tang Xuanzong heard the story and conferred upon this parrot the title

¹¹⁴ By contrast, outdoor postal employees working for the Manzhouguo Directorate wore yellow uniforms with matching hats while rural couriers wore vests of a deep red color. Dong Mingqian, “Tan Wei-Man shiqi Dalai youzheng he youpiao xingshi qingkuang” (Discussing the circumstances of the puppet Manzhouguo period Dalai post office and postage stamp performance), *Da’an wenshi ziliao* (Da’an literary and historical materials) 3 (1986); reprint, *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, 1: 42.

¹¹⁵ *NCH*, 20 October 1937; *NCH*, 22 September 1937; Yi Ming, “Zui tuoshan de toudi fangfa – gongxian gei luyi tongzhi” (The most appropriate delivery methods – a contribution given to green-clothed comrades), *Zhonghua yougong* (Chinese postal workers) 2: 9/10 (31 December 1936): 63-65; Ye Cao, “Lao yougong,” 146.

¹¹⁶ S.O. No. 2030, from Acting Shanghai Postal Commissioner Shields to Co.-D.G. Destelan, 17 December 1926 in SHAC137.2183-8.

“green-clad angel.”¹¹⁷ In other words, “messengers in green” were responsible for bringing important and timely news. As a postal worker’s doggerel put it: “Dressed in green/Specializing in delivery/This time I’ll deliver a piece of important news.”¹¹⁸

The process of color branding the Post Office to give it a unique and distinctive identity was so successful even the Communists supported the colors. In 1949 the Communist’s First National Postal Conference adopted green as its official postal color. The Conference declared postal green represented “directness, quickness, efficiency, safety, convenience and emblemized peace, youthfulness, flourishing, and prosperity.”¹¹⁹ The symbolic meanings of green to the Communists were actually elements of postal identity created by the Imperial/Chinese Post Office and attached to green via the subtle process of transference.

Uniform(ed) Workers: Postal Workers and Institutional Identity

Color branding the Post Office worked most convincingly on its uniforms. Clothing itself constitutes a set of visible cultural elements conveying various kinds of meanings to audiences at differing political, economic, social, and psychological levels, but has only started to receive attention in Chinese history.¹²⁰ Studies of the history of clothing in China initially focused on changes in clothing and style from “traditional” Chinese clothing to “modern” dress.¹²¹ More recently, clothing in China has been analyzed from the perspective of a multi-level Chinese engagement with shifting global political and cultural trends in couture as they relate to gender construction.¹²² Most research on Chinese clothing mentions the adoption of the Zhongshan suit

¹¹⁷ A longer version of the “green-clad angel” story was written in the Tang dynasty by Zhang Yue (張說) in his *chuanqi* entitled “The story of the green-clad angel” (綠衣天使傳).

¹¹⁸ Gu Yue, “Toudi” (Delivery), *Tianjin yougong* (Tianjin postal workers) 7: 1 (1933), 18.

¹¹⁹ <http://www.xxpost.com/CultureInfo.asp?id=64>

as a national uniform symbolizing the political and cultural masculinization of Chinese men, but fails to recognize the more widespread adoption of uniforms for wage laborers.

The advent of modern uniforms in the Post Office was a manifestation of the globalization of Chinese industrial organization. Modern uniforms signified their modernity both by the material used – cheviot, drill, duck, jean, and serge – and their identical sizes, which required industrial production methods. The real revolution in clothing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was thus the mass production of ready-to-wear clothing and uniforms.

Uniforms, like clothing in general, work on an inner-outer dichotomy representing both personally- and socially-constructed meanings. The uniqueness of uniforms, however, stems from the management imposing them on workers. The general effect of mass-produced uniforms is to dehumanize or erase differences among the wearers, but their significance stems from political, social, and cultural contexts. In some cases uniforms worn by athletes and quasi-military organizations represent a re-masculinization of men within an industrial society that had eliminated older pathways to construct masculinity. From this perspective, uniforms could lead to both social stability such as in sport or instability such as in fascistic organizations. Uniforms for police, firemen, and postal employees were specifically designed to signify social stability by demonstrating their quasi-military organization and attention to order and discipline. The confluence of industrial production techniques in the manufacturing of uniforms for anonymous bodies and the social meaning of uniforms meant that the Post Office used uniforms to civilize their workers to draw the public's attention to the discipline and orderliness of postal labor.

¹²⁰ Hilda Kuper, "Costume and Identity," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 15: 3 (June 1973): 348-367.

¹²¹ A. C. Scott, *Chinese Costume in Transition* (Singapore: Donald Moore, 1958); Valery M. Garrett, *Chinese Clothing: An Illustrated Guide* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); for the impact of republicanism on clothing, see: Henrietta Harrison, *The Making of the Republican Citizen: Political Ceremonies and Symbols in China, 1911-1929* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 49-60.

¹²² Antonia Finnane, *Changing Clothes in China: Fashion, History, Nation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

In general, the Chinese Post Office forced postal workers to wear uniforms for three main reasons. First, as a manifestation of the industrialization and dehumanization of the work force, uniforms served to “civilize” workers by sublimating their individual identities to the corporate identity of the Post Office. Second, the Post Office reconstituted sub-institutional identities by using variations in the uniforms to signify the separation of roles and the division of labor among postal workers. Third, the Post Office used the uniforms and policed how they were worn to prescribe conventionalized secular performances by postal workers to make them symbols of authority and legitimacy as employees of the state.¹²³ In sum, the Post Office sublimated individual worker identities to the larger corporate identity to use their uniformed bodies as a form of advertisement for the efficiency, professionalism, trustworthiness, and dedication of the Post Office.¹²⁴

The most significant distinction in uniforms throughout postal history was based on a simple dichotomy between indoor and outdoor staff. While the Post Office always allowed indoor staff to wear their own clothing, the Directorate forced outdoor staff to wear uniforms.¹²⁵ Uniforms made the outdoor staff immediately recognizable to the general public so that when they looked “smart” or presented a “decent appearance” it reflected credibly on the Post Office and its corporate identity. The Post Office thus conceived of uniforms as a method of control by making workers aware of how they appeared and acted in public. By making workers recognizable the Directorate also bureaucratized their relationship to the public by physically showing their authority and legitimacy through their uniforms.

¹²³ The prescribed clothing for religious or secular rituals has also been described as a uniform. As used in this section, uniform(s) means an identifying set of clothing worn by the members of a profession, organization, or rank.

¹²⁴ The notion of uniformed bodies as a form of advertisement stems from: Gregory J. Downey, *Telegraph Messenger Boys: Labor, Technology, and Geography, 1850-1950* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

¹²⁵ Only in 1934 did Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua float a “pro-German” scheme of military-style uniforms including double-edged sabers for the indoor staff, but they refused to wear “martial” clothing. Huo Xixiang, “Huiyi Guomindang shiqi de youzheng” (Recollecting the postal service of the Nationalist Party era) *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* 65 (1979): 155-197; reprint, *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, 1: 100.

In the early years of the Post Office, when its overall bureaucracy was relatively small, the work functions among the staff were not highly differentiated nor were workers' ranks stratified. As the Post Office grew in size its bureaucracy became increasingly complex requiring a greater variety of staff members with well-defined duties. The first and most important functional differentiation was between rural couriers and urban postmen. Not only did couriers and postmen serve different functions – rural versus urban – but also they wore different uniforms.¹²⁶ By at least 1904 outdoor staff were wearing uniforms.¹²⁷ They all appear in the same light-colored Chinese-style shirts with toggle buttons, but with trousers of various colors and some wearing puttees. The distinction between the postmen and couriers, one maintained throughout the Republican era, is that couriers are only given vests while postmen have uniforms of a decidedly Chinese style consisting of long sleeve shirts widening down the arm and extending below the hand. Conical-style and traditional winter hats were permitted, as was Chinese footwear. There is also a clear focus on the upper body as it is the portion of the body uniformed while various colors and the sporadic wearing of puttees are seen on the legs.

At some point between 1910 and 1911, for reasons unknown, new Western-style uniforms start making their appearance in some photographs. Quite possibly the introduction of new service uniforms coincided with the creation of the Supply Department in June 1910, which subsequently handled the manufacture and distribution of all uniforms. Whatever the case, the Directorate eliminated all Chinese-style clothing for outdoor staff replacing them with Western-style uniforms, except for rural couriers who retained the vest. Chinese style skullcaps and other

¹²⁶ The discussion that follows is based on photographs seen in the Second Historical Archives and scattered throughout the postal archive.

¹²⁷ Presumably uniforms were used prior to 1904, but this is the earliest date for which I have found evidence. Gonghan di 325 hao, Zhenjiang youju juzhang Leileishi han qing Shanghai Da Qing youju juzhang goumai niukou, 11 June 1904 (Letter No. 325, Zhenjiang Postmaster L. Rocher to Shanghai Postmaster requesting help to purchase buttons) in Zhang Zhuquan, ed., *Qingmo Zhenjiang youjie zongju dang'an zhaiyao huibian* (Collection of translated archival materials from the late Qing Zhenjiang Head Post Office) (Zhenjiang: Zhenjiang difangzhi & Zhenjiang youdian ju, 1996), 76.

headwear gave way to peaked caps. Jackets were thigh-length, sleeves ending at the wrist, with Western style metal buttons, and several large pockets with a large belt cinched around the waist. The Directorate made all trousers the same color as the jackets and distributed Western-style leather shoes. A number of other pseudo-military elements were also added to the uniforms including shoulder braids, brass insignia, and epaulettes.

Some employees initially objected to the new Western-style uniforms. Shortly after the western New Year's holiday in 1913, the Yichang Postmaster ordered all postmen to wear the new uniforms. After wearing the uniforms for a day, the Yichang postmen refused to wear them again. When queried, the men claimed the public was "laughing at them" because of the red braid on the shoulder of the uniform. When the Postmaster ignored their pleas, the postmen stormed out on strike. When the Postmaster threatened to replace them, the men agreed to wear the uniform in exchange for an increase in salary to which the Postmaster agreed. One of the first effective strikes by postmen was thus over their uniforms.¹²⁸

As a corollary to the new Western-style uniforms the Directorate and foreign Postmasters started showing greater concern with the physique and countenance of their outdoor staff. The Directorate wanted "strong and healthy" candidates for couriers and postmen while Chinese Inspectors recommended hiring only those "who have a good appearance, are young and strong, [and] ride a bicycle well."¹²⁹ Chief Inspector Erik Tollefsen evinced the most extreme concern with the bodies of postmen. Tollefsen suggested eliminating all those whose personal appearance suggested they were "slovenly, unhealthy, rascally, cunning, dishonest, quarrelsome, or merely unpleasant." Instead, only men who "look" honest and who are "of the same average

¹²⁸ S.O. No. 75, Yichang Postmaster Gear to Postmaster Piry, 11 January 1913 in SHAC137.2187.

¹²⁹ Circular No. 418, Acting Associate Director General Destelan, 12 July 1916 in SHAC137.2023-4; Enclosure to Shanghai S.O. No. 497, Inspector Dzing to Associate Director General Destelan, 16 March 1916 in SHAC137.2183-12.

height and dimensions” should be hired. Tollefsen thought that if all postmen were the same height and weight they “look smarter in a body” and the Directorate could save considerably on uniforms by only manufacturing one size.¹³⁰

In the late 1910s and early 1920s postal expansion necessitated creating a much larger outdoor staff. To differentiate the workers and give them occupational identities, the Directorate assigned uniforms according to job title. For example, around 1917 the Post Office introduced trucks and river launches into the Service, which required the hiring of chauffeurs and boatmen. Shortly thereafter, new regulations stipulated unique uniforms for both these groups. By 1921, workers classed as postmen, couriers, mail coolies, sailors, chauffeurs, and train escorts each had occupational uniforms.¹³¹ The Directorate also distributed full descriptions of all uniforms to the districts to eliminate minor variations introduced by District Postal Commissioners. The Directorate emphasized that the “standard designs” described in the regulations “be strictly adhered to” in the quality and construction of each type of occupational uniform.¹³²

The last major alterations to postal uniforms came in 1935. In February, Minister of Communications Zhu Jiahua issued new regulations for uniforms that eliminated Western-style uniforms in favor of modified Zhongshan jackets.¹³³ In accordance with the Ministry’s regulations, the Directorate ordered postmen to wear green-colored, single-breasted, closed-collared jackets with four pockets worn to the mid-thigh and sleeves to the wrist, which is a

¹³⁰ E. Tollefsen’s Inspection Report, 1923 in SHAC137.4457. In the 1930s the Supply Department also recommended limiting uniforms to three sizes to halve costs. S/O No. 87, Thomas Gwynne, Postal Supply Department, Shanghai, to Director General of Posts, 3 July 1933 in SHAC137.2462.

¹³¹ Tianjin ju youwuzhang Talide cheng Beijing youzheng zongju zongban guanyu zhifu de baogao, 1 June 1921, ” in *Tianjin youzheng shiliao*, 3: 454-455.

¹³² Instruction No. 267, Additions and Amendments to Instructions: No. 63, Co-Director General Destelan, 31 December 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5.

¹³³ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongling di 702 hao, youzheng juzhang Guo Xinsong, 28 February 1935 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 702, Director General Guo Xinsong) in SHAC137.2251-5.

description of a Zhongshan jacket except the Directorate added buttons on the sleeve.¹³⁴ The postmen's uniform provided the template for all others save the sailors who wore a distinctive sailor suit. For employees ranking higher than postmen the Directorate added some element to the basic uniform such as yellow stripes on the sleeve for Delivery Inspectors, two rows of brass buttons for chauffeurs, a badge of crossed anchors for *Laoda*, or used white duck instead of green drill for Train and Steamer Postmasters. The Directorate removed some element or used inferior materials for employees lower on the occupational scale than postmen – Mail and Office coolies had bone toggle buttons instead of brass ones, mechanics only received overalls with bone toggle buttons, mail escorts did not have a brass emblem, watchmen did not have pockets on the outside of their Zhongshan jacket, and chair coolies only received a Chinese style blouse. For the lowest employees, the rural couriers, the Directorate gave them a “native style waistcoat” with cloth frog buttons.¹³⁵

The new uniforms demonstrated a sartorial sensitivity by the Directorate who sought clothing both Chinese and modern for its workers, but clothing that signaled the Post Office's unification with the revolutionary ideals espoused by the wearing of the Zhongshan jacket.¹³⁶ The Zhongshan jacket represented the revolutionary ideal of egalitarianism by containing no outward sign of rank or position. Although the Ministry and Directorate's regulations describe Zhongshan jackets, the accompanying details undermine the revolutionary spirit of those jackets by stratifying the workers through added or subtracted elements to the basic postman's uniform. In fact, the 1935 regulations contained the most highly differentiated uniforms in postal history.

¹³⁴ Director General Liu Shufan first allowed shorts and long stockings in 1928. Circular Memo No. 46, Director General Liu Shufan, Officiating Co-Director General C. H. Shields, 20 September 1928 in SHAC137.288-3.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ On the early history of the Zhongshan suit, see: John Fitzgerald, *Awakening China: Politics, Culture, and Class in the Nationalist Revolution* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 23-25.

The purpose of adding or subtracting elements to the uniform was to symbolize a chain of command by creating a status system reliant on physical markers worn on the body.

Abstractly, postal uniforms represented a modern industrial mode of production resulting in uniforms of high-quality fabric, precise fitting, and consistent color that transformed individual workers into a uniformed mass. The collective body of uniformed workers was then redefined into occupational categories and a chain of command signified by distinctive uniforms. From the Directorate's perspective the uniforms gave the outdoor staff an immediately recognizable identity to the public. The uniformed bodies of postal workers looking and acting like a disciplined army of well-ordered and polite workers became a form of advertisement for the efficiency, professionalism, trustworthiness, and dedication of the Post Office.

Shaping the Public Bodies and Behaviors of Postal Workers

In order for the bodies of postal workers to be effective conveyors of postal identity, the Post Office had to discipline and police their behavior and the performance of their duties. By policing the workers' behavior, the Directorate prescribed conventionalized secular performances transforming postal workers into bodily representations of the larger corporate identity of the Post Office. The Post Office thus used the bodies of postal workers and their public behavior as a form of advertisement for the efficiency, professionalism, trustworthiness, and dedication of the Post Office.

Prior to industrialization most handicraft workers and peasants controlled their own pace, timing, and conduct of work. Factory and modern bureaucratic discipline radically altered these practices. Employers and administrators in the early twentieth century dictated how, when, and in what manner work was done by placing workers within an industrial disciplinary regime to

make them more productive, but also more tractable to modern forms of control. Under these forms of discipline workers were rewarded not only according to their labor output, but also based on their behavior in the workplace. The Chinese Post Office, and other similar institutions, have two distinguishing features; first, they lack formal “factory discipline” similar to that accompanying many of the steam-driven industries like textile mills; second, its labor force was hybridized containing significant numbers of manual laborers, public service staff, and white-collar employees. Outdoor postal workers in particular did not operate under the watchful eye of an overseer, but on the public streets outside the disciplinary structures of the factory while indoor staff faced more discipline through the proceduralization of their activities and direct oversight by managers. The very publicness of outdoor workers’ bodies drove the Post Office to institute both formal and informal methods of policing the workers’ behavior when they operated in public spaces.

Starting in 1897 the Post Office introduced formal disciplinary rules by requiring fidelity guarantees from all Chinese employed, which Postal Secretary Piry claimed, “suits exactly the customs of the Chinese people.”¹³⁷ The Inspectorate demanded all indoor clerks to provide guarantees from two substantial sources such as local money shops, small businesses, or landowners in amounts ranging from 200 to 1000 silver dollars depending on the rank of the employee. “Lower employees” including couriers and postmen had to secure guarantees in addition to contributions of one silver dollar per month as a security cash deposit. The stated purpose of these bonds and cash deposits was “as security for [their] honesty and good behavior.”¹³⁸ If employees broke postal regulations or engaged in illegal behavior they forfeited

¹³⁷ Postal Circular No. 144, Postal Secretary Piry, 12 September 1906 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

their cash deposit and their guarantors were legally responsible to pay the Post Office any additional amount lost to the Service.

Both the guarantee and security cash system worked effectively as countless employees who stole funds, stamps, or customer remittances had their cash deposits confiscated or their guarantors were forced to pay compensation.¹³⁹ The very effectiveness of these two systems was a contributory factor in at least two workers' strikes and numerous petitions and complaints. In November 1911 more than one hundred postmen declared a strike in Guangzhou with the sole demand that the Post Office refund their security deposits.¹⁴⁰ Similarly, in April 1922, the Shanghai postal workers tried to negotiate the return of their deposits, but when they failed a strike of some four hundred workers erupted across the city. After several days of negotiations, the strikers dropped their demand in exchange for a 15 percent pay increase.¹⁴¹

Supplementing the guarantee and security cash systems were larger pension schemes for upper-level staff starting in 1919 and for lower-level staff in 1923. Old-age pensions first appeared in England and the United States in the 1870s as a form of social reform to protect aging workers, but also to maintain the quality of the workforce. Once enacted, the idea of deferred compensation, or the threatened confiscation of those funds, effectively undermined the militancy of employees and policed their behavior lest they lose their pensions. Coupled with mandatory retirement ages – 55 for postmen and 60 for other employees – pensions were also designed to remove older workers without provoking hostility from other postal employees. In late 1918 the Directorate ordered upper-level staff to start contributing monthly amounts to a

¹³⁹ Literally hundreds of such cases occurred each year between 1896 and 1949.

¹⁴⁰ Guangzhou youzheng zongju quanti chaiyi guanggao (Announcement by all lowly servants of the Guangzhou Head Post Office) in SHAC137.1813-1.

¹⁴¹ *NCH*, 29 April 1922; Zhong-Gong Shanghai shi youdian guanliju weiyuanhui, *Shanghai youzheng zhigong yundong shi* (The history of the Shanghai postal service labor movement) (Beijing: Zhonggongdang shi chubanshe, 1999), 32-36.

“Guarantee and Provident Fund” designed to “introduce self-responsibility” and “provide the Service an additional safeguard.”¹⁴² A pension system for lower-level staff known as the Superannuation Fund started in April 1923 to “protect the interests of the Post Office” and gradually replace the security cash deposit system.¹⁴³ Mounting protests from postal workers and increasing trouble finding suitable investments for the funds, however, forced the Directorate to stop collecting contributions in early 1927.¹⁴⁴ After the National Government took over the Post Office in 1928 a new pension fund was created, which the Directorate once again used to threaten workers by suggesting their pensions would be confiscated for negligence or criminal activity.¹⁴⁵

While the threat of confiscating guarantees, cash deposits, or pensions was real, it was a distant threat primarily aimed at serious crimes or misdemeanors. Starting in 1907 the Inspectorate also created a system of merits and demerits hoping to have a more immediate effect on workers’ behavior. In late 1907 Shanghai Postmaster F. E. Taylor started experimenting with a “good-conduct stripe” scheme for postmen. Those postmen keeping their uniform neat and tidy and performing their duties well received a stripe to be attached to their uniform as a physical manifestation of their good behavior. Taylor, however, argued that Chinese did not respond to the granting of the stripes, but shaming them with their removal was

¹⁴² Circular No. 458, Co-Director General Destelan, 2 November 1918 in SHAC137.2023-4.

¹⁴³ Tongyu di 233, youzheng zongju zongban Tieshilan, 14 April 1923 (Instruction No. 233, Co-Director General of Posts Destelan) in SHAC137.2024-4.

¹⁴⁴ Co.-D.G. Circular Memo No. 1931, Co-Director General Destelan, 19 March 1927 in SHAC137.2023-23. Protests against the Superannuation Fund contributed to the 1925 Shanghai postal workers strike and are seen in early postal workers’ publications. *NCH*, 22 August 1925; *Yougong banyuekan* (Postal Workers’ fortnightly) 1 (10 March 1927) in SHAC137.2465-3.

¹⁴⁵ Cheng di 199 hao, daili youzheng zongju juzhang Lin Shi, 15 May 1929 (Petition No. 199, Acting Director General of Posts Lin Shi) in SHAC137.7515-1; Tongchi di 331 hao, youzheng zongju huiban Duofusen, 11 November 1929 (Circular Memo No. 331, Co-Director General of Posts Tollefsen) in SHAC137.288-18.

far more effective.¹⁴⁶ While there is little information on how the postmen responded to this system, it remained part of the official disciplinary system until 1930 when it was replaced by a formal merit-demerit method for the entire staff.¹⁴⁷ Instead of a visible system of stripes, Director General Wei Yifu (韋以黻) introduced a more private system whereby the merits or demerits were recorded on an employee's personnel record rather than their body. Each merit or demerit reduced or increased the time until that employee's next promotion cycle by three months. No other merit-demerit system existed alongside Wei Yifu's until 1945 when Director General Xu Jizhuang (徐繼庄) started a rigorous system of fines for mistakes by postal workers.¹⁴⁸

Postal administrators permanently recorded all of these merits and demerits on an employee's color-coded Confidential Report, which combined their personnel record with an evaluation of their value and behavior as an employee. These confidential reports were compiled for all staff, including foreigners. Each report was color-coded – red, pink, blue, or yellow – representing a four-tiered performance evaluation and likelihood for promotion. In addition to constituting a Service Record, the reports contain an evaluation of an employee's private conduct, their trustworthiness, level of intelligence, and industriousness.¹⁴⁹ Probably the most controversial aspect of the reports was the comments on the staff's private lives. For example, in the file of Charles Destrées we find the information that he “has many Jew friends,” that he was “déséquilibré,” and that local Chinese considered him “neurotic” – he lasted just over a year in

¹⁴⁶ Mr. F.E. Taylor: Surrendering Charge to Mr. E. Gilchrist and Enclosure: Memorandum on the Working of the Office, 6 December 1907 in SHAC137.1858.

