



Routledge Studies in the Modern History of Asia

NEWSPAPERS AND THE JOURNALISTIC PUBLIC IN REPUBLICAN CHINA

1917 AS A SIGNIFICANT YEAR OF JOURNALISM

Qiliang He



Newspapers and the Journalistic Public in Republican China

Offering an entirely new approach to understanding China's journalism history, this book covers the Chinese periodical press in the first half of the twentieth century.

By focusing on five cases, either occurring in or in relation to the year 1917, this book emphasizes the protean nature of the newspaper and seeks to challenge a press historiography which suggests modern Chinese newspapers were produced and consumed with clear agendas of popularizing enlightenment, modernist, and revolutionary concepts. Instead, this book contends that such a historiography, which is premised on the classification of newspapers along the lines of their functions, overlooks the opaqueness of the Chinese press in the early twentieth century.

Analyzing modern Chinese history through the lens of the newspaper, this book presents an interdisciplinary and international approach to studying mass communications. As such, this book will be useful to students and scholars of Chinese history, journalism, and Asian Studies more generally.

Qiliang He is Associate Professor of History at Illinois State University. He has published several books, including *Feminism, Women's Agency, and Communication—The Case of Huang-Lu Elopement* (2018) and *Gilded Voices: Economics, Politics, and Storytelling in the Yangzi Delta since 1949* (2012).

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**This book is dedicated to my father, He Yulin (1938–2012),
who let me know what censorship was and how to live with it**

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Preface

The present book project started with a casual chat between Yong Volz (then Zhang Yong) and me on her dissertational topic over a dozen years ago. During the conversation, she told me that John Benjamin Powell, a Missourian journalist, arrived in China in 1917. At that moment, I was also working on my doctoral thesis on sensationalism in 1920s Shanghai. One of the protagonists in my dissertation, Lianying, stood out as a superstar in a courtesan contest in 1917. So, Yong's information amazed me and prompted me to take another look at this specific year. Initially, I was thinking about creating a panel about journalism history and the year of 1917 with Yong and someone else. But that didn't happen. Beginning in 2015, I made up my mind to work out a manuscript independently.

My interest in journalism and its history could be dated back to my childhood. My father, He Yulin, worked as an editor on two journals affiliated with Shanghai University. Over the years, he complained about the communist leaders' stifling control over the journals and their intervention in his editorship. Meanwhile, he was also a very prolific writer for numerous periodicals in China. Before I graduated from Shanghai Jiaotong University, he intended to make an arrangement so that I could work for a newspaper, but in vain. I had long been interested in journalism because of my father's career. Occasionally, he hired me as a part-time proofreader of his journals. During my middle-school and high-school years, moreover, I had ample opportunities to read all kinds of newspapers and magazines free of charge. Facing so many choices, I became picky when reading. I learned to skip uninteresting (at least for me) essays and directly focus on content that fascinated me, such as sports news. I also observed my grandmas and my mom wrap up fruit and other stuff with newspapers in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus, I came to realize that a reader might not read everything printed in the periodicals, and a consumer could use the newspapers for other reasons.

That is precisely the central theme of this book. I call attention to the multiple uses of the newspaper in twentieth-century China, despite enlightenment, partisan, and radical intellectuals' efforts to make it an instrument of propaganda. In this book, I've attempted to underscore the newspaper's capacity to accommodate the needs of the maximal readership, rather than serving particular

interest groups. In so doing, I cite five cases—all in relation to the year of 1917—to show that the newspaper inherently defies easy categorization. Timothy Weston clearly agrees with me on that and has lent me a lot of support. I really appreciate his help, without which the publication of this book is impossible. Of course, I came to know Weston because of Li Shangyang of East China Normal University. Therefore, I would also thank Li here.