¹⁴⁷ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongling di 638 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Wei Yifu, 19 December 1930 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 638, Director General Wei Yifu) in SHAC137.288-11.

¹⁴⁸ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongxunling di 35 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Xu Jizhuang, 23 July 1945 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, General Instruction No. 35, Director General Xu Jizhuang) in SHAC137.6612-1.

¹⁴⁹ The postal archive contains thousands of these reports, for a few examples, see: SHAC137.2125.

the Service.¹⁵⁰ J. Depardon, states his personnel file, is “handicapped by his oriental (Japanese) wife.”¹⁵¹ Similar comments invading the private life of the staff are found in the confidential files for all Chinese staff including whether they frequented prostitutes, enjoyed gambling, drank heavily, or smoked opium. Enough employees and workers objected to the color-coded reports that immediately after the Nationalists appointed Liu Shufan as the new Director General in mid-1928, he ordered their abolition.¹⁵² Instead, Liu replaced them with “class reports on staff,” which dropped the evaluations of employees’ personal lives.¹⁵³

Another popular method for removing troublesome employees was the time-honored practice of transferring them. The Directorate frequently transferred upper-level staff to train them in new duties, but lower-level workers were not usually transferred unless there were special circumstances.¹⁵⁴ In the early 1920s, the postal workers labor movement posed new challenges to the Post Office. In response, the Directorate sanctioned the transfer of “troublemakers” to suburban or rural offices. The pattern of transferring “malcontents” became increasingly common in the late 1920s and 1930s. After a strike of postmen in June 1926, Nanjing Postal Commissioner Shields transferred the ring-leaders “as a warning to the staff and to prevent their stirring up further trouble.”¹⁵⁵ During a strike in Wuhan that December union members publically demanded that no executive committee member of their local be transferred during their tenure of office.¹⁵⁶ In late October 1930 Beiping Postal Commissioner Nixon stirred up a storm of protest when he transferred around twenty “notorious troublemakers.”¹⁵⁷ Nixon used the practice so frequently, the Beiping workers started an “Anti-Nixon Movement” in 1932

¹⁵⁰ Personnel File of C. Destrées in SHAC137.1793-1.

¹⁵¹ Personnel File of J. Depardon in SHAC137.1793-18.

¹⁵² Even future Acting Director General of Posts Huo Xixiang objected to color-coded reports. “Diguozhuyi yu Zhongguo youzheng” (Imperialism and China’s postal service), *Wenshi ziliao xuanji* 15 (1961): 59-80; reprint, *QGGJZXWSZL:YDSL*, 1: 73.

¹⁵³ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongling di 584 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Liu Shufan, daili huiban Xilesi, 15 October 1928 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 584, Director General Liu Shufan and Acting Co-Director General Shields) in SHAC137.288-11.

consisting of propaganda posters claiming he was a running dog of the imperialists who “framed cases against the loyal working brothers and revolutionary elements transferring them to distant offices.”¹⁵⁸

Supplementing the formal disciplinary regime were a host of informal measures designed to control workers’ behavior. Both foreign and Chinese postal administrators sought to create idealized model workers who demonstrated the qualities of discipline, trustworthiness, efficiency, punctuality, politeness, and enthusiasm. The expression of and desire for these qualities coalesced with a larger current in modern Chinese history wherein moral-politico revolutionaries and reformers ranging from Jiang Jieshi to Mao Zedong attempted behavioral revolutions designed to create new kinds of citizens or soldiers. Countless movements like Jiang’s New Life Movement (1934-1937) and new moral codes like Mao’s “Three Main Rules of Discipline and Eight Points for Attention” (1928-1929) operated under the assumption, like the postal administrators, that reforming public behavior would ultimately result in the moral transformation of the individual.

The Directorate’s formal systems for circumscribing workers’ behavior were thus coupled with numerous attempts to place the public and physical bodies of postal workers under a moral regime. Starting in 1901, the Post Office began issuing broad statements on the qualities held by “good” employees. Specifically sought were workers who demonstrated efficiency in

¹⁵⁴ A serial publication recorded all transfers and rarely mentions postmen or couriers. *Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, Youzheng ren yuan gengdong yuekan* (Monthly reports of staff movement) (Shanghai: Gongyinchu, n.d.) in SHAC137.2388.

¹⁵⁵ S/O No. 1060, Co-Director General Destelan to Nanjing Postal Commissioner Shields, 22 July 1926 in SHAC137.2182-1.

¹⁵⁶ Petition No. 337, Directorate General of Posts to Ministry of Communications, 2 December 1926 in SHAC137.5164.

¹⁵⁷ S/O No. 114, Beiping Postal Commissioner Nixon to Director General of Posts Wei Yifu, 29 October 1930 in SHAC137.2478-1

¹⁵⁸ Beiping youwu gonghui qu Nie yundong weiyuanhui, *Beiping youwu gonghui wei quzhu youwuzhang Niekexun xuanyan* (Proclamation of the Beiping Postal Workers’ Union to drive out Postal Commissioner Nixon) (Beiping: Beiping Postal Workers’ Union, 1932) in SHAC137(5).2662.

postal work, zeal and punctuality in carrying out their duties, tact and politeness when dealing with the public, and absolute trustworthiness and scrupulous honesty in the handling money and mail matter. In addition, appearance, good health, and freedom from family impediments would be the factors determining whether an employee was promoted.¹⁵⁹ Another requirement repeated time and again was that all postal employees must show “discretion in act and word” and be “absolutely non-political” lest their words and deeds endanger the autonomy of the Service.¹⁶⁰ Even workers themselves partially internalized the desire to be “free from and above politics” to show they “have the confidence of the public and are men of repute.”¹⁶¹

By the late 1910s and early 1920s postal operations and bureaucratic development expanded to such an extent that the Directorate deemed it necessary to have a more encompassing moral code for its public workers. Some Postal Commissioners like Erik Tollefsen liked to issue special staff orders. In these orders he “tried to appeal to the Staff’s sense of honor, to their loyalty, to their esprit de corps, to pride in their position, and in the Service...in kindly language and carefully translated into easy Chinese in terms of a benevolent spirit.”¹⁶² All postmen and couriers were “not allowed” to loiter in the streets or to frequent tea houses, restaurants, houses of ill-repute or become intoxicated, smoke opium, gamble, or behave in a disorderly manner. They were forbidden to race their bicycles or get drawn into quarrels on public streets. There were strict prohibitions on gossiping with the public or demanding tips from them.¹⁶³ Finally, the Directorate required all employees to keep their uniforms neat and

¹⁵⁹ Postal Secretary’s Circulars, No. 51, Postal Secretary Jules A. van Aalst, 1 August 1901 in SHAC137.2023-1.

¹⁶⁰ Confidential Circular S/O, Co-Director General Destelan, 28 November 1922 in SHAC137.2188-3; S/O No. 93, Beijing Postal Commissioner Nixon to Director General of Posts Wei Yifu, 26 May 1930 in SHAC137.2478-1.

¹⁶¹ Schemes put forward by the Postal Workers’ Union and the Postal Employees’ Association for the strengthening of the Postal foundation, 1 May 1932, submitted to the Minister and Vice-Minister of Communications in SHAC127(2).741.

¹⁶² Mr. E. Tollefsen’s Inspection Report, 1923 in SHAC137.4457.

¹⁶³ Postmen often asked for New Years’s cumshaws to the chagrin of the public. *NCH*, 27 January 1917.

tidy and made them financially responsible for any damage to their uniform.¹⁶⁴ The proper wearing and care of uniforms was of special interest to the Directorate who repeatedly warned staff to wash their uniforms and maintain a professional appearance. Staff who wore sloppy or dirty uniforms “appearing in the public street...immediately discredit the Post Office.”¹⁶⁵ If the staff fails to meet with public expectations, the Ministry of Communications admonished, “the future of the Post Office cannot be viewed with equanimity.”¹⁶⁶

In the 1930s Chinese postal officials placed greater emphasis on moral suasion for postmen. In early 1936 the Directorate distributed a pamphlet entitled *Handbook for Postmen* who were ordered to “recite its contents thoroughly, commit them to memory, and observe them faithfully.”¹⁶⁷ The *Handbook* ordered postmen to cultivate the habits of promptness, orderliness, industriousness, and hardiness to show their dedication. They should also refrain from talking and joking amongst themselves or wandering about and horsing around. When in direct contact with customers postmen should show politeness and good spirit. If a postman was found whoring, gambling, smoking opium, intoxicated, being disrespectful to the public or just generally “whooping it up” during office hours they would be immediately reprimanded and given demerits. While at work, postmen were required to wear clean uniforms, polished shoes, and have a burnished badge, but were forbidden to wear their uniforms after work, especially if they frequented teahouses, wine shops, or theaters.

¹⁶⁴ Postal Circular No. 419, Acting Associate Director General Destelan, 14 July 1916 in SHAC137.2023-4.

¹⁶⁵ S/O No. 396, Beiping Postal Commissioner Poletti to Director General Guo Xinsong, 21 March 1935 in SHAC137.2478-5.

¹⁶⁶ Jiaotong bu xunling di 5354 hao, jiaotong bu youzheng zongju tongling di 685 hao, youzheng zongju juzhang Huang Naishu, 26 October 1933 (Ministerial Order No. 5354, Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 685, Director General of Posts Huang Naishu) in SHAC137.288-11.

¹⁶⁷ Jiaotong bu youzheng zongju, *Xinchai xuzhi* (Handbook for postmen) (Shanghai: Gongyingchu, 1936), SHAC137.6273-1. In later years, the Directorate produced handbooks for many different categories of workers such as: *Youzheng daibansuo guize ji youzheng daibanren xuzhi* (Regulations for postal agencies and a handbook for postal agents) (Shanghai: Gongyingchu, 1936); *Youwu shicha renyuan shouce* (Handbook for postal inspectors) (Shanghai: Gongyingchu, n.d.); *Youjuzhang xuzhi* (Handbook for Postal Directors) (Chongqing: Xi Chuan youzheng guanliju neidi yewu gu, 1941); and Xu Jizhuang, *Youzheng renyuan xuzhi* (Handbook for postal staff) (Chongqing: Gongyingchu, 1943), all in SHAC137.0010.

Like the *Handbook for Postmen*, the Hebei Head Post Office produced a special handbook in September 1948 exclusively for “window employees” who dealt directly with the public at the service counters.¹⁶⁸ The pamphlet begins by stressing that as a public service institution the counter staff are the primary representatives of the Post Office and therefore should follow Director General Huo Xixiang’s statement, “The public is the master of the Post Office,” and therefore “meticulous service is needed.” Counter staff should use “psychology” to project a modest, general, and “pure-hearted countenance” to assuage the public while also using a pleasant and clear style of speaking and maintain a “happy attitude.” To make a positive first impression, the handbook recommends treating the public service area “as if it were grandiose.” Personnel should also look frugal and avoid ostentatiousness and loquaciousness. Instead, they should always show deferential politeness to the public. Such exhortations to be polite even resulted in several “kindness competitions” held by the Directorate.¹⁶⁹

The discipline and punishments meted out to postal workers – both formal and informal – represented larger movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in which modern industrial and bureaucratic organizations started focusing on the body as a locus of both newer social ethics and, as discussed in this section, as a form of publicity. The Directorate sought to define and regiment the conduct of work and public behavior of postal workers seeing them as representations of the corporate identity of the Post Office. Formal disciplinary rules like guarantees and security cash as well as merit-demerit systems and confidential reports on staff served to police workers’ behavior by threatening financial loss. Moral strictures against behaviors like smoking opium and visiting prostitutes as well as moral suasion to act and appear decently sought to reform the individual’s ethical center by dictating their outward behavior.

¹⁶⁸ Hebei youzheng guanli ju gongzhong fuwu zu, *Youzheng chuankou renyan fuwu shouce* (Handbook for post office window service employees) (Beiping: n.p., 1948) in SHAC137(5).2761.

¹⁶⁹ *Da gang bao*, 1 April 1948.

While the Directorate did appear genuinely interested in the thoughts and actions of their employees, the larger purpose was to use them as symbols of institutional identity. When workers kept themselves clean it was a moral statement about the Post Office; when postal workers spoke politely it was a statement about the service orientation of the Post Office; when postal workers avoided “corrupting” behavior it was a sign of their discipline.

Conclusion

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries new ideas of government openness and transparency emerged in China signaling recognition of the transformations occurring between state and civil society. This chapter has specifically focused on the Chinese Post Office’s construction of a corporate identity in broadly-defined “media” demonstrating the government’s growing attention to modern advertising, new conceptions of institution-building, and an appreciation of the value of public information. Overall, these cross currents reveal a growing awareness of the overlapping relationships between state-making, institution-building, and public opinion within the Chinese state. As I have tried to show, these new relationships are profitably viewed through the process of institutional identity in the Chinese Post Office.

While many processes and activities go into the making of institutions like the Post Office – bureaucratization, economic development, expansion, standardization – there are equally important questions of identity and meaning that convey given messages to the public and institutional members about the nature of that institution as it changes over time. The drive for a coherent corporate identity forms the key ideological dimension of institutions, which is particularly important for those that reliant upon public acceptance and popular approval like the Post Office. The content of that identity, or the elements of which it is constituted, varies widely

across institutions and is shaped by their own understanding of their purposes and historical missions. Occasionally such an institutional identity is said to encapsulate the all-encompassing vision of an important “founding father” such as Robert Hart with the Customs; however, in the construction of an institutional identity one cannot usually designate with any certainty who is the creator of that identity – it is better to acknowledge that the institution itself is the author. In understanding the institution as author, then, one crucial aspect as institutional identity is located. A second is the similarity between individual and institutional identity in that its identity is not crystallized at the moment of birth or initial conceptualization, but grows and changes in accordance with contingent factors like historical context, the particular audience being targeted, or the physical medium being employed.

The corporate identity of the Chinese Post Office from 1896 to 1949 past through several stages. In each stage, postal identity functioned contextually on multiple levels, was aimed at different audiences, and was embodied in a variety of physical forms. Broadly speaking, the Post Office used the *Working Reports* to manufacture an origin narrative, but also to emphasize and disseminate its self-perceived identity characteristics like progressiveness, innovativeness, efficiency, competitiveness, and uniqueness. The Directorate’s placement of advertisements, even more than their content, demonstrates the blurring of lines between public information and publicity as a strategy to shape public perceptions of the Post Office, but also to target specific groups with tailored advertising messages in various media. The Directorate color branded itself and its bodies – buildings, vehicles, workers – green and yellow in an effort to give the Post Office a unique, enduring, and immediately recognizable visual identity within urban cityscapes and rural landscapes. The Directorate required outdoor postal workers to wear uniforms transforming them into bodily advertisements for postal discipline, order, dedication, and public

service. To police the workers' bodies, the Post Office used various formal and informal measures designed to shape how workers behaved and acted toward the public ensuring they remained representatives of the Post Office's efficiency, professionalism, trustworthiness, and dedication as a public service institution.

The Post Office thus used its *Working Reports*, advertising, institutional colors, the uniformed bodies of workers, and behavior regulations to help project varying conceptions of its identity sometimes to separate groups and at other times to the public at large. To the government it presented a modern institution achieving success through competition, progressive expansion, and innovation; to the public it showed an institution focused to public service, politeness, efficiency, and trustworthiness; and to workers it developed an ethos of loyalty, dedication, and discipline. The result of the Post Office's efforts to link itself to such values and symbols was the creation of high levels of consumer confidence, administrative autonomy, and loyalty from its workers. In sum, the Post Office's succeeded in fostering a public perception of and reputation for the Post Office as communications medium vital to the development of the Chinese nation-state through its unique, distinctive, and enduring corporate identity as a modern public service institution.

Chapter 7
Common|wealth:
The Qiaopiju Remittance Network, the Chinese Post Office,
and the Making of the Transnation

The Post Office participated in a nation-building project in the early twentieth century to forge a territorially-bounded national community out of the disparate elements of the multiethnic Qing Empire. It also intervened in the transnational social spaces occupied by overseas Chinese.¹ The purpose of these interventions was not only to create a deterritorialized cultural identity of Chineseness – to decouple the ethnic nation from the territorial state by naming immigrants and sojourners as national ethno-citizens – but also to gain access to the financial resources of overseas Chinese communities in order to strengthen the economic basis of the state.² The relationship between the Chinese Post Office and the Qiaopiju remittance network constitutes one of the most important long-term contacts between the state and overseas communities in the early twentieth century.

Qiaopiju (僑批局), or literally Overseas Letter Offices, is a generalized term for a type of business firm that appeared during one of the great waves of Chinese migration in the late nineteenth century.³ The Qiaopiju specialized in mobilizing and transporting labor overseas, shipping goods throughout the diasporic network, handling private and business letters, and providing remittance and other banking services to overseas Chinese. As a historical phenomenon we can consider the Qiaopiju, and their antecedents the circumambulating Overseas

¹ On the notion of “transnational social space,” see: Thomas Faist, *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

² Prasenjit Duara’s work analyzes the late Qing and Republican-era states’ overtly political efforts to co-opt overseas Chinese into their nation-building projects. “Nationalists Among Transnationals: Overseas Chinese and the Idea of China, 1900-1911,” in *Ungrounded Empires: The Cultural Politics of Modern Chinese Transnationalism*, edited by Aihwa Ong and Donald Nonini (New York: Routledge, 1997), 39-60; “Transnationalism and the Predicament of Sovereignty: China, 1900-1945,” *American Historical Review* 102: 4 (1997): 1030-1051.

³ Some of the other common names for overseas remittance companies, often reflecting the influence of local dialect, are Letter Agency (批信局), Money Letter Office (銀信局), Overseas Letter Office (僑信局), Letter Office (信局), Remittance Office (匯兌局), Remittance Letter Office (匯兌信局), Remittance Firm (匯兌莊), Overseas Letter Shop (僑批館), Letter Shop (批館), and Gold Mountain Firm (金山莊).

or South Seas Agents (水客/南洋客), as the earliest form of an institutionalized spatial network linking overseas Chinese to the homeland through the movement of people, remittances, goods, and information.⁴

For over a hundred years, from the mid-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, the Qiaopiju enjoyed unparalleled success in securing the remittance business of overseas Chinese. To maintain their market dominance, the Qiaopiju had to be economically adaptable and politically savvy within a variety of settings, both within and without China – during the disintegration of the Qing state, in the fragmented polity of the Republic, amid the recasting of state-business relationships by the Nationalist state, among the Southeast Asian indigenous states, within the pre- and post-1870 colonial regimes in mainland and archipelagic Southeast Asia, under Japanese occupation during World War II, and in the midst of racist and discriminatory policies in other countries.

Many scholars looking for the source of the Qiaopiju's ability to thrive in such diverse political and economic settings have emphasized their structure as a "traditional Chinese" style of business firm. What makes the Qiaopiju traditional, these scholars argue, are their reliance on various forms of cultural or familial affinities, sometimes called *guanxi* (關係) bases,⁵ such as native-place, dialect, or real and fictive kinship relationships, in firm-customer and inter-firm relations.⁶ Some scholars like Chen Xunxian focus on the psychological desire – the "root" (根)

⁴ On spatial networks, see: Laurence Ma, "Space, Place, and Transnationalism in the Chinese Diaspora," in *The Chinese Diaspora: Space, Place, Mobility, and Identity*, edited by Laurence Ma and Carolyn Cartier (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), 1-49.

⁵ Tong Chee Kiong and Yong Pit Kee, "Guanxi Bases, Xinyong and Chinese Business Networks," *British Journal of Sociology* 49: 1 (March 1998): 75-96.

⁶ Chen Chunsheng, "Jindai Huaqiao huikuan yu Qiaopi ye de jingying: Yi Chao-Shan diqu de yanjiu wei zhongxin" (Modern overseas Chinese remittances and the business of the Qiaopi industry: Using the Chaozhou-Shantou area as a research focus), *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu* (Research in Chinese social and economic history) 4 (2000): 57-66; Huang Yanhua, "Huiqiao huikuan dui jindai Chao-Shan diqu nongye yu nongcun shehui de yingxiang" (The influence of overseas Chinese remittances on the agricultural industry and village society in the Chao-Shan area),

consciousness – of overseas Chinese to return both physically and metaphorically to the families and homeland as the factor giving rise to the Qiaopiju.⁷ More recently Dai Yifeng and Jiao Jianhua, drawing on Mark Granovetter’s economic sociology,⁸ are emphasizing the business practices of Qiaopiju as “embedded” in traditional cultural and social practices – rather than an idealized free market – such as interpersonal trust based on native-place or geo-consanguineous ties.⁹ The reliance on these traditional practices and cultural affinities, Dai Yifeng argues, manifested itself not only in culturally sensitive customer services with the “human touch,” but also in the “networkization” (網絡化) of firm-customer and inter-firm relations.¹⁰ These culturally sensitive policies, Dai and others argue, gave the collective Qiaopiju a competitive edge over “modern” remitting enterprises like banks that were reliant on systems trust – a type of trust defined by confidence in an impersonal system of rules.¹¹ In their desire to find the indispensable “Chinese” elements of Qiaopiju success, previous scholars have thus overlooked both the modernity of adopting traditionalistic or culturalist practices and the role of the state in shaping transnational Chinese communities and networks.

Huanan nongye daxue xuebao: Shehui kexue ban (South China agricultural university journal: Social science edition) 5: 3 (2006): 104-109.

⁷ Chen Xunxian, “Lun Qiaopi de qiyuan” (On the origins of Qiaopi), *Huaqiao Huaren lishi yanjiu* “Overseas Chinese History Studies” 3 (1996): 76-80.

⁸ Mark Granovetter, “Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness,” *American Journal of Sociology* 91: 3 (November 1985): 481-510.

⁹ Dai Yifeng, “Chuantong yu xiandai: Jindai Zhongguo qiye zhidu bianqian de zai sikao – Yi Qiaopiju yu yinhang guanxi wei zhongxin” (Tradition and modernization: A re-thinking on fluctuation in the Chinese enterprise system using the relationship between Qiaopiju and banks as the central focus), *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu* “Journal of Chinese Social and Economic History” 1 (2004): 65-73; Jiao Jianhua, “Zhidu chuangxin yu wenhua chuantong: Shixi jindai Pixinju de jingying zhidu (System innovation and cultural tradition: Examination and analysis of the business model of the modern Pixinju), *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu* (Research on China’s social and economic history) 3 (2005): 64-70.

¹⁰ Dai Yifeng, “Wangluohua qiye yu qianru xing: Jindai Qiaopiju de zhidu jiangou (1850s-1940s)” (Network enterprises and their embedded nature: The system structure of modern Qiaopiju), *Zhongguo shehui jingji shi yanjiu* “The Journal of Chinese Social and Economic History” 1 (2003): 70-78.

¹¹ The emphasis on personal trust stems from a number of studies of contemporary transnational Chinese business firms by scholars searching for the engine of the post-1960s Asian Economic Miracle. e.g. Wong Siu-lun, “Chinese Entrepreneurs and Business Trust,” in *Business Networks and Economic Development in East and Southeast Asia*, edited by Gary Hamilton (Hong Kong: Centre of Asian Studies, University of Hong Kong, 1991), 13-29; S. Gordon Redding, “Weak Organizations and Strong Linkages: Managerial Ideology and Chinese Family Business Networks,” in Hamilton, ed., *Business Networks*, 30-47.

In order to create a more nuanced understanding of the Qiaopiju, we must analyze not only the nature of their business practices, but also their interactions with the Chinese state. The Qiaopiju and its network(s) were built upon a collection of colonial modern forms of business practices. The culturalist business practices employed by the Qiaopiju owners were not traditional, but were articulated as part of the organizational process of transnationalization, viz. to make firm “connections” across land, border, and ocean. By using culturalist business tactics, Qiaopiju businessmen created a viable type of business firm, network, and set of practices to operate in the interstitial gaps between nation-states, empires, and colonies at the precise moment that Southeast Asia became colonized, the Western nation-state system made inroads into East Asia, and global communications and transportation systems like telegraph lines, steamer routes, and modern postal services increasingly linked the world. That is, the emergence of the Qiaopiju as a distinctive type of transnational business firm occurred almost exactly when these “institutions” – colonies, nation-states, communication systems – established regulatory regimes to police and control the flow of capital, information, and people. This was no mere coincidence. The Qiaopiju did not adopt “traditional” cultural business practices because they were traditional, I argue, but discursively created and used these practices in order to secure a reliable market segment and exploit the incomplete, negotiable, and porous boundaries of the global nation-state and colonial systems.

As a distinctively colonial modern form of transnational business, the Qiaopiju were reliant on cultural practices in firm-customer and inter-firm relations to gain access to remittances and construct their network, but relied on capitalist methods to make their profits. Qiaopiju owners engaged in capitalist practices, and earned the majority of their money, by taking advantage of the accelerated time and economic incentives offered by modern

transportation, telecommunications, and financial institutions in order to engage in other economic activities – currency speculation, transshipping, securities trading, or arbitrage – in the time lag between accepting the remittances and the customer’s expectation of its delivery to make their profits. In other words, the Qiaopiju owners used the remittances as short-term loans to engage in their own economic activities. The colonial modernity of the Qiaopiju as a firm, then, stems from its unique combination of “traditional” culturalist customer relations and “modern” capitalist profit-making strategies in a small flexible type of business firm designed to successfully negotiate and adapt to the emerging regulatory regimes of the nation-state, colonial, and capitalist world systems in order to survive.

An understanding of the Qiaopiju and their activities is vital to appreciating a portion of the complex relationship between the Chinese state and diaspora. While many scholars view diasporic communities as existing outside the state, the relationship between the Post Office and the Qiaopiju suggests a more nuanced situation. There are two standard perspectives on the significance of diasporic communities – one celebrating the rise of transnationalism as a form of subversive “bottom-up” resistance to the disciplinary state¹² and one using a “transnational perspective” to study the flows, interactions, and transformations that take place “between the cracks” of nation-states.¹³ Both of these perspectives either over- or underestimate the extent to which the nation-state and colonial systems simultaneously liberated and restricted diasporic communities. By focusing on the relations between the Post Office and Qiaopiju, I will argue that the Chinese state facilitated the creation and maintenance of transnational Chinese

¹² Homi K. Bhabha, “DissemiNation: Time, narrative, and the margins of the modern nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, edited by Homi K. Bhabha (New York: Routledge, 1990), 291-322; Michael Kearney, “Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire,” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4: 1 (March 1991): 52-74.

¹³ Madeline Y. Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home: Transnationalism and Migration Between the United States and South China, 1882-1943* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000); Adam McKeown, “Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas, 1842-1949,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 58: 2 (May 1999): 306-337.

communities by encouraging “diasporic nationalism” as a method of “transnational reincorporation” into the state discourses of ethno-nationalism.¹⁴ The Chinese state sought to reincorporate the overseas Chinese by discursively creating a notion of deterritorialized Chineseness that emphasized the responsibility of diasporic communities to contribute economically to the burgeoning state. One of the ways to make such “contributions” was to send their remittances back “home” either through Qiaopiju or the Post Office or, eventually, both in cooperation.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the relationship between the Qiaopiju and the Chinese Post Office seesawed between open and beneficial cooperation and closed and harmful competition. From the state’s perspective, overseas Chinese remittances provided a vital source of foreign currency, helped level its balance of payments, solidified its claim to a postal monopoly, and give it some small profit through remittance handling fees.¹⁵ The Qiaopiju benefited from the relationship by being allowed to continue some operations on the mainland despite the state postal monopoly, received subsidized rates for international money orders and clubbed packages, and were exempted in many cases – after effective lobbying by their trade associations – from Universal Postal Union regulations prohibiting the existence of private transnational remittances businesses. The relationship between the Qiaopiju and the Post Office,

¹⁴ Diasporic nationalism is a term used by McKeown to represent the efforts by overseas Chinese, who conceptualized their own liminal position within Southeast Asian colonial states as a reflection of China’s weak international position, to help strengthen the state financially. McKeown, “Conceptualizing Chinese Diasporas,” 322-326. By contrast, James A. Cook uses the phrase “transnational modernity” to describe a multi-pronged approach by returned and overseas Xiamen merchants to create a new narrative of the nation centered on the maritime activities of overseas Chinese. “Reimagining China: Xiamen, Overseas Chinese, and a Transnational Modernity,” in *Everyday Modernity in China*, edited by Madeleine Yue Dong and Joshua L. Goldstein (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006), 156-194. The phrase “transnational reincorporation” comes from Luis Eduardo Guarnizo and Michael Peter Smith, “The Locations of Transnationalism,” in *Transnationalism from Below*, edited by Guarnizo and Smith (Albany: Transaction Publishers, 1998), 7.

¹⁵ In this chapter I will not be delving into the actual amounts of remittances carried by Qiaopiju firms or the Post Office, which is a subject both comprehensively and ably covered by a number of Chinese and Western scholars. For samples of this literature, see: Chun-hsi Wu, *Dollars, Dependents and Dogma: Overseas Chinese Remittances to Communist China* (Stanford: The Hoover Institute, 1967); Zheng Linkuan, *Fujian Huaqiao huikuan* (Overseas Fujianese remittances) (1940, reprint: Oakton, VA: Center for Chinese Research Materials, 1988).

however, was not without conflict. During the 1920s and early 1930s, the Qiaopiju's continued success, in spite of tightening postal regulations, forced the Post Office to both poach and co-opt many of the Qiaopiju's business and organizational strategies to break their stranglehold on the loyalties of overseas remitters.¹⁶ The continuing weakness of the Nationalist State, the Post Office's realistic assessment of the distinct advantages possessed by the Qiaopiju, and the Qiaopiju's own flexible survivalist strategies forced the two sides back into a generally cooperative relationship by 1935. Upon the outbreak of World War II in 1937, the Post Office followed a dual policy of direct cooperation with the Qiaopiju while simultaneously transnationalizing itself by building its own overseas network through a series of agency agreements between the Post Office and international banks and the creation of a domestic Distribution Center (分發局) network for delivering the remittances. Time and again, however, the transnational dexterity and flexibility of the Qiaopiju overmatched the superior political and financial resources of the Republican-era states. It was these very same qualities that brought the Qiaopiju into existence in the 1850s.

Voyagers and Hostellers: Middlemen and the Origins of the Qiaopiju, 1850-1870

In the mid-nineteenth century a new surge of Chinese emigration began as tens of thousands of coastal Chinese began looking for new economic opportunities on the “gold mountain” of

¹⁶ A number of articles by Chinese scholars discuss the competition between the Post Office and the Qiaopiju. Ling Yan, “Minguo youzheng yu minjian xinju de guanxi xilun: Yi 20 shiji 30 niandai de Xiamen wei zhongxin” (An analysis and discussion of the relationship between the national postal service and people's letter shops: Using Xiamen in the 1930s as a focus), *Zhongshan daxue xuebao: Shehui kexue ban* (Zhongshan university journal: Social science edition) 47: 3 (2007): 53-59; Jiao Jianhua, “Jingzheng yu longduan: Jindai Zhongguo youzheng ye yanjiu: Yi Fujian Pixinju yu guoying youju guanxi wei li (1928-1949)” (Competition and monopoly: Research on the Chinese postal service: Using the relationship between Fujian Pixinju and the nationally-run post office as an example) *Xueshu yuekan* “Academic Monthly” 39: 1 (January 2007): 142-147; Chen Liyuan, “Chao-Shan Qiaopi wangluo yu guojia kongzhi (1927-1949)” (The Chaozhou-Shantou Qiaopi network and state control (1927-1949), *Shantou daxue xuebao* “Shantou University Journal (Humanities and Social Sciences Bimonthly) 19, Supp. (2003): 2-11.

California and in the mines and agricultural fields of Southeast Asia. In Southeast Asia prior to 1870, these early immigrants entered local indigenous states whose rule was weak, diffuse, and decentralized and an economic system increasingly dominated by the early colonial powers – the Dutch in Batavia, the British in Singapore, and the Spanish in Manila. The relations between the colonial regimes and local states rested for the most part on commercial treaties and agreements. The inconsistencies of direct/indirect local and colonial rule, the lack of demarcated territorial boundaries, the admixture of indigenous and Western governmentalities, and the gradual transition to capitalist-oriented production left open enough space for overseas Chinese to thrive as middle-men within this hybrid economic system from their bases in the polyglot cities scattered throughout mainland and archipelagic Southeast Asia.

Overseas Chinese not only served as middlemen in the emergent capitalist economies of Southeast Asia between indigenous peoples and colonizers, but also in the mobilization and transportation of laborers from southern China to the tin mines of the Dutch East Indies, the rubber plantations of the Malay peninsula, and the other commercial crop fields throughout the region.¹⁷ These labor recruiters usually collected outward-bound Chinese from along the southeast coast or in Hong Kong and escorted them through an emerging transoceanic network linking together seaward China and maritime Southeast Asia. The men who organized these trips and escorted the emigrants went by a number of different names – Water Bosses (水頭), Overseas Agents (水客), South Seas Agents (南洋客), and Voyagers (走水) – though for simplicity I will refer to them collectively as “overseas agents.”¹⁸ In addition to serving as labor recruiters, overseas agents also booked passage and arranged accommodations on credit and did

¹⁷ On Chinese as middlemen in Southeast Asia, see: Rajeswary Ampalavanar Brown, “Introduction: Chinese Business in an Institutional and Historical Perspective,” in *Chinese Business Enterprise in Asia*, edited by R. A. Brown (New York: Routledge, 1995), 19.

¹⁸ I prefer to translate “ke” (客) as “agent” rather than the more common “guest” because the English term “agent” suggests both the occupational pursuits of these men and their function within the transnational migrant circuit.

a number of other odd jobs necessary for transporting the laborers from China to their new place of work.¹⁹ As middlemen, one of the services they began offering was to carry remittances from overseas Chinese back to the homeland.

Historical evidence suggests that overseas agents were the precursors to, and frequently founders of, Qiaopiju firms, but there remains some ambiguity about the origins of Qiaopiju. Chinese scholars argue that overseas agents first emerged in the mid-nineteenth century when illiterate overseas Chinese began asking fellow townsmen to carry small amounts of cash back to their families. Gradually, the men carrying the remittances realized the potential profits to be made by handling remittances and became circumambulating overseas agents. Concerns about the informality and unpredictability of these initial exchanges led the agents to open small general stores (商號) or inns (客棧) to provide easily accessible locations for collecting the remittances. They also regularized their procedures and expanded their contacts by sending representatives out to collect remittances. In other cases, pre-existing general stores made agreements with itinerant overseas agents to transport remittances for the shops.²⁰ Sometimes local inns concentrated in the main cities of southeast coastal China – Fuzhou, Xiamen, Chaozhou, Shantou, Guangzhou – maintained informal agreements with shops scattered throughout the Chinese diaspora to collect and transmit remittances.²¹

Professional overseas agents undoubtedly emerged from a number of different origins, but previous scholarship has generally overlooked the possible connection between them and couriers (信客), predecessors and contemporaries of the Minxinju, who provided similar services

¹⁹ Hsu, *Dreaming of Gold, Dreaming of Home*, 32-34.

²⁰ Peng Yingtian, *Minxinju fazhan shi: Zhongguo de minjian tongxun shiye* (A history of the expansion of people's letter offices: China's popular communications enterprise) (Taipei: Zhongguo wenhua daxue chubanshu, 1992), 68, 70-71; Dai, "Wangluohua," 70.

²¹ Wu, *Dollars, Dependents and Dogma*, 31. In the early twentieth century there were 184 such hostels in Xiamen, 60 in Shantou, and 20 in Hong Kong. Dai, "Wangluohua," 71.

in mainland China from an earlier date. In addition to carrying letters, remittances, and small parcels, couriers also frequently escorted travelers, made travel arrangements, and handled luggage for people throughout China.²² In the mid-19th century, couriers and Minxinju began transnationalizing their operations by starting to handle letters and remittances from Guangzhou and surrounding environs to the colonies of Hong Kong and Macao. Once these Minxinju firmly established themselves as remittance carriers between southern China and the colonies, they became known as Hong Kong-Macao Letter Shops (港澳信館) and probably provided an early example for overseas agents and Qiaopiju.²³

Whatever the precise origins of the overseas agents, by the late 1850s we see the emergence of a growing transoceanic network created and maintained by inns, general stores, and overseas agents linking seaward China, the entrepot of Hong Kong, and colonial cities and towns throughout Southeast Asia. As one-man or small operations, there is little historical documentation on the business strategies and practices of these overseas agents. What seems well-established, however, is that the linchpin holding together this junk-traversed transoceanic network – or, more precisely, multiple networks – were various types of relationships based on mutual affinities such as local dialect, native-place, and real or fictive kinship. Since most of the laborers and overseas agents were townsmen and spoke the same dialect, and such agents circulated between familiar labor depots and work centers in Southeast Asia, the overseas Chinese gradually gave their personal trust to agents with geo-consanguineous ties. Such affinity-based interpersonal relations between agents and immigrants not only provided a system of mutual benefit and trust, but such a system was absolutely indispensable in the days prior to

²² Enclosure in Shanghai Despatch No. 4200 of 1919 to Co-D.G., Memorandum by Woo Yih Ching, Acting Deputy Commissioner of Shanghai, 4 March 1919 in SHAC137.2013.

²³ Inspectorate General of Customs, *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Navigation, Industries, Etc. of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce in China and Corea and the Condition and Development of the Treaty Port Provinces, 1882-1891*, 3 volumes (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1892), III: 573-74.

the creation of regional financial and communications institutions that could transmit remittances. In other words, overseas Chinese relied on townsmen to carry their remittances home not because of the procedural complexities of systems trust-based remittance institutions like regional banks, as some have argued, but because their economic choices were conditioned by the absence of such institutions.

Interpersonal trust and mutual affinities as the basis of agent-remitter relations in the early years afforded a viable transactional model, but also limited the ability for business growth, profit-making, and introduced an element of uncertainty. By using these so-called *guanxi* bases, both agents and remitters limited the available avenues for conducting their economic exchanges and narrowed their economic choices. Agents had access to overseas Chinese with whom they shared relationships, but their business was restricted to that relatively small group. Profits would only increase with greater remittances or an influx of new immigrants from the same hometown. From the perspective of the remitter, they were locked into the remittance fees charged by their hometown agents, but were still exposed to possible losses.²⁴ In sum, pre-1870 agent-remitter business transactions relied on geo-consanguineous and other affinities as a basis for business trust, but they also exposed both sides to economic limitations, risk, and uncertainty. The situation underwent a momentous change around 1870.

²⁴ Early agents took as much as ten percent of the total remittance as their fees. *Quanzhou qiaopi ye shiliao* (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1994), 4 cited in Dai, "Wangluohua," 77n6

*Early Qiaopiju: Networking Empire, Nation, and Colony, 1870-1910*²⁵

The opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, improvements in steamship technology, the expansion of the submarine telegraph network, and the inauguration of modern postal services helped usher in the era of high imperialism in Southeast Asia by increasing its contacts with the rest of the world. Within the region, the construction of roads, bridges, new ports and port facilities, and railways increasingly linked domestic political and economic centers and integrated hinterland and metropole. In effect, the region became networked to the world and the colonies and nations became networked to each other.²⁶ When colonists, emigrants, and indigenous peoples began using these new transportation and communications networks they transformed the geo-political and economic landscape of Southeast Asia by intensifying the marketization of local economies and gradually hardening the nation-state/colonial systems, especially in the realms of market controls, territorial borders, and formal legal systems.

The globalization of the capitalist economic model and the technological revolution in transportation and communication helped colonial administrators impose a more complex bureaucracy onto the loose, indigenous forms of political association in Southeast Asia, but the as yet unsolidified borders of the colonial states continued to permit enterprising Chinese traders to operate outside the purview of the state. This constellation of factors presented an opportunity and challenge for overseas agents and other Chinese businessmen who quickly grasped that

²⁵ Popular works on Qiaopiju frequently claim they were founded in the mid-Ming period – relying on the mistaken assumption that Minxinju first appeared during that same period – but there is no reliable evidence to support such a claim.

²⁶ By 1871 most of the major submarine telegraph lines linked cities throughout Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and coastal China and, coming from the north, Vladivostok to Southeast Asia via Nagasaki, Shanghai, and Xiamen. By the mid-1870s, steamship companies like the Holt Brothers' Ocean Steam Ship Company and Butterfield & Swire's China Navigation Company networked most major ports in Southeast Asia and China. For an excellent overview of international telegraph companies and their links with imperialism, capitalism, and colonialism, see: Daniel R. Headrick and Pascal Griset, "Submarine Telegraph Cables: Business and Politics, 1838-1939," *Business History Review* 75: 3 (Autumn 2001): 543-578; on steamship lines, see: Francis E. Hyde, "British Shipping Companies and East and South-East Asia, 1860-1939," in *The Economic Development of South-East Asia: Studies in Economic History and Political Economy*, edited by C. D. Cowan (New York: Praeger, 1964), 27-47.

steamships and telegraph lines could help them increase their business and the rather porous borders would allow them to operate unencumbered in interstitial areas. Their existing business model of independent owner-operators, however, would need some modification to take advantage of these opportunities. At the forefront of those capitalizing on the new situation were overseas agents who began establishing more formal Qiaopiju firms.

Although there is little historical trace of the founders of individual Qiaopiju firms, they appear to have been established by people in a number of occupational categories all tied in some manner to the maintenance of the early transnational network. In addition to overseas agents and hostel keepers, owners of overseas trading companies also began offering small remittance services in the 1880s.²⁷ Other firms handling petty remittances included transshipping companies, local retailers, wholesalers, and other kinds of small businesses based either in a Chinese or Southeast Asian coastal port town with branches scattered throughout the local hinterland and abroad.²⁸ Quite frequently, pre-existing money dealers, traders, and foreign currency exchangers throughout Fujian and Guangdong such as native banks (銀號), money shops (錢莊), and Gold Mountain firms (金山莊) also provided remittances services.²⁹ In a few cases, men who were “Piglet purchasers” (豬仔購), selling emigrants into indentured servitude in the commercial agricultural fields or mines of Southeast Asia, founded Qiaopiju.³⁰ Finally, in one of the most famous examples, a Chinese-Filipino boatman named Guo Youpin established

²⁷ Inspectorate General of Customs. *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Navigation, Industries, Etc. of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce in China and Corea and the Condition and Development of the Treaty Port Provinces, 1882-1891*, 3 volumes (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1892), III: 519.

²⁸ Bank of Taiwan, *Overseas Chinese Remittances in the 1910s* (1914), translated in George L. Hicks, ed., *Overseas Chinese Remittances from Southeast Asia, 1910-1940* (Singapore: Select Books, 1993), 68.

²⁹ Wu, *Dollars, Dependents and Dogma*, 37.

³⁰ Liu Guangsheng, *Zhongguo gudai youyi shi* (History of postal stations in ancient China) (Beijing: Renmin youdian chubanshe, 1986), 383.

the Tianyi Qiaopiju in Zhangzhou, Fujian, which later expanded to include more than 30 branches and 550 employees.³¹

In the absence of formal business records, we can only partially reconstruct the shape of the early Qiaopiju network as it emerged in the late nineteenth century. The first known Qiaopiju, the Virtuous Benefit Letter Shop (德利信局), appeared in Shantou in the late 1850s with another branch in Chaozhou.³² Over the next two decades, Qiaopiju began to spread throughout the larger ports of coastal China. In the 1870s Qiaopiju appeared in places such as Shantou, Chaozhou, Xiamen, Guangzhou, and Anhai, but the real explosion took place in the 1880s when we begin to find more significant numbers throughout maritime China, including five in Taiwan.³³ According to one estimate, between 1887 and 1891 there were more than fifty new Qiaopiju established along China's southeast littoral zone.³⁴ By the beginning of the twentieth century, sites of emigration like Xiamen and Guangdong had between thirty and forty remittance firms, respectively, while Qiaopiju also began to move inland, especially along navigable rivers, to places like Wuzhou, Guangxi.³⁵

Aside from those headquartered in China, overseas agents and companies scattered throughout Southeast Asia began to establish Qiaopiju during the 1880s. By the 1890s, there

³¹ Jiao Jianhua, "Jindai Pixinju tese tanyuan: Yi Fujian weili" (Exploring the core characteristics of the modern Pixinju: Using Fujian as an example), *Fujian luntan* (Fujian forum) 5 (2005), 78.

³² Liu, *Zhongguo gudai*, 383.

³³ On Qiaopiju in the 1870s, see: Zheng Hui, "Minxinju zhaoshi de lishi beijing he tiaojian" "The Historical Background of Establishing the Minxinju," *You shi yanjiu* (Research on postal history) 22 (March 2003), 16; in the 1880s, Dai, "Wangluohua," 72; on the Qiaopiju in Taiwan, see: Inspectorate General of Customs, *Decennial Reports*, III: 488-489.

³⁴ Liu, *Zhongguo gudai*, 383.

³⁵ Inspectorate General of Customs, *Decennial Reports on the Trade, Navigation, Industries, Etc. of the Ports Open to Foreign Commerce in China and Corea and the Condition and Development of the Treaty Port Provinces, 1892-1901*, 2 volumes (Shanghai: Statistical Department of the Inspectorate General of Customs, 1904), II: 325; *Guangdong sheng zhi: Youdian zhi* (Guangdong provincial gazette: Post and telecommunications gazette) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1999), 154.

were already 49 Qiaopiju in Singapore.³⁶ In the early twentieth century there were about 280 Qiaopiju in Singapore and Penang in British Malaya; between thirty and forty scattered between Batavia, Bandung, and Semarang in the Dutch East Indies, about ten in Manila, around thirty in Saigon in French Cochinchina, seven in British Hong Kong, and fifty in Thailand.³⁷ From its early development we can determine that the early Qiaopiju network builders collectively created a functionally efficient hub-and-spoke pattern with Head Offices in large coastal cities in China and Southeast Asia and smaller offices radiating out into the hinterland and secondary littoral cities.

The rigidity of typical hub-and-spoke networks, and the attendant transportation and economic inefficiencies, were overcome by the Qiaopiju through the use of a number of inter-firm agreements to extend the reach of their services. The Qiaopiju utilized inter-firm agreements to expand their network reach, increase their customer base, and lower overhead costs. Although some Head Offices might establish wholly-owned branches in nearby cities, more commonly Qiaopiju owners made simple financial arrangements with other firms.³⁸ The effect of all these inter-firm agreements was a vast, overlapping series of miniature remittance networks. In a study of the Qiaopiju conducted in the early twentieth century, the Bank of Taiwan estimated that nine out of ten Qiaopiju had some form of contractual agreements with other firms.³⁹

While some of the original overseas agents continued to carry currency from Southeast Asia to China into the middle of the twentieth century, Qiaopiju firms tended to develop a more

³⁶ Dai, "Chuantong yu xiandai," 66.

³⁷ Cited in Dai, "Wangluohua," 72. On Qiaopiju in Thailand, see: Suchada Tantasurak, *Poeykwan: The Remittance among Overseas Chinese in Thailand* (Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1992).

³⁸ Inspectorate General of Customs, *Decennial Reports on the Trade, 1882-1891*, III: 535.

³⁹ Bank of Taiwan, *Overseas Chinese Remittances*, translated in Hicks, *Overseas Chinese Remittances*, 68.

sophisticated series of business practices to produce greater profits and capitalize on the new communications and transportation inventions.⁴⁰ By doing so, they started transitioning to a colonial modern form of business. For example, to increase the safety of their remittances, Qiaopiju owners began replacing currency with small slips of paper representing the amount sent by each remitter.⁴¹ After collecting a reasonable number of slips, they placed them inside a single package, referred to as a “clubbed package” (總包) by the Post Office, and entrusted it to the Chinese supercargo of a home-bound ship who then handed it over to Qiaopiju agents at a port of call or destination.⁴² Instead of making most of their profits from remittance fees, as they had done in the past, Qiaopiju firms used the remittances as a form of temporary capital over the course of the days or weeks it took the supercargo to reach his destination.⁴³ Frequently, collected remittances were pooled and used to purchase goods in Southeast Asia, the goods were then sold in Hong Kong or coastal China, and the profit from the sales were used to pay the remittances with the additional profits invested back into the company. In other cases, Qiaopiju owners simply used the funds to engage in exchange rate speculation relying on free-floating currency markets between Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and China to make their profits.⁴⁴ The time lag between when the remitter expected the money to reach China and the quickness by which the Qiaopiju could telegraph the remittances to Hong Kong gave the Qiaopiju all the time they needed to use the money for speculation and investment. Overall, the early Qiaopiju relied

⁴⁰ One Japanese researcher in the early twentieth century estimated there were still more than 2,000 overseas agents operating. Cited in Dai, “Wangluohua,” 71. In a 1937 survey, it was estimated that approximately 950 overseas agents were still plying their trade. Wu, *Dollars, Dependents, and Dogma*, 31.

⁴¹ This was the practice in Thailand where Qiaopiju representatives petitioned the King to allow them to transmit such slips to China in bundles. Tantasurak, *Poeykwan*, 6.

⁴² Inspectorate General of Customs, *Decennial Reports, 1882-1891*, III: 535.

⁴³ Once steamers and telegraphs allowed the Qiaopiju to remit monies quicker, they drastically reduced their remittance fees from roughly ten to one percent. By contrast, the Imperial Post Office charged 2% on domestic remittance fees in the late nineteenth century. Jiao, “Jindai Pixinju tese tanyuan,” 79; the Chinese Post Office did not start offering overseas remittances until 1917.

⁴⁴ Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao,” 62.

on new forms of transportation, communication, and financial markets to increase their profit margins, but, available evidence suggests, did not yet begin to offer those specialized culturally-sensitive customer services that would complete the creation of their colonial modern business model – it would take direct competition from other types of remittance services to bring those to the fore.

As an early form of the transnational Chinese business firm emerging in the late nineteenth century, and influenced by global flows of capital and technological inventions of the Second Industrial Revolution, several features of Qiaopiju firms up to about 1910 mark them as distinctly modern companies. Despite the horizontal structure of most Qiaopiju firms, their owners used strategically flexible, informal inter-firm linkages to expand their geographic reach vertically within the hierarchy of places in Southeast Asia and China to maintain low costs. More fundamentally, the Qiaopiju relied almost entirely on modern transportation, communication, and financial institutions to generate revenue. The Qiaopiju created their profit margins by using steamship transportation to move people, telegraphic communications to remit monies to Hong Kong, parlayed the remittances into greater profits by taking advantage of shifting exchange rates and fluctuating markets for raw materials, and transshipping manufactured products into China.⁴⁵ Only then did they deliver the remittances. The actual remittance fees taken were miniscule, but the money made playing the international markets gave the Qiaopiju almost their entire profit margin.

⁴⁵ Jiao, “Jindai Pixinju tese tanyuan,” 79; Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 62.

Growth of the Qiaopiju Network, 1910-1950

Starting in the early twentieth century there was a rapid increase in the number of Qiaopiju firms both in China and Southeast Asia.⁴⁶ Despite a clear trend towards expansion, inconsistent counting methods and variations in the definition of what constituted a Qiaopiju firm has resulted in confusion about the size of the industry after 1910. Only in the late 1920s when the Post Office began trying to emulate the Qiaopiju network did postal officials make the first studies of the industry. By drawing on a number of sources, I have tried to create the most comprehensive picture of the size of the industry though these figures should still be considered incomplete.

With the exception of estimates in the 1890s, the first concrete figures for the number of Qiaopiju operating in China and abroad did not appear until the late 1910s. According to postal records, 172 Minxinju/Qiaopiju operated in Guangdong in 1917.⁴⁷ If the figure of forty Qiaopiju in Guangdong in the first decade of the twentieth century is correct, the number of firms more than quadrupled in just over ten years. Estimates for the number of Qiaopiju operating in Southeast Asia shows uneven, but steady growth. As the center of the Qiaopiju network in Southeast Asia, Singapore alone expanded from 49 Qiaopiju firms in the 1890s to more than 200 by 1916 with another 70-80 in nearby Kuala Lumpur. In other maritime Southeast Asian cities, however, growth was slower.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ The opening and closing of Qiaopiju firms probably followed macro economic trends, especially the relative value of silver and the ebbs and flows of emigration. For example, the collapse of rubber speculators in 1910 and poor conditions in the rubber industry in 1930 both reduced the Qiaopiju industry in the Straights Settlements. Limited statistical figures and a dearth of information about founding dates of Qiaopiju, however, renders it impossible to make definitive conclusions. Ta Chen (Da Chen), *Emigrant Communities in South China: A Study of Overseas Migration and Its Influence on Standards of Living and Social Change* (New York: Institute of Pacific Relations, 1940), 77.

⁴⁷ There were 28 in Guangzhou, 61 in Shantou, and 83 in Qiongzhou (Haikou). *Guangdong sheng zhi: Youdian zhi* (Guangdong provincial gazette: Post and telecommunications gazette) (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 1999), 154.

⁴⁸ Peng, *Minxinju fazhan shi*, 107-110.

Efforts by the Post Office to study the Qiaopiju industry led to more accurate statistical counts starting in 1927. In 1927, Fujian Postal Commissioner W. Stapleton-Cotton ordered a survey of “registered Minju.” The resulting statistics showed 278 firms operating in Fujian with the vast majority, 201, being headquartered in Xiamen with another 64 stationed in local rural areas around Xiamen. The other thirteen firms worked out of Fuzhou.⁴⁹ In Fujian, then, the number of Qiaopiju expanded from around 30 in 1900 to 278 by 1927. In these early counts, however, the Post Office usually failed to distinguish between “head” and “branch” offices. Only in 1931, when the Shantou First-Class Postmaster issued licenses, did he differentiate between “head offices” and “branches” thereby painting a more accurate picture of the local Qiaopiju industry.⁵⁰ The Postmaster reported only eight Qiaopiju situated in Shantou, but those eight had 67 branches scattered throughout the local inland area.⁵¹

With the Post Office licensing provisions for Minxinju/Qiaopiju coming into effect in September 1930, we begin to see more frequent counts by the Post Office.⁵² For the fiscal year 1931-1932, the Fujian Head Office licensed a total of 240-250 firms for the entire province.⁵³ In 1934, the count for Xiamen alone showed 122 Head Offices in the city, which increased to 153 by 1935.⁵⁴ The increase of head Qiaopiju offices in Xiamen, the “Clearing House” of the industry, covers what appears to have been a general decline of the number of firms in the rest of

⁴⁹ Memorandum No. 12652/2649: Minchu, Fuzhou Postal Commissioner Stapleton-Cotton to Co-Director General Destelan, 8 December 1927 in SHAC137.2014.

⁵⁰ The Shantou First-Class Postmaster was quite familiar with the Qiaopiju industry having had significant autonomous powers to deal with them while Shantou was head of an independent postal district from 1 April 1929 to 1 January 1931. Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongling di 593 hao, daili youzheng zongban Lin Shi, daili huiban Xilesi, 27 February 1929 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, Circular No. 593, Acting Director General Lin Shi, Acting Co-Director General Shields) in SHAC137.288-9.

⁵¹ Shantou duan nei yi guahao Minju biao (Table of Minju registered in the Shantou section) in SHAC137.1811-4.

⁵² Zanxing Minju guahao lingzhao banfa (Provisional regulations for Minju registered licenses) as attachment to Circular Memo No. 520, Director General Wei Yifu, 29 September 1930 in SHAC137.6272-5.

⁵³ Jiao, “Jindai Pixinju tese tanyuan,” 78.

⁵⁴ Siming yideng youju suo xia ge Minxinju/Pixinju mingchen jiqi fenhao yilanbiao, 1934 (Schedule of the names and branches of Minxinju/Pixinju under the jurisdiction of the Siming First-Class Post Office) in SHAC137.1188-6.

the province from 250 in 1931-32 to 185 in 1935.⁵⁵ In Guangdong, the Head Office recorded a grand total of 198 firms for 1931, which declined slightly to 192 by 1933.⁵⁶ By 1935, the number of firms in Guangdong had further declined to 169, but Shantou, as the center of the Guangdong Qiaopiju network, remained strong with 110 registered firms with a total of 790 overseas and inland branches.⁵⁷ Qiongzhou, on Hainan Island, also continued its prominence in the overseas remittance network with 65 firms in 1933, which contracted slightly to 59 by 1935.⁵⁸ For the entire country, the Directorate General of Posts tabulated 322 head offices with 3363 branches in China and abroad in June 1934.⁵⁹ Adding together the 1935 totals for Fujian and Guangdong there were 354 head offices in the mid-1930s.⁶⁰

Figures for Qiaopiju head or branch offices in Southeast Asia in the 1930s are rare. The most accurate count comes to us from the South Manchurian Railway Company's Economic Statistical Office, which counted a total of 515 Qiaopiju in all of Southeast Asia in 1930. Of those 515, all of which were presumably head offices, there were 160 in the Dutch East Indies, 50 in Indo-China, 80 in Thailand, 15 in the Philippines, and 210 in British Malaya and Burma.⁶¹

As for the geographic extent of the Qiaopiju network in Southeast Asia, our best source is a petition from the Directorate to the Ministry of Communications in April 1932 in response to an order from the Ministry to list all cities in Southeast Asia with Qiaopiju firms. While the

⁵⁵ Enclosure to Foochow, Co.-D.G. Memo. No. 2649-12652 of 1927 and Letter from the Acting Deputy Commissioner to the Commissioner, Foochow in SHAC137.2014.

⁵⁶ *Guangdong sheng zhi: Youdian zhi*, 154; Ge youzheng guanliju tian song [x] Minxinju diaocha biao (Table of Minxinju surveyed by each Head Post Office, 1933) in SHAC137.1193.

⁵⁷ Chen, "Jindai Huaqiao huikuan," 57.

⁵⁸ *Hainan sheng zhi: Youdian zhi* (Hainan provincial gazette: Post and telecommunications gazette) (Haikou: Nanhai chuban gongsi, 1994), 12.

⁵⁹ Ma Chujian, *Zhongguo gudai youyi* (China's ancient postal service) (Taipei: Taiwan Shangwu yinshuguan, 1999), 162.

⁶⁰ The 354 Qiaopiju is close to Chen Da's estimate of 370-80 Qiaopiju in the mid-1930s. Chen Da, *Nanyang huaqiao yu Min-Yue shehui* (Southeast Asian overseas Chinese and Fujian-Guangdong society) (Changsha: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1939), 89.

⁶¹ *A Survey of the Nanyang Chinese Economy* (Taipei: Department of Foreign Affairs of the Taiwan Governor General's Office, 1943) translated in Hicks, *Overseas Chinese Remittances*, 179.

following list is certainly not exhaustive it provides a fairly good picture of the geographic scope of the Qiaopiju network.

*Table 6: Names of Places in Southeast Asia with Qiaopiju*⁶²

Country	Cities with Qiaopiju
Taiwan	Tainan, Taibei
Indo-China	Saigon
Siam/Thailand	Bangkok
Burma	Rangoon
Straights Settlements	Kedah, Malacca, Penang, Puket, Singapore
Philippine Islands	Cebu, Davao, Iloilo, Jolo, Manila
British North Borneo	Jesselton
Dutch East Indies	Amboina, Bagan, Batavia, Bali, Bangalore, Cheribon, Deli, Dhambi, Denpasar, Java, Macasser, Menado, Palembang, Pekalongan, Soerabaia, Samarinda, Samarang, Singaraja, Telok Betong
Federated Malay States	Ipoh, Kelantan, Kajang, Kuala Lumpur, Klang, Port Dickson, Perak, Rembau, Serembau, Selangor, Taiping, Teluk Anson, Tanjang Malim
Johore	Batu Pahat, Labis, Muar, Segamat

During World War II, Qiaopiju firms initially closed because of unsettled conditions and Japanese harassment, but then started to grow once again.⁶³ By 1941, according to records of the Fujian Head Post Office, there were 122 Qiaopiju headquartered in Xiamen or the nearby cities of Jinjiang (晉江) and Gulangyu (鼓浪嶼), which maintained relations with 2559 branches scattered throughout inland areas and Southeast Asia.⁶⁴ For wartime Guangdong, we only have accurate figures for Qiaopiju operating out of Shantou. In the early 1940s, there were 86 Qiaopiju head offices officially operating in Shantou; however, Japanese interference in overseas

⁶² Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju cheng di 123 hao, 4 April 1932 (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, petition no. 123) in SHAC137.8855.

⁶³ Zou Jinsheng, "Taipingyang zhanzheng shiqi de pixin jidi" (Sending pixin during the Pacific War period), *Jiyou bolan* (Extensive reading in philately) (May 2004): 30-31.

⁶⁴ Fujian qu suo xia ge Pixinju shengqing huanfa sanshi nian zhizhao biao (Table of all Pixinju under the jurisdiction of the Fujian district who applied for relicensing in the year 1941) in SHAC137.1811-7.

remittance activities forced 23 of them to move to nearby Meixian (梅縣), Guangdong, in Free China.⁶⁵ The firms that evacuated inland maintained relations with 230 branches while the 63 in Shantou kept up business contacts with 658 branches.⁶⁶

Marketizing Culture: The Qiaopiju, Interfirm Networks, and Customer Relations

The growth of the Qiaopiju industry after 1910 was the result of improvements in its business model. In the late nineteenth century, overseas remittance firms had a rather free hand in developing their remittances networks, but around 1910 the Qiaopi industry began encountering resistance from the colonial regimes in Southeast Asia, the Qing state, and then the newly-established Republican government in China, all of whom were in the midst of creating more effective borders, regulatory regimes, and state banks.⁶⁷ Once colonial and state authorities began studying the practices and transnational networks of the Qiaopiju, and began competing with and regulating them, the Qiaopiju began to utilize culturalist firm-customer business practices and flexible organizational strategies. It was this encounter, rather than some in-born propensity to favor cultural in-groups, that encouraged the Qiaopiju to rely on cultural affinities to develop a more sophisticated set of business practices, organizational models, and inter-firm networks to maintain market dominance in the overseas remittance industry. The combination of network structure, inter-firm relations, and culturalist customer relations would make the Qiaopiju one of the colonial modern business par excellence in the period between 1910 and 1950.

⁶⁵ *Guangdong sheng zhi: Youdian zhi*, 155.

⁶⁶ Chen, "Jindai Huaqiao huikuan," 57. Chen gives a figure of 25 Qiaopiju firms that fled to Meixian.

⁶⁷ For example, King Rama VI of Thailand instituted new bank and insurance laws in the 1910s designed to limit the outflow of remittances by overseas Chinese. Tantasurak, *Poeykwan*, 8, 10.

Inter-firm relations between and among Qiaopiju in the period after 1910 are distinguished by their flexibility and, concomitantly, a general decline in relations based on cultural affinities or *guanxi* bases. Certainly, native-place, dialect, or kinship relations continued to have some significance, but the general trend was towards intensifying inter-firm relations for economic and political reasons. The primary economic motive for increased cooperation was the desire to expand the reach of their remittance networks. That is, to tap markets and deliver remittances in areas where the originating firm had no affiliates. The political motive for increased cooperation was to counteract and lobby against government efforts to restrict Qiaopiju business.

While it is probably impossible to trace the never-ending arrangement and rearrangement of formal and informal contractual inter-firm relationships – a strength that made Qiaopiju firms very flexible – we can minimally point to a few different models that were probably fairly standard. Research by the Japanese-controlled Bank of Taiwan suggests that there were three primary types of inter-firm relations: (1) yearly profits divided equally amongst all the offices in a network; (2) all business expenses were paid by the Head Office, which also received all the profits, but they paid commissions between one and two percent to the collecting offices; and (3) Head Offices received all the profits, but paid a commission of 0.002 to 0.004 percent on the amount of remittances collected to contract agents.⁶⁸ In Fujian there was a special terminology to describe inter-firm relations. Qiaopiju who acted independently were known as *toupan* (頭盤); firms that acted as agents for a number of different overseas Head Offices and delivered in urban or suburban areas were called *erpan* (二盤), and agent firms that delivered inland were

⁶⁸ Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 62.

called *sanpan* (三盤).⁶⁹ Conventions of naming should not prohibit us from understanding that any given Qiaopiju probably acted as a head office, a branch office, an affiliate, and a contract agent all times.⁷⁰

The flexibility in inter-firm relations among Qiaopiju should be recognized as one of the hallmarks of their success. Such flexibility allowed them to both deepen their relations with firms from all over the diaspora, but also to greatly expand the reach of their networks. If a Qiaopiju in Thailand collected a remittance from an overseas worker from Yunnan, but had no branch there, they apparently made simple and efficient agreements with a chain of Qiaopiju firms who could effect delivery. Of course, it was always in the interests of any Qiaopiju firm to assist other as they might need the same help in the future. For example, an inland agent in the Shantou area might represent ten different Qiaopiju firms.⁷¹

The economic motives for increased inter-firm relations gradually pushed Qiaopiju away from relationships built solely on cultural affinities like native-place sentiment. Native-place sentiment did continue to hold some sway for overseas-based Qiaopiju where we find, for example, Fujian-born owners in Singapore dividing themselves loosely into groups from Xiamen, Fuzhou, Xinghua, and Longyan, but in other places such as the Federated Malay States all Fujian-born owners worked together.⁷² One reason Fujian-born Qiaopiju owners worked together in the Malay States, and the most frequently cited in petitions to the government, was

⁶⁹ Jiao, "Jindai Pixinju," 78; Yang Qunxi, *Chao-Shan diqu Qiaopi ye ziliao* (Materials on the Chaozhou-Shantou area overseas letter agencies) (Shantou: Chao-Shan lishi wenhua yanjiu zhongxin, Shantou shi wenhua ju, Shantou shu tushuguan, 2004), 463.

⁷⁰ Huang Qinghai, ed., *Minnan qiaopi shi jishu* (Historical records on Southern Fujian qiaopi) (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 1996), 51-66 cited in Yang, *Chao-Shan diqu*, 448.

⁷¹ Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936 in SHAC127(2).123.

⁷² Ye Yuan, "Minxin huikuan yu zuguo jingji" (Minxin remittances and the economy of the motherland), *Huaqiao jingji jikan* (Overseas Chinese economic quarterly) 1: 1 (April 1941), 25. Another source from the 1940s divides the Fujian Qiaopiju into Xiamen, Fuzhou, Xinghua (including central Longyan), and Minxi (Western Fujian) groupings. South Manchurian Railway Co., East Asian Economic Research Bureau, *Remittances by Overseas Fujian Chinese* (1942) translated in Hicks, *Overseas Chinese*, 296; Yang, *Chao-Shan diqu*, 319.

that the Chinese government's "alleged protection" of overseas Chinese was "merely empty words."⁷³ If the Chinese government would not help protect the interests of overseas Chinese, they were forced to form their own trade associations to fight for their survival.

Inter-firm Relations: Trade Associations

Starting in the late 1920s, Qiaopiju owners also maintained inter-firm relations at an industry level through the organization of modern trade associations (同業公會).⁷⁴ Around the turn of the twentieth century, Chinese merchant organizations in many fields underwent associational restructuring as they began to change from the old-fashioned guild (會館, 公所), designed to regulate trade in the interests of business owners, to the modern trade association, devoted to promoting trade, lobbying government, and standardizing business practices. That said, modern trade associations continued to manifest some native-place influence in their organizational practices reflecting guild traditions, but there was also a gradual and distinctive shift towards organization in accordance with commercial or other identities.⁷⁵

Qiaopiju trade associations represented a modern trend away from economic specialization by native place in their relations with colonial or state administrations, but whose internal organization often showed some signs of fragmentation along native-place lines. The internal fragmentation was fostered by the overall structure of the trade associations as voluntary

⁷³ Petition from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Singapore, 12 November 1926 as enclosure to Ministry's Xunling No. 1460, 3 December 1926 in SHAC137.5164.

⁷⁴ Although it appears the Qiaopiju owners of Shantou organized a Southseas Pixin Industry Guild (南僑批業公所) around 1882 nothing is known about its activities and no other trade associations appeared until the mid-1920s. On the existence of the 1882 guild, see: Rao Zongyi, ed., *Chaozhou zhi, shiye zhi, shangye* (Chaozhou gazetter, industrial gazette, commerce) (Chaozhou: Chaozhou xiuzhiguan, 1949), in Yang, *Chao-Shan diqu*, 324; Chen, "Chao-Shan Qiaopi," 5.

⁷⁵ Byrna Goodman has ably demonstrated the continuing importance of native-place sentiment in the organization of modern trade associations and unions despite contemporary trends in naming practices that glossed over the geographical biases embedded in modern trade associations. *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 29-46.

organizations based on contractual agreements restricted to certain geographical areas rather than compulsory, monopolistic associations controlling the entire trade and encompassing Qiaopiju across the region. Conceptually, much of the native-place influence within the Qiaopiju trade associations was less a function of traditional identity politics than determined by the concentration of emigrants from specific places within China congregating in certain cities in Southeast Asia. The transnationalization of economic enterprises required a reliance on some organizing principle in lieu of corporate ownership of the entire network - the simplest principle turned out to be native place. By the 1930s and 1940s, however, the combination of economic instability, the wartime disruption of regional economic activity, and heavy state interference in foreign exchange rates pushed the Qiaopiju into forming general trade associations eliding native-place sentiment.⁷⁶

The primary impetus in the organization of Qiaopiju trade associations was the onset of heavy interference by the Chinese state and colonial administrations in Southeast Asia with Qiaopiju activities during the late 1920s, especially the Chinese Post Office's attempts to eliminate the clubbed package system from 1925 to 1928.⁷⁷ The rapidly industrializing regional economy, a renewed desire to apply relevant Universal Postal Union regulations, and the hardening of state and colonial borders all pushed the Qiaopiju owners towards forming trade associations to protect their commercial interests. In concrete terms, this meant that Qiaopiju owners' cardinal reason for establishing trade associations was not to police each other or regularize business procedures, but to challenge the encroaching regulatory regimes of the state, colony, and Universal Postal Union through collective lobbying.

⁷⁶ e.g. the various Qiaopiju trade associations in British Malaya organized an umbrella trade union association called the South Seas Chinese Remittance Industry General Trade Association (南洋中華匯業總會) in 1946. Nanyang Zhonghua huiye zonghui, *Nanyang Zhonghua hua huiye zonghui niankan* (Yearbook of the Southseas Chinese Remittance Industry Union Trade Association) (Singapore: Nanyang Zhonghua huiye zonghui), 1947.

⁷⁷ The Chinese Post Office's anti-Qiaopiju activities in the mid-1920s will be discussed in the next section.

The Qiaopiju trade associations emerging in the late 1920s were situated in the cities that acted as clearinghouses for international remittances – frequently the largest local ports – in coastal China and Southeast Asia such as Xiamen, Shantou, Singapore, and Bangkok. Although there may have been other informal Qiaopiju trade associations, there were trade associations in the following cities: Shantou (1926), Xiamen (1927), Jieyang (1931), a second one in Xiamen (1932), Jinjiang (1934), a second one in Shantou (1940), all-Fujian (early 1940s), and Chaoyang (early 1940s).⁷⁸ Qiaopiju trade associations based overseas were situated in Thailand (1932), in Singapore there were associations for Chaozhou (1926-27), Fujian (unknown), and Hainan (unknown), in British Malaya in Pulau Pinang, Selangor, and Malacca (all in 1946).⁷⁹ Purportedly, there was even an alliance of overseas agents in the 1930s called the South Seas Overseas Agents Alliance (南洋水客聯合會) and a General Alliance of South Seas Agents (南洋水客聯合總會) in Shantou in 1947.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ The names of the China-based trade associations were: The Shantou Overseas Chinese Pixiu Trade Association (汕頭華僑批業公會/汕頭批業公會), founded in 1926; the Letter Association of the Xiamen General Chamber of Commerce (廈門市商民協會信業分會), established around 1927; the Shantou Municipal Overseas Letter Trade Association (汕頭市僑批同業公會), which was the new name for the reorganized Shantou Overseas Chinese Pixiu Trade Association adopted in 1931; the Jieyang Pi Industry Association (揭陽批業公會) established in 1931; the Xiamen Overseas Chinese Money Order Trade Association (廈門華僑銀信業同業公會), set up around 1932; the Jinjiang County Remittance Industry Trade Association (晉江縣銀信同業公會) in 1934; the Shantou Municipal Pixiu Trade Association (汕頭市批信同業公會), established by Japanese occupation authorities in late 1939; and the Fujian Overseas Chinese Letter Shop and Remittance Trade Association (閩僑信局匯兌公會) and Chaoyang County Overseas Pi Industry Association (潮陽縣僑批業公會), both operating in the early 1940s.

⁷⁹ The Southeast Asian-based associations were: The Thailand Overseas Chinese Money Order Trade Guild (暹羅華僑銀信局公所), established on 31 January 1932. In Singapore there were the Chaozhou Overseas Chinese Remittance Trade Association (潮僑匯兌公會), founded in 1926-1927, the Fujian Overseas Chinese Remittance Trade Association (閩僑匯兌公會), and the Hainan Overseas Chinese Remittance Trade Association (瓊僑匯兌公會). In British Malaya there were the Pulau Pinang Money Order Trade Association (檳城銀信局公會), the Selangor Chinese Remittance Industry Trade Association (雪蘭莪中華匯業公會), and the Malacca Chinese Remittance Industry Trade Association (馬六甲中華匯業公會), all of which, starting in March 1946, jointly formed the more comprehensive Singapore-based South Seas Chinese Remittance Industry General Trade Association (南洋中華匯業總會).

⁸⁰ Yao Cengyin, *Guangdong sheng de Huaqiao huiquan* (Overseas Chinese remittances to Guangdong) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1943), 39 and *Shantou huaqiao zhi* (Shantou overseas Chinese gazetteer), 2-11, both cited in Yang, *Chao-Shan diqu*, 65-66.

Formal trade association charters usually defined their purposes in broad terms. As to be expected, the mission of the association was to engage in activities beyond the purview of the individual firm – most important was always “maintaining the interests of the trade.” For example, the organizers of the Chaozhou Overseas Chinese Remittance Trade Association assigned as duties the protection of the trade, strengthening services to overseas Chinese remitters, and arbitrating disputes between member firms.⁸¹ Likewise, the Shantou Municipal Overseas Letter Trade Association’s organizational regulations defined its functions as harmonizing its members’ viewpoints, guaranteeing the trade’s money orders against loss, promoting the interests of the collective, and redressing harm done to the business, including state efforts to restrict their scope of operations.⁸² Specifically, Qiaopiju trade associations lobbied local, national, and colonial governments on economic and regulatory policies related to international remittances, coordinated trade activities, standardized remittance procedures, arbitrated disputes, and served as the clearinghouse for telegraphic remittances and disseminator of local foreign exchange rates.⁸³

Although relatively little is known about the internal organization of these trade associations, Postal Inspector Zhang Jixi’s 1936 report gives us some insight into their structure.⁸⁴ According to Zhang, fifty Qiaopiju “of large concerns” in the Shantou area constituted the Shantou Municipal Overseas Letter Trade Association. Notably, this was slightly less than half the total of 110 registered Qiaopiju operating out of Shantou in the mid-1930s. Of

⁸¹ Rui, “Youxin yinzhuang (piju) suoji.”

⁸² Chen, “Chao-Shan Qiaopiju wangluo,” 5.

⁸³ According to Rui Yixun, every Friday a cable was sent to the Shantou Qiaopiju Trade Association from Hong Kong conveying the amount of remittances collected in the Federated Malay States. The Association would then release the remittances to the local Qiaopiju and cable the local exchange rates back to Hong Kong and on to Southeast Asia. Rui Yixun, “Youxin yinzhuang (piju) suoji” (Trivial memories of the Youxin Money Shop (Piju),” *Shantou wenshi* (Shantou literature and history) 4 (May 1987) (<http://www.ydtz.com/news/shownews.asp?id=30967>)

⁸⁴ Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936 in SHAC127(2).123

the fifty members, they divided themselves into four classes according to the size of their typical transactions, which then determined the amount of association fees levied on individual firms. Pooled association funds were used to pay the salaries of seven committee members and to “protect the interests” of the collective group by maintaining “good connections with Shantou bankers and local business leaders.” Indeed, the owner of the powerful Yuanyu (願裕) Qiaopiju served as Chairman of the Xiamen General Chamber of Commerce in the late 1920s. In general, then, the primary purpose of this trade association was to “protect their interests” and “utilize it as an organ for making necessary negotiations with local authorities or outsiders.”⁸⁵

Culturalist Customer Services

Prior to 1910 there are few records or descriptions of Qiaopiju customer relations, but afterwards Qiaopiju began using a whole host of apparently new culturalist business practices. These practices gave the Qiaopiju a competitive edge and helped secure a loyal following among emigrants. While many of these new practices had, to borrow Dai Yifeng’s phrase, “the human touch,” I argue it was external interference or an understandable response to new national, colonial, and international regulatory regimes that pushed the Qiaopiju towards these practices rather than simply a cultural affinity for fellow townsmen.

One of the more oft-noted services offered by the Qiaopiju was writing and reading letters for illiterate customers. When customers sent a remittance back to China it was almost always accompanied by a short letter called a *pixin* (批信).⁸⁶ A Qiaopiju office or agent would offer to write the letter for an illiterate remitter. When the remittance and letter reached their

⁸⁵ No. 110/13746, Fujian Postal Commissioner W. Stapleton-Cotton to Director General Liu Shufan, 12 September 1928 in SHAC137.7876.

⁸⁶ Peng, *Minxinju fazhan shi*, 116; “Xianluo Huaqiao youhui nanti” (The puzzle of postal remittances from overseas Chinese in Thailand) *Zhongyang qiaowu yuekan* (Central overseas Chinese affairs monthly) 9 (1931), 6.

destination, the courier would then read the letter aloud to the recipient. After reading the letter, the courier invited the recipient to send their own letter back, which is called a *huiji* (回批). Of course, couriers were often recruited for their literacy and familiarity with local families, especially since remittances were often insufficiently addressed with nothing more than a surname and village.⁸⁷

Private letters written for customers were part of a more formal remittance procedure developed by Qiaopiju to protect the remittances and provide evidence of delivery. The following is a description of a standard Qiaopiju remittance procedure in its mature form. An agent would arrive at a work site of overseas Chinese or an emigrant would go to a Qiaopiju office. After handing over the amount to be remitted, the Qiaopiju employee issued a receipt to the remitter and inquired if any message was to accompany the remittance. Once the letter was written, the employee created a slip with a serial number on it indicating the amount remitted, gathered the letter and funds, and a *huiji*, which acted as both a return receipt and a form for a short message from the recipient. Once the several forms reached their destination, the courier handed over the money, the receipt stating the original amount remitted, and the *huiji*. If a message was to be returned, it was written on the *huiji* and despatched abroad. Once the *huiji* was returned to its point of origin, it was taken to the original remitter and read aloud – the family news included in the latter, often mentioning the amount received, served as a secondary receipt. At every step the Qiaopiju employees checked and double checked that all serial

⁸⁷ Qiaopiju couriers were also paid accordingly at between 10 and 30 yuan a month – the lower end being for farmers who carried remittances during their slack times. Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936 in SHAC127(2).123; Gesheng shanghai lianhehui zongshiwusuo kuaiyou daidian zongzhi di 236 hao (The All-Provincial Union of Chambers of Commerce, General Affairs Office, Postal Telegram No. 236, 21 August 1928) in SHAC137.7791.

numbers matched thus allowing them to trace ordinary letters.⁸⁸ On average, the Qiaopiju could collect a remittance, delivery it, and return the *huiji* within 20-30 days.⁸⁹

The above description is revealing in that it shows the Qiaopiju using a sophisticated, regularized procedure for handling remittances – actually more bureaucratic than postal remittances – but that also catered culturally to the unique needs of overseas Chinese and their families. This kind of phenomenon in Qiaopiju practices perfectly represents their colonial modernity – a sophisticated procedure ensuring safe passage of remittances from colony through entrepot to nation with enough “human touch” to satisfy their unique clientele.

Another culturalist business practice designed to meet the needs of overseas Chinese workers was sending agents out to collect remittances. Clearly, many overseas workers on Southeast Asian plantations or in mines could not leave work to trek to a large city to remit money. Instead, most Qiaopiju made scheduled stops in each area to collect remittances on or around pay day. In areas heavily populated by Chinese workers several Qiaopiju might have to bid to collect remittances from the workers who had pooled their funds in an attempt to secure a lower remittance rate.⁹⁰

Other culturalist business practices by Qiaopiju included granting remittances on credit and selling “Mountain Tickets” (山票). If a remitter needed to send money for an emergency or did not have enough funds in hand, Qiaopiju would offer “Advance Money” (墊款) and accept the remitter’s word that the money would be repaid.⁹¹ “Mountain Tickets” worked exactly like

⁸⁸ This description of a typical transaction was cobbled together from various sources – in many cases Qiaopiju had slightly different procedures, but they are so minor as to not be worth discussing.

⁸⁹ Letter from Chew Hock Leong, Head Office Manager in Charge of Branches, Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation to de Sercy, Deputy Commissioner, Guangdong Head Post Office, 14 September 1937 as Enclosure to Guangzhou-D.G. of P.R. & S.B. S/O No. 254 in SHAC127(2).123.

⁹⁰ Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936 in SHAC127(2).123.

⁹¹ Presumably the Qiaopiju charged higher remittance fees or interest on the original amount. On “advance money,” see: Dai, “Wangluohua qiye yu qianru xing,” 75.

stamp remittances at the Post Office. The Qiaopiju had an assortment of pre-printed stamps with denominations like 5, 10, or 20 yuan they would sell to a remitter who was afraid bandits might waylay the Qiaopiju courier. Once purchased, the tickets could be sent to China in the safest way possible and upon receipt could be cashed at the Qiaopiju.⁹²

Qiaopiju business practices in their customer relations do have something of a “culturalist” tinge. They obviously catered to the particular needs of overseas Chinese far more than the Post Office or international remittance banks, but to suggest their entire business model is therefore somehow “traditional” or “culturalist” appears to miss the point. In each of the above examples, we can also see typical capitalist behavior of regularizing, standardizing, or bureaucratizing their procedures to secure the remittances of overseas Chinese and deliver them safely and efficiently while also increasing their profit margins. Every step in their remittance procedures shows that overseas Chinese most emphatically did not implicitly trust them. Serial numbers, *huiji*, and personal letters were a triple check on the honesty of the Qiaopiju’s employees. Rather than simply favor Qiaopiju because of certain cultural affinities, it is just as likely that workers preferred Qiaopiju for their almost ironclad remittance procedure. A heavy emphasis on the “culturalist” nature of Qiaopiju does a disservice to their particular strengths as flexible, adaptable firms carefully navigating colony, nation, and international regulatory regimes while developing customer services to suit the times.

Capitalist Profit-Making Strategies

In the twentieth century remittances remained a “sideline” for most Qiaopiju.⁹³ They were a sideline in the sense that a majority of their profits came from currency exchange speculation,

⁹² Dai, “Wangluohua qiye yu qianru xing,” 75; Jiao, “Zhidu chuangxin yu wenhua chuantong,” 66.

⁹³ Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 59.

price arbitrage, or transshipping goods. Qiaopiju owners favored exchange rate speculation as providing quicker profits, but they were not averse to arbitrage or short-term investments in moveable goods when exchange rates proved unfavorable.⁹⁴

In the process of collecting remittances Qiaopiju owners always paid particular attention to currency exchange rates between Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and cities in China, particularly Shanghai.⁹⁵ Exchange rate speculation not only allowed Qiaopiju owners to make quick profits, but it was also a strategy to avoid colonial or state limits on international remittances.⁹⁶ When currency speculation was undertaken, the Qiaopiju employee would quote the current exchange rates of local currency to Singapore, Hong Kong, or Shanghai dollars to the remitters. Once the remittance was accepted at that rate, the Qiaopiju owners would then wait for the rates to shift in their favor. If the rates between, for example, Singapore and Shanghai were favorable the Qiaopiju would then telegraphically transfer the funds to Shanghai and make the exchange.⁹⁷ It appears that in most cases Qiaopiju owners might wait up to ten days for the rates to improve.⁹⁸

When exchange rates were unfavorable or did not improve in the allotted time, Qiaopiju owners might then turn to price arbitrage or transshipping goods between Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and southeastern China. Price arbitrage was simply a way Qiaopiju owners could take advantage of price differences in various durable goods between markets in Southeast Asia, Hong Kong, and southern China. They could either engage in simultaneous telegraphic transactions – to lower risk – or accept greater risk by transshipping goods. Transshipping goods seems to have been more common than simultaneous transactions. In most cases, Qiaopiju

⁹⁴ Jiao, “Jindai Pixinju tese tanyuan,” 65; Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 62.

⁹⁵ Not only was Shanghai one of the great trading centers in East Asia, but was also popular for the convenience of its quick telegraphic communications with London and New York.

⁹⁶ Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 62.

⁹⁷ Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936 in SHAC127(2).123.

⁹⁸ Some sources claim a week while others ten days. Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936 in SHAC127(2).123; Hicks, *Overseas Chinese Remittances*, 68.

owners would purchase local goods such as agricultural products, cotton textiles, or Western goods and then ship them to Hong Kong for sale or reshipment to China. Since transporting and selling goods might take an extended period, the Qiaopiju issued remittances out of working capital and repaid themselves once the goods sold at a profit.⁹⁹

If some customer services offered by the Qiaopiju had the “human touch” their profit-making strategies most certainly did not. In actually handling the money of remitters, Qiaopiju owners were quite capitalistic. They unabashedly charged remitters a fee – albeit small – for allowing the Qiaopiju to use the workers’ hard-earned wages as temporary capital, they unashamedly held back much needed remittances waiting for currency rates to improve, and unrepentantly masked their activities with customer relations.

If the Qiaopiju model of business is to be lauded, it should not be celebrated as something “traditionally Chinese,” but as evidence of overseas Chinese businessmen’s ingenious exploitation of the most modern communications, transportation, and financial institutions. Along with their flexible inter-firm relations and culturalist customer services, their profit-making strategies show an adaptability to twentieth century modes of capitalism, a cognizance of regional needs, and fluidity of movement in transnational space. Such a powerful combination goes far to explain the unparalleled success of Qiaopiju firms. One of the features that made the Qiaopiju particularly successful was their defense of their industry against interference by the Chinese state.

Trans-Action Costs: Relations between the Post Office and Qiaopiju, 1920s-1940s

The main issue at the center of the relationship between the Post Office and Qiaopiju was always control over, or access to, overseas remittances. Underlying this complex relationship, however,

⁹⁹ Remittances from Overseas Chinese, Inspector Chang Chi-hsi, 4 December 1936” in SHAC127(2).123.

were questions of a deterritorialized Chinese identity, state power, China's balance of foreign trade, and the transnationalization of the state. The National Government exerted significant state power through the Directorate to regulate the Qiaopiju, but that power was often curbed by lobbying from Qiaopiju trade associations and Chambers of Commerce both in China and abroad. At the forefront of the government's concerns was encouraging diaspora Chinese to send remittances home, remittances that helped China balance its foreign trade deficit. Such broad state interests ultimately trumped Post Office concerns about protecting the postal monopoly and the legality of the Qiaopiju. Even after recognizing the necessity of allowing the Qiaopiju to continue functioning, both the National Government and Directorate understood the state could also directly access overseas remittances by transnationalizing the Post Office to mimic and directly compete with the Qiaopiju networks.

Prior to the mid-1920s when the Directorate first began differentiating between Minxinju and Qiaopiju, the Post Office lumped together these two very different types of firms as "Letter Hongs" (民局).¹⁰⁰ Failing to grasp the fundamental differences between these two types of firms meant that the Qiaopiju enjoyed subsidized clubbed package rates like the Minxinju, but were also subject to repeated Directorate attempts to close them down. The 1921 effort to close all Minxinju, motivated by the promulgation of a new Postal Law giving the Post Office a national monopoly failed in the face of combined resistance by local and provincial officials supported by Minxinju trade association lobbying.¹⁰¹ In the face of such intense lobbying efforts the Ministry

¹⁰⁰ Although certain postal commissioners stationed in the southeast made a clear distinction between those accepting international and domestic remittances at various times, at other moments Qiaopiju activities appeared almost unknown to postal staff. For example, the postal archives at Xiamen in 1927 contained very little information about Qiaopiju activities. Fuzhou Memo. No. 5027/12384 in SHAC137.5287.

¹⁰¹ Articles 1, 2, and 5 of the 1921 Postal Law defined the government postal monopoly and provided the legal basis for the attempt to close all Minxinju. "Postal Law" as enclosure to Circular No. 507, Officiating Co-Director General, temporarily C. Rousse, 1 November 1921 in SHAC137.2024-5.

of Communications decided to delay the closure of all Minxinju/Qiaopiju until an unspecified later date.

Thwarted in his efforts to close the Minxinju/Qiaopiju, Co-Director General of Posts Destelan sought an external means to undermine the profitability of the Qiaopiju by eliminating the clubbed package system, which was their *raison d'être*. In the summer of 1924, the Dutch East Indies representatives to the Stockholm Convention of the Universal Postal Union introduced a proposal to eliminate the clubbed package system, which was seconded by the representatives from China. The relevant articles of the Convention did not specifically mention the clubbed package system, but simply codified long-standing national postal laws forbidding more than one letter being sent under a single cover, i.e. all letters had to be sent *a decouvert* (散寄).¹⁰² After the Convention's adjournment the Philippines also halted the exchange of clubbed packages with China. Seizing on these developments, the Directorate submitted a series of proposals to the Ministry of Communications in December 1925 on the general abolition of the international clubbed package system. The Ministry, released from direct responsibility for eliminating the system, gave its approval on 31 December 1925. By October 1926, the Directorate and the Southeast Asian postal administrations had fixed the date for the abolition as 1 January 1927.¹⁰³ On 8 October 1926, the Singapore postal administration publically announced plans to abolish the clubbed packages system.¹⁰⁴

Shocked by the news of the impending abolition, Qiaopiju owners throughout coastal China and Southeast Asia mobilized support, founded lobbying groups like the Singapore

¹⁰² Universal Postal Union, *Convention of Stockholm (August 28, 1924): Together with the Detailed Regulations for its Execution* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1925), Article 34, Paragraph 3.

¹⁰³ Note re: Minchu at Xiamen as enclosure to Fujian Memo No. 2605/12494 in SHAC137.5287.

¹⁰⁴ “Yu Zhongguo jianhuan zhi xinbao” (The exchange of clubbed packages with China) as enclosure to Zhu Xing lingshiguan cheng Waijiaobu han (Letter from the Chinese Consulate in Singapore to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs), 2 December 1926, cited in Peng, *Minxinju fazhan shi*, 217-218.

Chinese Association for Reducing Postage (新加坡華僑減輕郵資大會), and sent delegations to meet with postal officials. Members of the Singapore Chinese Chamber of Commerce, many of whom were Qiaopiju owners, “assailed” the Directorate, numerous government ministries, and postal administrations throughout Southeast Asia with petitions requesting a three month delay.¹⁰⁵ In Bangkok the Chinese General Chamber of Commerce telegraphed the Chinese Ministry of Communications claiming that the Chinese public in Thailand was “highly indignant” at the decision to abolish the clubbed package system.¹⁰⁶ The All-Provincial Union of Chambers of Commerce and the Xiamen General Labor Union, speaking on behalf of Qiaopiju trade associations in Shantou and Xiamen, also lobbied the Ministry of Communications to rescind the abolition.¹⁰⁷ On 13 February 1927, the Directorate cabled the postal administrations throughout Southeast Asia notifying them of the extension of the clubbed package system.¹⁰⁸ After the failure of this latest effort, Fujian Postal Commissioner Stapleton-Cotton declared that the “exceptionally strong” Qiaopiju trade associations would make the struggle to eliminate the clubbed package system “long and bitter.”¹⁰⁹

Following the Nationalist takeover of both the Directorate General of Posts and Ministry of Communications, the government announced the convening of a National Communications Conference to reevaluate all communications and transportation policies.¹¹⁰ In the run-up to the

¹⁰⁵ Enclosure to Ministry’s Xunling No. 1460, dated 3 December 1926: Petition from the Chinese Chamber of Commerce, Singapore, 12 November 1926 in SHAC137.5164.

¹⁰⁶ Ministry’s Xunling No. 464, 25 April 1927 in SHAC137.1187.

¹⁰⁷ Translation of Cheng No. 97 to the Ministry of Communications, May 1927; Memo. No. 4833/8106, Xiamen Acting Deputy Postal Commissioner to Fujian Postal Commissioner, 5 August 1927; Enclosure to Fuzhou-Co.-D.G. Memo No. 2534/12216 of 1927 – Rough translation of despatch of 2 August 1927 from the Xiamen General Labor Union in SHAC137.1187; Enclosure to Foochow-Co.-D.G. Memo. No. 2649-12652 of 1927 – Letter from the Acting Deputy Commissioner to the Fuzhou Commissioner in SHAC137.2014.

¹⁰⁸ Jiaotong bu zongwu si diliu ke, *Zhongguo youzheng tongji zhuanke* (Special issue of statistics on the Chinese postal service) (N.p.: Jiaotong bu zongwu si di liu ke, 1931), Appendix, 40. The decision was made public sometime in early April. *The Straits Times*, 11 April 1927

¹⁰⁹ Memo. No. 2605/12494, Fujian Postal Commissioner V. W. Stapleton-Cotton, 24 October 1927 in SHAC137.5287.

¹¹⁰ Circular Memo No. 13, First Secretary Huang Naishu, 12 July 1928 in SHAC137.288-3.

August 1928 Conference, various Qiaopiju trade associations, representing “millions of impoverished overseas Chinese appealing loudly,” worked to preempt a decision to eliminate the Qiaopiju.¹¹¹ Despite those efforts, the Conference delegates accepted the Directorate’s proposal to close all Minxinju/Qiaopiju as violators of the state postal monopoly. The delegates officially delayed the closure until the end of 1930 to give the Minxinju/Qiaopiju owners and employees enough time to transition to new professions.¹¹²

Immediately following the National Communications Conference the Chaozhou-Meixian General Chamber of Commerce, the Shantou Overseas Chinese Pixian Industry Trade Association, and the All-Provincial Union of Chambers of Commerce began an unrelenting lobbying effort to nullify their decision.¹¹³ The Qiaopiju lobbyists made remarkably similar arguments in their impassioned pleas. In letter after letter, Qiaopiju owners defended their livelihoods claiming that the Post Office would be unable to assist illiterate overseas Chinese workers to writing letters and address their envelopes. The Post Office, they claimed, charged exorbitant fees for small remittances and costly postage to deliver to isolated overseas Chinese communities. The Post Office was not only costly but as a state institution had the deplorable tendency to lose remittances.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Zhaolu youzhengsi han (Copy of a letter from the head of the postal department), 6 August 1928 in SHAC137.7791; Zheng Ketang, “Nanyang Minxinju cunfei wenti” (Question on the survival of the South Seas Minxinju) *Zhongyang qiaowu yuekan* (Central overseas Chinese affairs monthly) 7-8 (1930), 37.

¹¹² Guomin zhengfu jiaotong bu mishu chu, ed., *Quanguo jiaotong huiyi huibian* (Collection on the National Communications Conference) (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1928), 68-69, 382-384.

¹¹³ Zhaolu Guomin zhengfu Jiaotongbu xunling di 902 hao (Copy of order no. 902 from the Ministry of Communications of the National Government), 24 August 1928; Gesheng shanghai lianhehui zongshiwusuo kuaiyou daidian zongzi di 236 hao (Express telegram, general series no. 236, All-Provincial Union of Chambers of Commerce), 21 August 1928 in SHAC137.7791.

¹¹⁴ e.g. Gesheng Shanghai lianhehui zongshiwu suo kuai you daidian zongzi di 236 hao (The All-Provincial Union of Chambers of Commerce, General Affairs Office, Postal Telegram No. 236), 21 August 1928 in SHAC137.7791; “Letter from Mr. Lin Yishun to the Ministry of 7 June 1929; “Jiaotongbu xunling di 1208 hao, Jiaotongbu zhang Wang Boqun, 24 April 1929” (Ministry of Communications, Instruction No. 1208, Minister of Communications Wang Boqun) in SHAC137.1187.

Pressure from Chambers of Commerce and Minxinju/Qiaopiju trade associations ultimately swayed the National Government and undermined Directorate efforts. By the opening of the London Congress of the Universal Postal Union in May 1929, the Ministry ordered Director General of Posts Liu Shufan (劉書蕃) to approach the Dutch East Indies representative to work out a compromise allowing the Qiaopiju to operate freely within the colony.¹¹⁵ The government also rescinded the abolition of all Minxinju/Qiaopiju by extending the deadline until 1 January 1935.

Hamstrung by the National Government's unwillingness to officially close the Qiaopiju, and frustrated by the constant contradictory orders from the same, the Directorate began building up a regulatory system to apply pressure on the remittance firms. New licensing regulations, efforts to increase the tariff on clubbed packages, and a crackdown on smuggling were the Directorate's primary weapons against the Qiaopiju. While the period from 1928 to 1935 seems to represent a wholesale effort by the Directorate to hinder the operations of the Qiaopiju upon closer inspection it is a period of tentative steps and half measures.¹¹⁶

In September 1930, the Directorate issued the "Provisional Regulations for Minju Registered Licenses."¹¹⁷ The license application required Qiaopiju owners to submit full particulars on their ownership, relationships with other Qiaopiju, and the overseas areas they served.¹¹⁸ Most significantly, only Qiaopiju in existence in 1930 would be allowed to apply for a license – no new firms could be legally established – and if a Qiaopiju voluntarily closed its doors it was forbidden from selling its license. Each license was only valid for one calendar year

¹¹⁵ Zheng Ketang, "Nanyang Minxinju cunfei wenti" (Question on the survival of the South Seas Minxinju), *Zhongyang qiaowu yuekan* (Central overseas Chinese affairs monthly) 7-8 (1930): 37-40.

¹¹⁶ Several Chinese scholars view this period as struggle for "survival" by the Qiaopiju against Directorate attacks (Peng, Jiao) or the "centralization of state power" over the Qiaopiju (Chen). Peng, *Minxinju fazhan shi*, 228-232; Jiao, "Jingzheng yu longduan," 143-144; Chen, "Chao-Shan Qiaopi," 6.

¹¹⁷ Circular Memo No. 520, Director General Wei Yifu, 29 September 1930 in SHAC137.6272-5.

¹¹⁸ For examples of official Qiaopiju licenses, see: SHAC137.1186.

allowing the Directorate to keep current records on the industry, its owners, and the shape of the Qiaopiju networks. Despite the application deadline of 31 December 1930, enough Qiaopiju protested that the Ministry ordered the Directorate to grant an extension until the end of 1934.¹¹⁹ Once again, the Directorate's regulations – already rather circumspect – were weakened by the pressure applied on the Ministry by Qiaopiju trade associations.¹²⁰

The Directorate's licensing provisions served as a new form of oversight of the international remittance industry designed to regulate its size and track network flows. From the license applications the Directorate gained detailed information about the number of Qiaopiju, demographic information about the owners, and the size and extent of the various inland and international networks. Through the yearly relicensing provision the Directorate maintained up-to-date information about the economic condition of the industry. The Directorate prohibited bankrupt firms from selling their licenses to gradually limit the size of the Qiaopiju industry, but they left a loophole allowing new firms to register themselves as a subsidiary company of a previously licensed firm – a loophole never closed.¹²¹ Most importantly, the Directorate used the information culled from license applications to make intensive studies of the overseas remittance industry. After 1930, the Directorate began ordering frequent counts of the number of Qiaopiju and their branches, despatched inspectors to study their business practices, assigned accountants to tabulate remittances, sent postal delegations abroad to investigate local conditions, and assigned statisticians to accumulate all sorts of figures about the industry. The purpose of these

¹¹⁹ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju tongchi di 1205 hao, daili youzheng zongban Tang Baoshu (Ministry of Communications, Directorate General of Posts, circular memo no. 1205), 8 December 1933 in SHAC137.7553-2.

¹²⁰ With some minor modifications, including a nominal application fee, these licensing provisions remained effective until 1949.

¹²¹ The loophole was reaffirmed and codified in a 27 March 1935 directive from Director General Guo Xinsong to Fujian Postal Commissioner J. A. Greenfield. Fujian sheng dang'anguan, ed., *Fujian Huaqiao dang'an shiliao* (Archival materials on Overseas Chinese from Fujian) (Beijing: Dang'an chubanshe, 1990), I: 315-6.

ongoing studies was not only to regulate the industry, but also to give the Directorate enough information to form their own international remittance network.

One of the results of the Directorate's myriad studies on the Qiaopiju, and part of their efforts to restrict the industry, was an attempt to raise the tariff on clubbed packages. Since the late 1890s, the Directorate subsidized the Qiaopiju in the form of reduced tariff rates for their clubbed packages – firms usually paid one-half of the international letter rate or five cents per 20 grams on the total weight of each clubbed package. In 1929, a Directorate inspector calculated the total yearly loss to the Service from these reduced rates as 170,000 yuan.¹²² Armed with this information, the Directorate petitioned the Ministry to raise the tariff on clubbed packages, but Qiaopiju protests thwarted the Directorate's efforts.¹²³ By the early 1930s, a readjustment of the exchange rate between Chinese currency and the gold franc – the official currency in which all international transit charges were paid – forced the Directorate to increase the international letter rate to 15 cents in July 1930, 20 cents in February 1931, and 25 cents in July of the same year.¹²⁴ Rather than immediately raise the rate on clubbed packages, the Ministry made a special exception allowing the Qiaopiju to continue enjoying their original five cent rate resulting in an additional "serious loss" to the Service.¹²⁵ By September 1933, the Directorate could no longer

¹²² Peng, *Minxinju fazhan shi*, 229.

¹²³ "Jiaotongbu xunling di 677 hao, Jiaotongbu zhang Wang Boqun, 1 March 1930," (Ministry of Communications, Instruction No. 677, Minister of Communications Wang Boqun) and "Jiaotongbu xunling di 807 hao, Jiaotongbu zhang Wang Boqun, 11 March 1930" (Ministry of Communications, Instruction No. 807, Minister of Communications Wang Boqun)," *Jiaotong gongbao* (Communications gazette), No. 131 (5 April 1930), 2-4, 6; Zhaolu Jiaotongbu xunling di 20 hao (Copy of Ministry xunling no. 20), 8 January 1932 in SHAC137.8855.

¹²⁴ Liu Chenghan and Xue Pinwen, *Zhongguo youzi kao* (A study of Chinese tariff rates) (Taipei: Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, 1957), 82, 85.

¹²⁵ Chu Chia-hua, *China's Postal and Other Communications Services* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), 53.

maintain such serious financial losses and raised the rate on clubbed packages to 12.5 cents per 20 grams, or 50 percent of the international rate.¹²⁶

Ministry and Directorate thinking about the Qiaopiju between 1925 and 1935 was fraught with contradictions and reversals. When the period began Co-Director General Destelan, Director General Liu Shufan, and Minister of Communications Wang Boqun all sought the total elimination of the Qiaopiju for infringing on the state postal monopoly. Lobbying by Qiaopiju trade associations and interested Chambers of Commerce effectively persuaded the Ministry and Directorate to adopt a more incremental policy. The Directorate did enact new licensing provisions, made studies of the industry, and eventually increased the tariff on clubbed packages, but as the period progressed new financial difficulties, including the loss of postal revenue from Manchuria in 1932 – resulting in the largest postal deficit on record at 5.8 million yuan – pushed the Ministry and Directorate towards a more conciliatory approach. By November 1933, the Directorate formally abandoned its efforts to close the Qiaopiju and gave them permission to continue operations after the closure of all Minxinju on 1 January 1935. The most significant development of this period was the Directorate’s decision to undertake extensive studies of the Qiaopiju and their business practices. These studies not only laid the groundwork for a comprehensive Qiaopiju policy, enacted in December 1935, but also gave the Post Office the wherewithal to begin constructing their own overseas remittance network.¹²⁷

¹²⁶ S/O No. 251, Director General of Posts to Guangdong Postal Commissioner Nordstrom, 15 July 1933 in SHAC137.2473-3.

In December 1935, the rate on clubbed packages was again adjusted, but this time in accordance with the destination of the package. Qiaopiju firms sending clubbed packages to the Philippines, Indochina, and the Dutch East Indies paid 20 cents per 20 grams, those sent to the Federated Malay States, Singapore, North Borneo, and Thailand paid 10 cents per 20 grams, and those sent to Hong Kong only paid 5 cents per 20 grams. “Pixin shiwu chuli banfa” (Method for handling Pixin affairs) in Youzheng zongju xunling 861/27786, Youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong to Fujian youzheng guanliju, 31 December 1935 in Fujian sheng dang’anguan, ed., *Fujian Huaqiao dang’an shiliao*, I: 316-19.

¹²⁷ The comprehensive policy put in place in December 1935, known as “The Method for Handling Pixin Affairs” was simply an amalgamation of existing Directorate regulations on Qiaopiju firms with very minor adjustments.

The Wartime Qiaopiju Industry, 1937-1945

The first months of the war had little effect on southeastern China or Qiaopiju operations, but the Japanese naval blockade begun in the spring of 1938 had a devastating impact. After the initial blockade of some of the larger ports, the Japanese navy began the actual invasion in March.

Xiamen fell to the Japanese on 13 March 1938, Fuzhou in May, Bias Bay (Guangdong) in early October, and Guangzhou on 21 October. Hainan surrendered in February 1939 and Shantou in July.

With the major southeastern ports captured most Qiaopiju closed down their operations. When conditions settled, Qiaopiju firms faced three options: close their business for the duration of the war, continue to operate under Japanese occupation, or move their businesses to Free China. It was undoubtedly a difficult choice. Of the 86 Qiaopiju based in Shantou in prewar China, 23 decided to relocate to Meixian in Free China, but 63 decided to remain in Shantou under Japanese control.¹²⁸

Qiaopiju firms remaining in occupied China faced a number of challenges from the Japanese and the Chinese National Government. Within a short time, the Japanese established control over the entire overseas remittance industry.¹²⁹ The main instrument of control was the Shantou Municipal Pixin Trade Association.¹³⁰ The Japanese Imperial Army established the Trade Association in late 1939 for the “regeneration” of the overseas Chinese remittance

“Pixin shiwu chuli banfa” (Method for handling Pixin affairs) in Youzheng zongju xunling 861/27786, Youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong to Fujian youzheng guanliju, 31 December 1935 in Fujian sheng dang’anguan, ed., *Fujian Huaqiao dang’an shiliao*, I: 316-19

¹²⁸ Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 57.

¹²⁹ Report by S.K. Fong, Remittances from Overseas Chinese: An Outline Concerning the Causes of the Inauguration of the Service and Its Present Condition, 14 March 1938 in SHAC127(2).123.

¹³⁰ [Diwei] ‘Qiaopi ye gonghui jiecheng yaoling’ (Main Points on the form of the [enemy] pixin trade association) as attachment to Caizhengbu yuqian tezi di 6530, caizhengbu buzhang Kong Xiangxi (Ministry of Finance, Chongqing special letter no. 6530, Minister of Finance Kong Xiangxi, 6 March 1940) in SHAC1181-1.

industry so the Qiaopiju could “use their genuine whole-hearted sincerity to cooperate in the construction of the New East Asian Order.” All day-to-day operations of the Qiaopiju in the association – viz. all Qiaopiju operating in the occupied zones – were under the orders of the Bank of Taiwan or the Yokohama Specie Bank, who also transmitted all overseas remittances and converted them into military-use stamps.¹³¹ The Qiaopiju in the occupied zones were limited to sending remittances to Shantou and the surrounding counties under Japanese occupation. In 1942, after conquering much of Southeast Asia, the Japanese adopted similar tactics by using the Bank of Taiwan to control the industry. Of all Qiaopiju in Southeast Asia, only 35 decided to work with the Japanese.¹³²

In response to this move by the Japanese, the Chinese Ministry of Finance ordered the Guangdong Provincial Bank and the Directorate General of P.R. & S.B. to take a number of aggressive “countermeasures.”¹³³ The Overseas Affairs Commission of the National Government notified all Chinese groups in Southeast Asia to remit their funds through government banks or their agents to avoid having remittances fall into Japanese hands. The Ministry also recommended the Guangdong Provincial Bank establish branches at places bordering guerilla areas to facilitate remittances to inland areas and to lower all remittance fees. Finally, the Directorate should attack Qiaopiju working in occupied areas by confiscating any remittances they carried with the government taking 50% and 50% going as a reward to those who actually seized the funds.¹³⁴

¹³¹ Guanyu duifu diwei qitu xishou Huaqiao huikuan taolunhui huiyi jilu (Record of the minutes of the Overseas Chinese Affairs Commission meeting on the enemy’s attempts to attract overseas Chinese remittances), 16 March 1940 in SHAC1181-1; Report by Zhou Yundong in SHAC127(2).123.

¹³² Chen, “Chao-Shan Qiaopi,” 8.

¹³³ “[Diwei] ‘Qiaopi ye gonghui jiecheng yaoling’” (Main Points of the form of the [enemy] pixin trade association) as attachment to “Caizhengbu yuqian tezi di 6530, caizhengbu buzhang Kong Xiangxi” (Ministry of Finance, Chongqing special letter no. 6530, Minister of Finance Kong Xiangxi, 6 March 1940) in SHAC1181-1.

¹³⁴ “Report by S.K. Fong, Remittances from Overseas Chinese: An Outline Concerning the Causes of the Inauguration of the Service and Its Present Condition, 14 March 1938” in SHAC127(2).121.

Once it became clear the Japanese only intended to occupy the coastal ports, most Qiaopiju firms moved inland to set up shop. After the fall of Xiamen, Qiaopiju firms moved to Jinjiang, which is a small port between Xiamen and Fuzhou. All overseas Qiaopiju were told to direct their remittances to Jinjiang, but since the Japanese were blockading the harbor most packages had to be routed through Suixi and then overland. Eventually the delays caused by the Japanese blockade made Jinjiang untenable and the Qiaopiju moved en masse to Gulangyu Island – across the harbor from Xiamen – since it was easier to smuggle the remittances from Gulangyu to Xiamen or inland.¹³⁵ Conditions near Shantou were virtually the same. After two months, Qiaopiju firms moved inland and transmitted their remittances over new routes starting from the coast near modern-day Shenzhen, but once that route proved untenable, they shifted their operative routes to Mong Cai (芒街) on the northern Indochinese border through to Dongxing (東興), Guangxi, and then overland to Shantou.¹³⁶

Qiaopiju firms operating in Free China were also forced to adopt new methods for transferring their funds from Southeast Asia. They still engaged in currency exchange speculation, but rather than effect transfer through their own branches or local money shops they used international banks or post offices, which provided more security and less Japanese interference. One method was to remit funds through the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation by telegraphic transfer to Shantou, Xiamen, or Gulangyu and then despatch inland by messenger or against drafts to local merchants. They could also remit directly through banks like the Guangdong Provincial Bank that had inland branches. Another method was to remit through foreign banks to Hong Kong and then transfer inland. Finally, they also occasionally

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Yang, “Chao-Shan diqu,” 111-18.

remitted through foreign post offices or the Chinese Post Office who could effect delivery right to the recipient's door.¹³⁷

In late 1941-early 1942 there was another collapse of the overseas remittance industry as the Japanese began the conquest of Southeast Asia. The Japanese almost simultaneously attacked Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, Malaya/Singapore, and Thailand and then captured the Dutch East Indies in March 1942. During the invasion Japanese targeted overseas Chinese for their anti-Japanese activities, particularly their economic assistance to China through overseas remittances. As Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew later said, "Singapore had been the centre for the collection of ethnic Chinese donations to Chongqing to fight the Japanese."¹³⁸ Even though the Japanese attempted to conciliate Chinese goodwill starting in late 1942, to gain their assistance in reviving the local economies, memories of Japanese atrocities against overseas Chinese such the Sook Ching massacre in Malaya kept most Chinese from cooperating. As usual, the Qiaopiju proved adaptable to the new situation and started funneling their remittances onto the black market. Black market activities became a hallmark of the Qiaopiju remittance industry starting in 1942 and extending all the way until the end of the Civil War in 1949.

The Transnationalization of the Chinese Post Office, 1937-1945

While the Qiaopiju attempted to keep their businesses open, the exigencies of war provided the Post Office with the opportunity to begin direct competition. There had long been a sentiment in the Directorate that the Post Office "has an almost perfect...organization for handling overseas remittances," but legal difficulties and the strength of the Qiaopiju kept the Post Office from

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ http://www.intellasia.net/news/articles/regional/111283922_printer.shtml

engaging in competition for the remittances.¹³⁹ The Directorate's desire to collect overseas remittances meshed well with the National Government's continued attempts to facilitate and maintain links with transnational Chinese communities. While most of the state's previous attempts had been discursive, a transnational remittance network would be a solid, physical connection to overseas Chinese. One might claim, as the Qiaopiju firms did repeatedly, that other forms of organization served the diaspora "better," but once the war began the Directorate felt the Qiaopiju's lack of an "ethical model of business" – their profit motive – worked against the larger purpose of overseas remittances to support the Chinese state against annihilation.¹⁴⁰ As one Directorate employee put it, "it is hoped that these Overseas Chinese [firms] will not spoil the good name of patriotism because of a little personal gain at the sacrifice of National Interest."¹⁴¹ Remitting from abroad through the Post Office might be a bit more expensive, but its "state-run character" meant "the Post Office does not take profit as its *raison d'être*" and is therefore more suitable in "assisting our overseas compatriots."¹⁴² "At this time of national difficulty," wrote the Directorate, "our overseas brothers are devoted to contributing to the nation."¹⁴³

As it emerged in late 1937 and early 1938, the Directorate's transnational remittance network consisted of two parts. First, a domestic sorting and delivery system consisting of newly-created Distribution Centers and special overseas remittance employees; second, a remittance collection system made up of international banks and other companies who acted as contract agents for the Directorate. As a whole, the Post Office's remittance network was

¹³⁹ Report by Zhou Yundong, 18 March 1940 in SHAC127(2).123.

¹⁴⁰ Letter from C.Y. Yeh to C.H. Liu, 16 January 1941 in SHAC127.1181-2.

¹⁴¹ *Youju banli huaqiao huikuan yewu xuzhi* (Handbook for Handling Overseas Remittances by the Post Office) in SHAC127(2).123.

¹⁴² Report by Zhou Yundong, 18 March 1940 in SHAC127(2).123.

¹⁴³ *Youju banli huaqiao huikuan yewu xuzhi* (Handbook for Handling Overseas Remittances by the Post Office) in SHAC127(2).123.

modeled almost entirely on Qiaopiju's organizational and business practices, except the Directorate used more formal institutions and contracts and earned its profits on remittance fees.

The Chinese state's construction of a transnational remittance network had the corollary effect of transnationalizing the state itself. That is, the Chinese state became a transnational organization by extending itself into other countries in order to link the diaspora to the state through a deterritorialized notion of ethnic Han resistance to Japanese imperialism. States, generally speaking, do not frequently transnationalize themselves since the whole basis of the Westphalian state system depends on a notion of individual states being territorially-bounded corporate structures that are coextensive with their political society. International law in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries also discouraged states from engaging in transnational activities within states of "equal" status. Scholars have begun to discuss recent transnational states viewing them as the result of a global bourgeoisie class who emerged in the late twentieth century and who acts through supranational organizations like the United Nations, International Monetary Fund, World Bank, World Trade Organization, etc. to promote their own interests.¹⁴⁴ The transnationalism of the Chinese state in the late 1930s was not result of a global capitalist class acting through supranational organizations, but rather a unique case of a state, with a widely-scattered diasporic population identifying closely with the ethnic nation, constructing a physical network of agents in other countries to collect economic resources when the existence of the state was threatened.

The first step in transnationalizing the Chinese state through the creation of an overseas remittance network was to find overseas agents to collect the remittances. In finding such agents the Directorate was very careful to skirt a number of legal issues restricting state activities in

¹⁴⁴ For example, William Robinson, "Towards a Global Ruling Class? Globalization and the Transnational Capitalist Class," *Science and Society* 64: 1 (Spring 2000): 11-54.

postal matters extending beyond national borders. First and foremost, Universal Postal Union treaties prohibited any state from engaging in any postal activities within another state. The Directorate had also signed international money order treaties with most countries prohibiting them from dealing in international remittances with anyone except the other signatory. To get around this legal issue the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation, one of the earliest of the Directorate's agents, proposed taking out a Qiaopiju license, which would also give them preferential postal rates.¹⁴⁵ The Directorate had to quash this proposal as their own Qiaopiju regulations forbid the licensing of any new firms after 1935.¹⁴⁶ The only way for an overseas bank or company to act as an agent for the Post Office was a careful wording of all agency contracts to avoid words such as “international” or “remittance.”¹⁴⁷ Instead, agency contracts used terminology such as “exporting currency” (出國幣).¹⁴⁸

Despite careful wording and a deep-seated desire to succeed, the first attempts to create agency contracts were a failure. In the fall of 1936 Deputy Director of Posts Xu Changcheng (徐昌成) visited Saigon to meet with prospective agents and discuss the possibilities of a state-run transnational remittance network.¹⁴⁹ In early 1937, Xu's work bore fruit when he signed the first agency agreement with the Bank of East Asia-Saigon. To the vexation of the Directorate and the Bank of East Asia their system could not compete with the Qiaopiju's rates and

¹⁴⁵ Letter from Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation to W.H. Chu, United China Syndicate, 26 May 1938 in SHAC127.5233.

¹⁴⁶ “Pixin shiwu chuli banfa” (Method for handling Pixin affairs) in Youzheng zongju xunling 861/27786, Youzheng zongju juzhang Guo Xinsong to Fujian youzheng guanliju, 31 December 1935 in Fujian sheng dang'anguan, ed., *Fujian Huaqiao dang'an shiliao*, I: 316-19.

¹⁴⁷ Report by S.K. Fong, Remittances from Overseas Chinese: An Outline Concerning the Causes of the Inauguration of the Service and Its Present Condition, 14 March 1938 in SHAC127(2).123

¹⁴⁸ Contract between the Bank of China, the Central Bank, and the Directorate General of Postal Remittances and Savings Banks, 23 March 1939 (in Chinese) in SHAC127.5233.

¹⁴⁹ Report by S.K. Fong, Remittances from Overseas Chinese: An Outline Concerning the Causes of the Inauguration of the Service and Its Present Condition, 14 March 1938 in SHAC127(2).123.

services.¹⁵⁰ In April 1937, the Directorate tried again by opening negotiations with the Bank of Guangzhou to have its Bangkok branch collect remittances, but again business failed to develop because of high overhead costs. In October 1937, Guangdong Postal Commissioner Molland tried to resolve some of these cost issues by recommending the elimination of all postal fees, which the Directorate accepted.¹⁵¹ Shortly thereafter, the Directorate accepted Molland's recommendations to eliminate all postal charges and adopted the suggestion of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation (華僑銀行) to institute a system of small attached letters like the *pixin* and *huipi*.¹⁵²

Once the Directorate's overseas remittance network offered virtually the same services as the Qiaopiju at almost the same price, it began signing agency agreements in earnest to make the service fully functional. By October 1938, the Directorate signed an agreement with the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation for collecting remittances in Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Burma, and Hong Kong. The Post Office also signed agency agreements with private companies and banks in Hong Kong, Indochina, Thailand, the Philippines, Macao, and New York.¹⁵³

The domestic side of the Post Office's transnational remittance network was based on the Distribution Center. The Distribution Center (分發局) was an office specializing in the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ S/O No. 254, Guangdong Postal Commissioner Molland to D.G. of P.R.S.B. S.K. Shen, 11 October 1937 in SHAC127(2).123.

¹⁵² Letter from Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation to W.H. Chu, United China Syndicate, 26 May 1938 in SHAC127.5233.

¹⁵³ Minguo sanshi niandu qiaohui yewu jihua (Plan for the development of the overseas remittances business for 1941), 8 February 1941 in SHAC127.1181-2.

In Hong Kong, Kam Koam Tsing and Co. (信行進銀公司) represented the Directorate. The Banque de l'Indo-Chine (東方匯理銀行) acted as a Directorate agent in Indochina and Thailand. In Thailand the Directorate also had contracts with the Kwang Ah Co. (光亞公司) and Lee Hong Goldsmiths & Jewelers. In Macao, it was the Ming Shun Cash Shop (民信泉號) while in Manila the agents were the Philippines Bank of Communications (菲律賓交通銀行) and the Tiong Hui Exchange & Trust Company (中菲匯兌信託局). In New York, the Directorate's representative was the Bank of China (中國銀行). Later in the war, the Directorate also signed agreements with the Bank of China-Singapore and the Chase National Bank of New York.

handling, sorting, and delivery of all overseas remittances. Distribution Centers were usually fairly small offices, but it was important to separate them from regular postal establishments because of the specialized paperwork and the need to situate the Centers close to the Japanese lines. The Directorate placed the first Distribution Centers in Guangzhou, Shantou, Minhou, and Xiamen.¹⁵⁴ As the network matured, Centers were established throughout Fujian and Guangdong – in Fuzhou, Jinjiang, Longxi, Xiamen, Guangzhou, Shantou, Haikou, Qianshan, Jiangmen, Suixi, Huiyang, and Taishan.¹⁵⁵ A Distribution Center was later added in Kunming to handle remittances to all other areas of Free China.¹⁵⁶

Carrying out the diverse functions of the Qiaopiju forced the Directorate to create a number of new staff positions to emulate the positions held by workers in Qiaopiju firms. Sometime in 1938, the Directorate added the positions of Overseas Remittance Specialist and Overseas Remittance Special Secretary, who were consolidated into Overseas Remittance Clerks in late 1941. Overseas Remittance Clerks had three primary duties: (1) escort overseas remittances; (2) spot-check remittance stamps and their delivery; and (3) assist in all office matters relating to remittances.¹⁵⁷ Overseas Remittance Couriers, much like postmen, simply delivered remittances, but not other mail matter. In Guangdong in 1941, there were about 240 Overseas Remittance Clerks and 400 Overseas Remittance Couriers.¹⁵⁸ In addition to clerks and

¹⁵⁴ I.M.O's from Malaya, 1938-1939 in SHAC127.321.

¹⁵⁵ Overseas Petty Remittances Handled by Postal Remittance and Savings Banks, July 1941 in SHAC127(2).114. For a list of all places served by Distribution Centers, see: Youzheng chujin huiye ju, *Huaqiao huipiao fenfaqu diming biao* (Table of place names in the overseas Chinese remittance stamp distribution areas) (N.p.: Youzheng chujin huiye ju, 1940) in SHAC127(2).150.

¹⁵⁶ *Youju banli huaqiao huikuan yewu xuzhi* (Handbook for Handling Overseas Remittances by the Post Office) in SHAC127(2).123.

¹⁵⁷ Zhaolu bangonghan di 53 hao, juzhang Guo Xinsong, youzheng chujin huiye ju juzhang Liu Gongyun, 3 November 1941 (Semi-official no. 53, Director General Guo Xinsong to D.G. of P.R. & S.B. Director General Liu Gongyun, 3 November 1941.) in SHAC127.2748.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

couriers, there were also Overseas Remittance Inspectors whose duty was to constantly traverse the overseas remittance networks to ensure the smooth functioning of the system.¹⁵⁹

The Directorate's remittance procedure worked essentially the same as the Qiaopiju's system. Agent banks or companies dispatched employees to collect remittances and *pixin*. Once collected the remittances were telegraphically transferred to the appropriate Distribution Center. The Distribution Center then turned the currency into overseas remittances stamps, which contained a serial number, remittance amount, recipient's name, Distribution Center, stamp issuer and was chopped with a postal dater and a superior's signature. The remittance stamp also had a receipt attached that was torn off upon delivery. Accompanying the remittance was a return letter blank and envelope to be sent back to the remitter through the overseas agent.¹⁶⁰

The Directorate's transnational remittance network was a great success for three years from late 1938 to late 1941. It not only functioned efficiently in a manner very similar to the Qiaopiju network, but actually achieved its goal of handling more remittances than its competitors. The Directorate's overseas remittance network proved such a success primarily because of wartime conditions. The war disrupted the Qiaopiju networks, forcing many firms to close, and undermined consumer confidence in their ability to deliver remittances safely. With many areas falling under Japanese control, patriotic Chinese seemed to prefer sending their remittances through the Post Office.

¹⁵⁹ Qiaohui xunyuan shicha qiaohui baogao shu (Reports on overseas remittances by overseas remittance inspectors), 21 November 1942 in SHAC127.1808-1; for the routes of overseas remittance inspectors, see: Qiaohui xunyuan xingcheng baogao biao (Reports on the routes of overseas remittance inspectors) in SHAC127.1808-2.

¹⁶⁰ *Youju banli Huaqiao huikuan yewu xuzhi* (Handbook for handling overseas remittances by the Post Office) in SHAC127(2).123.

*Table 7: Amounts of Overseas Remittances Handled by the Post Office*¹⁶¹

1938 (October-December)	6,734,111.00
1939	50,370,001.00
1940	114,558,188.00
1941 (Jan.-Oct.)	155,721,703.00

After most of Southeast Asia fell to the Japanese and corruption started running rampant in Chongqing, the Nationalist Government's currency began a long inflationary spiral that would not end until the early 1950s. In terms of overseas remittances, the gradual and then quickening of inflation meant that most remitters began shifting their business back to the Qiaopiju who were operating on the black market. Prior to 1942, the Directorate General had been sending remittances on a floating exchange rate between Chinese National Currency and the U.S. dollar. When the exchange rate stayed relatively stable the Post Office's remittance network was successful, but once the National Government's pegged exchange rate of \$20 CNC to \$1 US diverged from market rates overseas remittances flooded onto the black market. The official exchange rate of 20:1 in June 1943 was only one-third of the market value of U.S. currency. By June 1945, the black market rate was 1,705:1 while the official postal rate was still 20:1. Overseas Chinese made the obvious choice to shift their business back to the Qiaopiju.

Table 8: Exchange Rates between Chinese National Currency and the US Dollar

Year	CNC per US \$1.00 ¹⁶²	
	Official	Market
1943 – June	18.80	59.00
– December	20.00	84.00
1944 – June	20.00	192.00
– December	20.00	570.00
1945 – June	20.00	1,705
– December	20.00	1,222

¹⁶¹ Listing Showing Amounts of Overseas Remittances Received by P.R.S.B. Since Inauguration of O.S. Service in SHAC127(2).114.

¹⁶² Kia-Ngau Chang, *The Inflationary Spiral: The Experience in China, 1939-1950* (Cambridge: Technology Press of MIT, 1958), 382-83.

Slipping Away: The Qiaopiju and the Black Market

After the war, a number of obstacles worked against the recovery of the overseas remittance business.¹⁶³ Towards the end of World War II, and immediately after, a number of Southeast Asian countries instituted controls on overseas remittances. In July 1942, the government of Thailand passed an act strictly limiting the amount of remittances that could be sent to China.¹⁶⁴ The British in the Singapore and Malaya followed suit in January 1946 by restricting the amount an individual could remit.¹⁶⁵ The Dutch in the East Indies took a different approach by limiting the total amount of remittances for the whole colony to one million guilders a month.¹⁶⁶ The colonies limited remittances to reduce their foreign trade deficits and help their own economies recover, but it had the overall effect of pushing Qiaopiju remittances onto the black market.

If limits on remittances in Southeast Asia drove some remittances onto the black market, the National Government's currency exchange policies exacerbated the tendency. In January 1942, the Sino-American-British Stabilization Board had fixed the official government exchange rate at 20 yuan to 1 US dollar. Despite growing inflation, the 20:1 exchange rate remained in effect until 3 March 1946 when the National Government adjusted the official exchange rate to 2020: 1. Over the next year, the pegged exchange rate constantly had to be adjusted. At various times the official exchange rate was 73%, 44%, 32%, and 27.5% of the market rate.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶³ This period has been extensively covered by a number of Chinese scholars. For examples of this work, see: Chen, "Chao-Shan Qiaopi,"; Yuan Ding and Chen Liyuan, "1946-1949 nian Guangdong Qiao hui taobi wenti" (The problem of evasive overseas remittance in Guangdong, 1946-1949) *Huaqiao Huaren lishi yanjiu* "Overseas Chinese History Studies" 3 (September 2001): 9-20; Yuan Ding and Chen Liyuan, "1946-1949 nian Guomin zhengfu dui Qiaopiju de zhengce" (The policies of the National Government towards overseas remittance agencies, 1946-1949) *Nanyang wenti yanjiu* "Southeast Asian Affairs" 3 (2001): 63-70; and Zhu Dongqin, "Zhanhou guomin zhengfu de waihui zhengce yu qiaohui" (The post-war overseas remittance policy of the national government and overseas Chinese remittances) *Nanyang wenti yanjiu* (Research on Southeast Asian questions) 2 (2002): 58-67.

¹⁶⁴ Tantasurak, *Poeykwan*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Wu, *Dollars, Dependents and Dogma*, 108.

¹⁶⁶ Zhuang Xinzai, "Lun qiaohui taobi de yuanyin ji wanjiu banfa" (A discussion of the reasons for evasion by overseas remitters and a method for retrieving them) *Chuhui fuwu* (Remittance and Savings service) 72 (1 August 1947), 3.

¹⁶⁷ Zhu, "Zhanhou guomin zhengfu de waihui zhengce yu qiaohui," 59.

With inflation spinning out of control, the Central Bank adopted a new floating exchange rate policy on 15 August 1947. Under the new policy, a Foreign Exchange Stabilization Fund Committee met each day to set official rates.¹⁶⁸ The floating exchange rate policy worked successfully for a few months keeping their rates between 80-90% of the market rate, but political pressure and criticism hampered the operation of the Committee. Many critics argued the Committee's constant devaluation of Chinese currency was actually increasing the inflationary trend. The Committee published a study showing they were merely following the market, but the political damage had been done and in the last months of the Committee's existence they were hesitant to make adjustments. Their rates fell to between 25-50% of the market.¹⁶⁹

In August 1948, the National Government introduced its wide-ranging Gold Yuan currency reforms and returned to a pegged remittance rate system. The Gold Yuan reforms worked well for about three months with rates pegged at 4:1, but hyperinflation set it again and by November the official pegged rate was only 66% of the market rate. With the failure of the Gold Yuan reforms, the National Government returned to a floating remittance rate, but it only proved a success for a few months. By January 1949 the official pegged rate was only 34% of the black market rate. After April 1949, the exchange rate made little difference as the public had lost so much confidence in the National Government that almost no remittances were sent through official channels.

The rapid fluctuations in the official exchange rate coupled with the on-set of hyperinflation devastated the Post Office's overseas remittance network. The Directorate was frustrated that the Qiaopiju were "openly profiteering" on the black market and attempted to

¹⁶⁸ On the working of the Stabilization Fund Committee, see: Chou, *The Chinese Inflation*, 132-41.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 136.

institute some of their own reforms.¹⁷⁰ With their own remittance business “at a standstill,” the Directorate convened the Guangdong Provincial Overseas Remittance Symposium in March 1947 to hear recommendations from experts.¹⁷¹ Aside from the problems of the black market, the attendees focused on the problem of remittance fees. The Directorate was literally unable to keep adjusting their remittance fees to keep up with hyperinflation. In January 1947, for example, the Directorate ran a deficit of 70 million yuan to handle just 112 million in remittances. In other words, the Directorate was losing money by accepting remittances. In addition to raising remittance fees, the members of the symposium made rather weak recommendations such as transferring remittances faster, concentrating archives in a single location, and improving the efficiency of their overseas remittance workers. There was a palpable sense of failure during the symposium reflected in its useless recommendations. Without authority over exchange rate policies or an ability to shut down the black market, the Directorate was literally incapable of reviving its overseas remittance business.

While the Directorate struggled just to keep its remittance business afloat in the late 1940s, Qiaopiju firms rebounded quickly after the war. In 1946 the Chinese Post Office relicensed 119 Qiaopiju head offices in Fujian with a declared total of 1110 branch offices in China and an additional 1572 abroad.¹⁷² In Guangdong, the Directorate tallied 98 Qiaopiju head offices who maintained relationships with 983 branches.¹⁷³ The postwar Qiaopiju concentrated their activities on Hong Kong. After collecting remittances in Southeast Asia, Qiaopiju firms

¹⁷⁰ Confidential Letter O.C.B.C. No. 94, D.G. of P.R.S.B. to Singapore Branch of the Overseas Chinese Banking Corporation, 17 July 1947 in SHAC127(2).249.

¹⁷¹ For a full report on the discussions at the symposium, see: *Yue sheng qiaohui zuotanhui jilu* (Guangdong provincial symposium on overseas Chinese remittances) in SHAC127(2).249.

¹⁷² Fujian youqu sa-wu nianfen ge Pixinju zong fenhao qingce (List of the head and branch Pixinju in the Fujian postal district for the year 1946) in SHAC137.6367.

¹⁷³ Guangdong youqu sanshiwu nianfen ge Pixinju zong fenhao qingce (List of the head and branch Pixinju in the Guangdong postal district for the year 1946) in SHAC137.6368. Chen, by contrast, maintains that Shantou only had 67 head offices with a total of 733 overseas branches in 1946. Chen, “Jindai Huaqiao huikuan,” 57.

telegraphically transferred the money to Hong Kong where it was converted into local currency. Rather than telegraphically transfer the funds again, Qiaopiju firms carried the HK currency to southern China to deliver it. Southern Chinese gladly accepted HK dollars because of the hyperinflation on Chinese currency. According to statistics accumulated by Wu Chun-hsi roughly 80-85% of all remittances travelled on the black market through Hong Kong in the immediate postwar years and by 1948 more than 99% of overseas remittances entered China through illegal channels.¹⁷⁴

The collapse of the National Government did not mean an immediate end to the Qiaopiju remittance network. In late 1949, the newly-established Communist government instituted strict regulations on foreign trade and remittances, but the government also understood the importance of the foreign currency reserves brought to China by overseas remittances. The initial trade restrictions did reduce the number of Qiaopiju. There were 185 Qiaopiju recorded in Fujian in November 1949, with some 2700 branches, but the number decreased to 138 in 1950, 124 in 1951, and 104 in 1952.¹⁷⁵ In Guangdong, the Shantou Post Office registered 60 Qiaopiju in 1951 who maintained relations with 427 inland and 348 overseas branches.¹⁷⁶ Over time, the Communist government slowly tightened restrictions on the Qiaopiju and, with other countries like the United States prohibiting remittances to China, by the mid-1950s the entire Qiaopiju remittance industry had been drastically reduced. The government allowed a few Qiaopiju to continue operations into the 1960s to help provide foreign currency reserves, but the political

¹⁷⁴ Wu, *Dollars, Dependents and Dogma*, 83; Yuan and Chen, “1946-1949 nian Guangdong Qiaohui taobi wenti,” 18.

¹⁷⁵ Jiao, “Jindai Pixinju tese tanyuan,” 78; *Fujian sheng zhi: Youdian zhi* (Fujian provincial gazette: Post and telecommunications gazette) (Beijing: Fangzhi chubanshe, 1996), 8.

¹⁷⁶ Yang, *Chao-Shan diqu*, 154.

troubles of Cultural Revolution finally brought an end to the private Qiaopiju business in 1973.¹⁷⁷

Conclusion

Since the East Asian economic miracle of the four little dragons – Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, and South Korea – in the 1960s, as well as the more recent meteoric rise of the mainland Chinese economy, scholars and commentators have sought the distinctive cultural elements central to this process hoping to describe a unique form of “Asian” or “Confucian capitalism.” Contemporary scholars generally agree that diasporic Chinese have played a fundamental role in the development of transnational “Chinese capitalism” since the late 1970s. More recently, however, the scholars have tended to reject arguments about “Chinese capitalism” as a form of reverse orientaling or have failed to find anything distinctive about capitalism in East Asia. While many of these economists and political scientists argue that the Maoist interregnum (1949-1979) broke the ties between communities in South China and Southeast Asia, many historians continue to employ culturalist explanations to understand transnational Chinese businesses successes in the late Qing and Republican eras. Following recent economists and political scientists, I have argued in this chapter that transnational Chinese remittance firms do not represent a form of Confucian or Chinese capitalism, but instead forged a colonial modern type of business firm.

The colonial modernity of the Qiaopiju firm was a result of particular historical circumstances and how Qiaopiju owners reacted to them. Qiaopiju firms had to operate in the transnational spaces between an imperial empire and then semi-colony in China, emerging nation-states and colonies in Southeast Asia, and colonial entrepots like Hong Kong. Within this

¹⁷⁷ On Qiaopiju firms in the Communist era, see: Yang, *Chao-Shan diqu*, 131-47.

transoceanic space, Qiaopiju firms also faced emergent regulatory state or international regimes bent on defending the nation-state system or international norms. To operate successfully in such geographic and political environments, Qiaopiju owners created a type of small, flexible firm that could navigate in a variety of settings. Qiaopiju owners also took advantage of the most cutting edge technologies – steamships, telegraphs, international postal services – to engage in capitalist profit-making strategies like currency exchange speculation, transshipping goods, or arbitrage. Coupled with their capitalist profit-making strategies were a number of customer services with a culturalist tinge such as *pixin* and *huiji* or writing letters for illiterate customers. The combination of a small, flexible firm using capitalist profit-making strategies with culturalist customer relations navigating the transnational space between nations, colonies, and international regulatory regimes is what makes the Qiaopiju a special type of business firm I have called colonial modern.

The very existence of the Qiaopiju remittance firms posed great challenges and opportunities for the Chinese Post Office. As firms carrying overseas remittances before the Imperial Post Office was even inaugurated in 1896, the Qiaopiju offered the Post Office and the Chinese state a physical link to overseas Chinese communities. The Post Office initially intervened in Qiaopiju business in its fight for a national postal monopoly, but lobbying by Qiaopiju trade associations, and their access to hundreds of millions in overseas funds, convinced the National Government to turn a blind eye to the Qiaopiju's violation of international postal agreements. Despite the Post Office's desire to fully tax Qiaopiju mail matter, the National Government decided to grant a special subsidized postage rate to the Qiaopiju through the clubbed package system to encourage them to continue their business. This national subsidy of overseas remittances demonstrates the central government's desire to create

and maintain a deterritorialized Han identity that linked diasporic communities to the nation-state through the Post Office. That is, the National Government believed that by remitting portions of their salary to the families in China, overseas Chinese were assisting the ethnic nation and modern nation-state.

As the Directorate began to study Qiaopiju business strategies in the early 1930s, they realized they could cut out the middleman and collect overseas remittances directly. As soon as the Qiaopiju began experiencing difficulties at the beginning of the War of Resistance, the Post Office undertook the unusual process of transnationalizing itself. As a state-run institution, the Post Office constructed of an overseas remittance network through agency contracts with international banks and companies thus effectively transnationalized the state by giving it a physical presence within other states. The Post Office was successful in building a transnational remittance network and succeeded for four years in attracting remittances, but the onset of inflation in the later years of the war and hyperinflation during the Civil War ended the effectiveness of the Directorate's remittance business. The Qiaopiju, as always, continued to thrive on the black market despite domestic and international regulatory regimes bent on disrupting their business.

Conclusion

The State Post: The Post Office, the Government, and the State

Exactly one month after the founding of the People's Republic of China on 1 October 1949, the People's Government established the Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (郵電部).

From December 10-28, the Ministry convened a National Postal Conference to discuss changes to the administration of the Nationalist Directorate General of Posts. Heading up the conference was the newly-appointed Minister of Posts and Telecommunications Zhu Xuefan (朱學范) who had worked in the Post Office since 1924.¹ Zhu's most capable advisor at the Conference was Gu Chunfan (谷春藩), a recent Acting Director General of the Nationalist Post Office, who served as the new Deputy Director of Posts.

At the Conference, the delegates made few changes to the structure, organization, or personnel of the Post Office. These decisions reflected Mao Zedong's April 25, 1949, general directive on the procedures for taking over Nationalist offices and the specific policy of the Central Executive Committee on the Post Office. According to those policies, the Post Office should retain its existing business structure, restore services as quickly as possible, announce basic policies and protect supplies, educate staff and remold their ideology, and study the old systems to plan necessary reforms.² There was also a "three preservations" policy to preserve

¹ Zhu Xuefan (1905-1996) joined the Post Office in 1924. In Shanghai, Zhu rose to prominence as a leader of the Postal Workers' Union after the Nationalists had purified it and then he became a member of the Standing Committee of the National Postal Workers' Union. In 1928, he joined the Nationalist Party with the aid of Lu Jingshi (陸京士), also a labor leader in the Post Office and later on Taiwan, and the two of them soon became followers of Du Yuesheng in the Green Gang. Over the next decade, Zhu served in a variety of capacities as a general labor leader in Shanghai attending many international labor conferences as a Nationalist representative. In November 1946, Zhu left Shanghai for Hong Kong where he announced his break with the Nationalists. In February 1948, he entered the Communist-controlled area and was selected as Vice-Chairman of the Chinese General Labor Union and Chairman of the National Work Committee. After the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Zhu Xuefan served as Minister of Telecommunications from 1949 to 1966.

² For an actual example of the process of the Communists taking over Post Offices, see: "Tianjin jieguan zu youzheng jieguan zongjie baogao" (Summary report on the takeover of the Post Office by the Tianjin Takeover Group) 20 March 1949 in Qiu Runxi, *Tianjin youzheng shiliao* (Historical materials on the Tianjin postal service)

the former offices, wages, and bureaucratic organization of the Nationalist Directorate. The Conference delegates also adopted slogans similar to the Nationalist Post Office, retained green and yellow as institutional colors, kept the vast majority of the staff, and maintained almost all internal working rules. The most significant changes were to staff titles and office nomenclature, both designed to reflect the revolutionary outlook of the new government.³

Government and State

The transition of the Post Office from Nationalist to Communist control went smoothly because the new government was content to view the Directorate as it portrayed itself – a progressive institution loyally serving the idea and reality of the central Chinese State. Over the decades, the Post Office insulated itself from the ravages of late Qing and Republican-era politics by claiming and acting as a “non-political” or “neutral” bureaucratic entity carrying out its primary mission to transform a presiding agrarian state into a modern centralizing one.⁴ To the Post Office, the Communists were simply the newest in a long line of governments that had taken over the system with little effect on the institution itself. In May 1911, the Qing Ministry of Posts and Communications secured jurisdiction over the Post Office, but only a few changes were made to staff titles. Under Yuan Shikai and the warlords, the Post Office had to remit some of its surplus to the Ministry of Communications to cover other government debts, but experienced little other interference. In early 1928, the Nationalist Government in Nanjing negotiated its own takeover

(Tianjin: Beijing hangkong hangtian daxue chubanshe, 1992), V: 9-22. For a positive foreign perspective, see: Duncan C. Lee, “Changeover in the Post Office,” *China Weekly Review* (July 16, 1949): 146.

³ Postal Directors (郵務長) now simply became First-Class Postal Officials (一等郵務員); postmen (信差) became mail delivery men (郵遞員); rural couriers (郵差) became mail transporters (郵運員), and office coolies (聽差) became postal assistants (郵助員). Tianjin youzheng guanliju tongling (renzi) di 11 hao, 22 February 1950 (Circular No. 11, personnel, Tianjin head post office) in Qiu, *Tianjin youzheng shiliao*, V: 50. This early 1950 order was an extension of a previous circular by the East China Directorate General of Posts. Huabei youzheng guanli zongju tongling di 104 hao (East China Directorate General of Posts, circular no. 104), 6 September 1949 in SHAC137.5489-2.

⁴ *RWCPO, 1911*, 12,

of the Post Office, appointed a Chinese director general, declared Chinese as the official Service language, added some new services, but the institution continued on largely as before. The Directorate also willingly worked with the Japanese occupiers and collaborator governments during World War II to retain administrative authority over the entire postal network. The Post Office was able to survive so many government takeovers, attempts to politicize it, and shifts in administrative authority because of the fundamental principle behind its idea of itself.

The administrators of the Post Office, both foreign and Chinese, shared the statist imperative or desire for the State. Postal administrators and staff, as government bureaucrats, distinguished between the State as Idea and the conception of the State as a reality. Their desire was to replicate and naturalize in China the forms and substance of the Western state as an impersonal, transcendent structure of power. The belief in the need for a modern, rational state as an autonomous actor capable of swiftly imposing needed reforms on a territorial-based nation was a view widely held across the political spectrum.⁵ Although that State should have mythical, impersonal qualities, it could be conjured and reified by the existence of government institutions like the Post Office creating bureaucracies, legal regimes, and administrative practices that constantly reiterated the State as the locus of governance and authoritative power. By asserting territorial sovereignty, fighting for a postal monopoly, developing and managing part of the national economy, building an information infrastructure, policing the public sphere, and linking to the transnation, all using the language of the State, the Post Office was reifying the idea of the State through its practices.

The distinction drawn by postal administrators between the state and government was common in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. “Government,” wrote Randolph

⁵ There was a brief moment at the end of the nineteenth century when Chinese intellectuals considered alternatives to the nation-state, but their intellectual orientations gradually returned to this model. Rebecca Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

Bourne, “is the idea of the State put into practical operation in the hands of definite, concrete, fallible men.”⁶ The elimination or collapse of a given government, as such, did not threaten the existence of the state. It is this idea manifested in the Post Office’s own practices that allowed it to so easily shift political masters. As long as each political regime recognized and spoke the language of the state, the Post Office could serve any government and benefit them by continuing to act out the State. Whether real or simply heuristic, the distinction between the state and government also forces us to question how we evaluate states.

*The Language of Stateness*⁷

Scholars have repeatedly compared the Chinese state against a Weberian model that rarely, if ever, existed anywhere in the world. The question of whether the late Qing, warlord, or Nationalist states were weak or strong is simply asking an ahistorical question.⁸ If “definite, concrete, fallible” individuals pursue their own political ends in creating and running their government, the question is not whether that State is strong or weak or has a high or low level of stateness. Instead, we need to examine the historically contingent structure, functions, and policies of the Chinese state as government bureaucrats and others sought to solve the questions they asked themselves and were asked of them. We might say the National Government was strong in defending itself against warlords, but weak in solving fundamental rural economic problems. As our perspective changes so does the appearance of the Chinese state. For the moment, it is significant enough to say that the idea of the State, of political coherence, territorial

⁶ Randolph Bourne, “The State,” in *The Radical Will: Selected Writings, 1911-1918* (New York: Urizen Books, 1977), 358.

⁷ The phrase “languages of stateness” comes from: Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, “Introduction: States of Imagination,” in *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State*, edited by Hansen and Stepputat, 1-38 (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001), 5.

⁸ Peter Baldwin, “Beyond Weak and Strong: Rethinking the State in Comparative Policy History,” *Journal of Policy History* 17: 1 (2005): 12-33.

unity, and sovereignty, represented the aspirations of the Chinese nation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when it appeared that idea might disappear.

How those aspirations were manifested through the Post Office was the broad subject of this dissertation. Although postal actors might subscribe to an image of the State with absolute control over territory, sovereign in its rights, and authoritative in its rule making, the reality was always undermined by historical contingency. There were countless disjunctures within the state bureaucracy contributing to incoherent policies with inconsistent application (e.g. suppression of Minxinju), one branch of the government pitted against another (e.g. Post Office v. Ministry of Posts and Communications), and plans and goals rarely produced the desired results (e.g. subsidies of airlines). Those disjunctures are only disruptive if we are basing our assessments of the Chinese state upon assumptions, ahistorical theoretical constructs, or anachronistic comparisons. Rather than pursue this unpromising path, I have examined the agency of a specific government institution, the Post Office, as it subtly yet persuasively continued to reiterate the idea of the state and replicate it in its practices. As an express history of bureaucrats, their institution, their practices, and their language, it has shown how their routinized functions gave material substance to the state.

The historical trajectory of state formation in China contained within itself myriad contingencies that shaped the actual modern Chinese state. One of the contingencies that profoundly shaped the Post Office, discussed in Chapter 1, was the role of foreigners in the Post Office. Like cosmopolitan foreign administrators across the globe, the foreign employees of the Chinese Post Office shared with other Chinese the belief that the creation of a modern centralizing state represented the aspirations of the Chinese nation and central government. The overall role of foreigners in the Chinese Post Office unquestionably contributed to its ability to

survive the political tumult of the early twentieth century, but I purposefully downplayed their significance because they shared the same fundamental vision of the state as many Chinese. Foreigners and Chinese alike in the late Qing worked hard to extend the Post Office out to the borders as a “national institution.”⁹ After the 1911 Revolution, the existing postal network continued to function nationally despite the quickening decline of central government authority and the shift of sovereignty from a monarch to the people. Over the next several decades, the Post Office – by its mere presence and constant activity – replicated and reiterated the sovereignty of the impersonal state across the territory imagined as “China.” The ability of this “national” institution to operate within numerous “quasi-states” controlled by warlords, communists, collaborators, and occupiers, reveals the shared assumption that whatever the government might be, the “natural” form of the Chinese state was the territory approximating the borders of the former Qing empire.¹⁰ The Post Office, more than any other central government institution, protected this idea by its presence throughout the country.

A secondary theme in the first chapter was the disunity of the state represented by the relatively high degree of administrative independence of the Post Office between 1897 and 1928 and even beyond. The Post Office viewed this independence as absolutely essential to its survival, and the survival of the state, when confronting various attempts to either interfere with its operations or divide it territorially. Postal administrators pursued a series of successful strategies to insulate, protect, and strengthen the institution from external disruption and territorial division. There were even times when a bureaucrat such as Director General Liu Shufan played the politician, but active and sustained resistance by the postal staff to the

⁹ The Post Office frequently referred to itself as a “national institution.” e.g. *RWCPO, 1904*, lii, *RWCPO, 1911*, 12.

¹⁰ Matthew Mosca argues that Han literati began to reinterpret their notion of geographic “China” as incorporating those territories conquered by the Manchu Qing at the turn of the nineteenth century. “The Literati Rewriting of China in the Qianlong-Jiaqing Transition,” *Late Imperial China* (December 2011): 89-132.

“pollution” of the Post Office – either through politically-required subsidies to airlines or the creation of a second Directorate – crushed these threats to the “repute” of the institution and state.

The relatively high degree of administrative independence by the Post Office was not only a function of its own strategies and practices, but also a result of a deliberate policy on the part of the Qing government. Chapter Two explored these issues by focusing on the effects of the Qing government’s decision not to grant the Imperial Post Office a state monopoly. The political environment in the late 1890s when conservatives and reformers were struggling for control of the central government, meant reformers succeeded in establishing the Post Office, but conservatives protected the “time-honored” postal relay and post station systems and the Wenbaoju, a pet project shared by several provincial viceroys. Private Minxinju letter firms also continued to operate because Qing bureaucrats feared unemployed couriers might riot. Lastly, the Qing Empire’s status as a semi-colony meant that various foreign governments and local Municipal Councils continued to operate independent postal services across the country. In order to achieve its self-defined goal of attaining a postal monopoly, Chinese and foreign administrators of the Post Office employed various methods to gain sovereignty over postal affairs. The various methods used were all “stately” – authority and the promise of massive carriage contracts to the steamship companies undermined the profitability of the Local Post Offices, intra-government negotiations and the administrative efficiency of the Post Office finally led to the displacement of the Wenbaoju and postal relay system, international negotiations at the Washington Conference in 1922 removed the Foreign Post Offices, and the Directorate finally convinced the National Government that a postal monopoly for the state was more valuable than the possible disruption caused by protesting Minxinju shops. By the mid-

1930s, the Post Office had attained full sovereignty as the supreme authority to govern postal affairs, which was recognized both domestically and internationally.

Late Qing bureaucrats thoroughly understood the significance of creating a modern, centralizing state institution like the Post Office. As discussed in Chapter 3, the political debate over whether to begin the process of transforming the presiding state into an interventionist one was resolved when the Guangxu Emperor authorized the creation of the Post Office during the Court reforms of 1895-98. Its establishment proclaimed the emergence of a more aggressive central state driving its own reforms and pursuing strategies of social transformation. To play such a role, the Post Office spread the “postal fabric” across the country to knit together the scattered communities of the empire. To educate the subjects-citizens, and bring outside cultural influences to rural areas, the Post Office intentionally subsidized newspapers, magazines, and books showing the great lengths to which the state would go to create and educate its citizens. Another decisive step in the invention of the modern state in China came when the Post Office began managing the social and economic well-being of the people. The Directorate promoted various “public services” such as money orders, parcel post, postal savings, and simple life insurance to transform society and the economy by acting as an “extra market” force mitigating some of the negative effects of capitalist development.

The state was absolutely crucial to the organization and the experience of coherence and order in modern Chinese society. The movement and circulation of information, people, and goods at incredible speeds, in great volumes, and at regular intervals all contributed to reshaping the country and laying the foundation for the modern Chinese nation-state. Chapter Four examined the Post Office’s role in this process through its creation of an “information infrastructure.” This infrastructure revolutionize the sense of space, time, and speed in Chinese

society, but was found in the mundane contracts signed with modern transportation companies, the types of mail such companies transmitted, and the physical arrangements (space v. weight) made that shaped the flow of information and goods. By co-opting modern transportation companies as stately actors – allowing them to fly the postal flag or transport official mail bags - and linking their networks with its own courier system, the Post Office tied together the main communications routes of the entire country as a state system.

One of the most common practices of all states is censorship as an expression of the legitimate use of force/violence. Although citizens may object to specific forms of censorship, most agree there should be some type of legal limit on expression. In the early twentieth century, those limits were defined almost exclusively by the state, but unless the state could control the flow of such expression it had little opportunity to suppress it. Since modern forms of print communications such as books, magazines, and newspapers rely on the government for distribution, the state was able to police the content of such print through the institutional controls on the circulation of information provided by the Post Office. To entice publishers to submit to such institutional controls, the Post Office provided subsidized postage rates to those who would register their publications. As an institutional form, postal censorship also pushed the government towards less violent and more ideological forms of suppression. Although postal administrators might balk at censorship for infringing on the inviolability of the mails or, of greater concern, slowing the sorting process, the Post Office also understood its role as a state institution serving its political masters in Beijing or Nanjing.

State institutions individually often try to make themselves real and tangible through symbols, texts, iconography and more permanent signs such as buildings, monuments, and uniforms. Chapter Six explored the Post Office's myriad expressions of the language of

stateness through its various forms of advertising and publicity campaigns. The Post Office was the first government institution to actively advertise itself to the public. In its *Working Reports*, the Post Office shaped its narratives around the unitary state, it categorized the rest of society as customers of the state, and materialized the state in its physical post offices, use of green as an institutional color, and through the unified mass of well-behaved postal workers. Through these various signs, postal administrators culturally constructed a visual and discursive identity for the Post Office – and thus the state – as a modern, competitive, innovative, efficient, service-oriented, and trustworthy institution. Stamps, though not expressly discussed as a form of advertising, were the most ubiquitous symbol of the state throughout the entire country. By the late 1940s, citizens of the Republic were attaching more than a billion stamps per year – all picturing state iconography – to their mail matter.

Although most modern states employ numerous discourses and physical offices to map and delineate the territory of the state in space and time, in reality most modern states also recognize the porousness and permeability of their national boundaries even as they seek to restrict movement through passports and other control mechanisms.¹¹ In the late nineteenth century, the Qiaopiju overseas remittance firms posed particular challenges to the Chinese state by employing a set of colonial modern forms of business practices to operate in the interstitial gaps between empires, nation-states, and colonies in maritime Southeast Asia and coastal China. These colonial modern business practices emerged in response to early efforts by state and international regulatory regimes seeking to force the flow of overseas remittances into the official international system governed by the Universal Postal Union. The re-bounding of the overseas Chinese remitters to the Chinese state came through the routinization of the clubbed

¹¹ The Chinese Post Office was the first state institution to offer photographic identification cards in 1922. Circular No. 525, Co-Director General Destelan, 10 November 1922 in SHAC137.2023-5.

package system in the Post Office. In response to Post Office efforts to close them down or raise their postage rates, the Qiaopiju organized institutions such as trade associations that could and would be recognized by the state as legitimate social organizations for lobbying purposes. When that lobbying succeeded, it forced the Chinese Post Office to transnationalize itself to compete with these private firms. Although the state transnationalized itself through a series of agency agreements carefully worded to slip past the administrative purview of international regulatory regimes, it ultimately “failed” because as a state its commitments to the international system – standard currency exchange rates, banking regulations, conventions of the Postal Union – kept the state from operating on the black market like the Qiaopiju. In the end, there developed a symbiosis between the Qiaopiju and the Chinese state whereby both benefited as allies and competitors in their efforts to circumvent international law to send/bring remittances “home.”

The State Incarnate

When Mao Zedong stood on the top of the Tiananmen Gate on 1 October 1949 to declare the founding of the People’s Republic of China, he was declaring the establishment of a new government, but not a new state. Mao and Jiang Jieshi might fundamental differ in their conceptualization of the Chinese government, but both shared a belief in the modern, centralizing, impersonal state as the embodiment of sovereignty. That belief had been created in the late Qing and early Republic by institutions such as the Post Office and reified, acted out, and spread through them. Despite the collapse of the imperial order, the ineffectiveness of various Chinese governments, numerous civil wars and warlord conflicts, quasi-states on the periphery and in the core, international imperialism and the Unequal Treaty System, aggressive Japanese colonialism, a World War, and the retreat by the Nationalists to Taiwan, the Post Office always

effectively carried out its duty to the State. By always maintaining the idea of “a single seat of authority” through its every word and deed, the Post Office made the State appear the proper home of the new nation.

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APPENDIX

*Table A.1:
Total Payments to Contracted Mail Carriers¹*

1912	410,708.37
1913	599,228.36
1914	637,054.25
1915	657,731.17
1916	612,895.30
1917	740,318.74
1918	661,128.07
1919	908,187.19
1920	951,794.65
1921	1,377,680.12
1922	1,525,916.91
1923	2,207,379.16
1924	3,306,704.62
1925	4,037,148.92
1926	3,846,519.62
1927	3,551,406.31
1928	5,047,046.32
1929	4,670,730.41
1930	8,425,935.66
1931	9,676,826.03
1932	6,741,795.73
1933	6,120,790.03
1934	5,879,624.38

¹ Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, III: 165-66.

*Table A.2:
Contract Payments to Steamers and Launches²*

Year	Payments	Percentage
1912	86,111.03	37.67
1913	125,721.09	36.37
1914	114,743.01	31.80
1915	131,848.17	34.21
1916	129,172.47	34.52
1917	136,229.16	27.47
1918	128,172.08	24.62
1919	217,605.17	29.52
1920	258,845.61	32.51
1921	294,345.87	26.04
1922	343,544.92	27.13
1923	485,389.63	26.77
1924	563,148.63	19.72
1925	629,801.65	20.37
1926	862,811.49	30.28
1927	680,931.77	25.13
1928	948,915.89	30.14
1929	962,989.13	25.04
1930	1,064,216.58	22.27
1931	1,085,408.00	21.64
1932	1,074,834.28	23.86
1933	1,066,036.62	21.63
1934	726,296.72	16.02

² Ibid., 168-69.

Table A.3: Distance of Steamer, Launches, and Native Craft Mail Routes (in miles)³

1905	4,660
1906	5,281
1907	5,747
1908	13,980
1909	14,912
1910	15,534
1911	13,980
1912	17,398
1913	18,019
1914	18,330
1915	19,573
1916	20,101
1917	21,313
1918	21,685
1919	22,369
1920	22,990
1921	24,637
1922	25,755
1923	25,942
1924	26,591
1925	28,539
1926	28,096
1927	28,535
1928	29,297
1929	29,595
1930	30,899
1931	31,114
1932	31,876
1933	32,808
1934	33,291
1935	38,590
1936	39,623
1937	31,762
1938	38,740
1939	32,032
1940	35,945
1941	34,714
1942	33,875
1943	31,816

³ Ibid., II: 23.

*Table A.4:
Railroad Mileage Utilized by the Post Office⁴*

1905	2,594
1906	3,481
1907	--
1908	3,884
1909	4,039
1910	4,660
1911	5,282
1912	5,592
1913	5,903
1914	5,903
1915	5,903
1916	5,903
1917	6,058
1918	6,214
1919	6,214
1920	6,338
1921	6,587
1922	6,680
1923	6,959
1924	7,122
1925	7,271
1926	7,393
1927	7,658
1928	7,863
1929	8,048
1930	8,254
1931	8,295
1932	8,424
1933	8,526
1934	8,836
1935	6,991
1936	7,203
1937	6,991
1938	5,722
1939	5,290
1940	5,427
1941	6,178
1942	6,310
1943	6,678
1944	945
1945	5,407

⁴ Jiaotongbu youzheng zongju, *Zhongguo youzheng tongji huiji*, 86-87.

Table 4: Continued

1946	8,940
1947	6,408
1948	6,173

Table A.5: Contract Payments to Railroads⁵

Year	Payments	Percentage
1912	26,929.95	11.78
1913	36,687.89	10.61
1914	34,332.40	9.51
1915	30,393.21	7.89
1916	27,870.73	7.45
1917	32,159.95	6.49
1918	30,808.58	5.92
1919	53,427.68	7.25
1920	45,009.28	5.65
1921	160,930.92	14.24
1922	140,235.63	11.07
1923	259,022.30	14.29
1924	763,185.70	26.73
1925	688,734.67	22.28
1926	556,790.87	19.54
1927	801,463.06	29.58
1928	790,283.11	25.11
1929	949,213.70	24.68
1930	1,404,560.43	29.40
1931	1,159,524.03	23.12
1932	749,963.80	16.65
1933	670,632.26	13.61
1934	674,207.60	14.87

⁵ Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, III: 170.

Table A.6:
Post Roads Travelled by Buses (in miles)⁶

1922	c. 1,250
1923	c. 1,350
1924	c. 1,100
1925	c. 1,250
1926	c. 1,350
1927	c. 1,500
1928	1,587
1929	3,367
1930	11,543
1931	13,382
1932	17,173
1933	16,087
1934	22,785
1935	27,001
1936	33,845
1937	33,711
1938	34,290
1939	24,233
1940	20,825
1941	19,652
1942	17,423
1943	18,777
1944	14,658
1945	18,703
1946	27,337
1947	39,305
1948	36,601

⁶ Jiaotongbu, *Zhongguo youzheng tongji huiji*, 86-87. The statistics for the years 1922-1927 are my estimates based up the routes mentioned in the *RWCPO* series.

Table A.7: Distance of Airmail Lines (in miles)⁷

1930	2,266
1931	2,709
1932	4,746
1933	6,755
1934	8,250
1935	9,140
1936	11,184
1937	4,722
1938	5,002
1939	6,835
1940	5,965
1941	5,033
1942	6,027
1943	5,343
1944	5,393
1945	16,150
1946	18,766
1947	21,352
1948	21,227

Table A.8: Contract Payments to Airlines⁸

Year	Payments	Percentage
1930	266,989.73	5.59
1931	419,685.99	8.37
1932	661,391.93	14.68
1933	828,580.70	16.81
1934	1,092,190.29	24.09

⁷ Jiaotongbu, *Zhongguo youzheng tongji huiji*, 86-87.

⁸ Zhang, *Zhongguo youzheng*, III: 171-72.