The final two chapters of the book are somehow derived from the first portion of my doctoral dissertation at the University of Minnesota. Therefore, I thank all the members of my doctoral dissertation committee: Ann Walter, Liping Wang, Ted Farmer, Christ Isett, Lary May, and Maki Isaka (then known as Maki Morinaga). Other professors in Minnesota have also helped me work out my dissertation. Tom Wolfe discussed journalism in both Russia and China with me quite extensively. Professor Chin-chuan Lee has never taught me in the classroom, but has had an enormous impact on my scholarship on journalism history. His writings in both English and Chinese are highly impressive and inspiring. I come up with many of my points in this book on the basis of his. In summer 2015, I had the good fortune to meet with Professor Lee in Hong Kong, although he could hardly recognize me in the beginning. Many of his Ph.D. students—Dong Dong, Su Weiqun (Wendy Su), and, of course, Yong Volz—have been my friends. Qin Fang, my ex-colleague in Minnesota and now the professor at Capital Normal University, helped me find copies of the *Central Daily News* (*Zhongyang ribao*). I appreciate her unreserved support.

I have also benefited from help and encouragement from others. Bryna Goodman has worked on newspapers and the history of Shanghai for decades. I keep learning from her by reading her works and through discussions with her face-to-face. Archivists, whose names I have forgotten (Sorry about that!), at the State Historical Society of Missouri and the University Archive, University of Missouri-Columbia, were extraordinarily knowledgeable and patient when I was searching archival materials in Missouri in March 2015. Xuan Mingmin, then a graduate student in journalism and communications at Mizzou, also greeted me with warmth then. Elizabeth Oyler, then Associate Professor in Japanese literature at the University of Illinois, and Hong Yu of Shanghai Normal University invited me to give talks at their universities in 2016. Hong Yu has also been generous in sharing his research and database with me. Professor Sudipa Topdar, my colleague at Illinois State University (ISU), organized a talk for me that year. During my presentation at ISU, Professor Katrin Paehler, also my colleague, reminded me of the existence of the network of communication in the context of early modern Germany. I also thank Tony Crubaugh, ex-chair of the history department, because he pushed me so hard over the years and tried his best to allocate resources for me to finish up my research and writing. It is fair to argue that, although I have already developed the idea of “1917” back to my days in Minnesota, this book project is a product entirely made in Illinois. For that reason, I need to thank Professor Lou Perez for having hired me and brought me to Illinois in 2014.

Of course, I’m thankful that various institutions have offered me assistance at different moments. Aside from the two archives in Missouri, I have been helped

by the staff of the Shanghai Municipal Archives and the Second Historical Archives of China in Nanjing. Many thanks go to institutions such as the Shanghai Library, the Harvard-Yenching Library, the Hoover Institution Library and Archives, the C. V. Starr East Asian Library of the University of California, Berkeley, the East Asian Library of the University of Minnesota, the library at the University of South Carolina Upstate, and the Milner Library of ISU. The history department of ISU provided me with startup funds for research. ISU's College of Arts and Sciences funded my researches between 2014 and 2016 for this project. Back to my days in Minnesota, I felt honored to receive the Albert and Virginia Wimmer Fellowship, the Walter Judd Fellowship, and the grant of the Graduate Research Partnership Program to conduct my research and write up my dissertation. I'd like to thank all those institutions. Of course, I continue to thank Douban.com, as I did last time, for affording me an online platform of rearranging bibliography and exchanging up-to-date academic information with other users. This website has simply changed my way of doing research. I particularly thank *East Asian History* for having published my article in 2016. The first chapter of the present book is based on that article.

Finally, I thank my family for everything I have accomplished so far. My mom supports and understands me throughout my life. My wife, Chen Wenyu, takes good care of our home and relieves me of a lot of daily chores. My career would have been very different without their wholehearted support. Mimi and Sugar are the cutest kitties in the world and always bring me great comfort every single day.

Introduction

This book is about the Chinese newspaper in the first half of the twentieth century. My main argument is that the newspaper is a polygeneric (featuring a whole range of subgenres), polyphonic (accommodating different and even conflicting voices or views), and multifunctional (used for various purposes) entity. It is inimical to arbitrary classifications and resists any effort to turn it into a univocal medium. In late-Qing (1644–1911) and Republican China (1911–49), the newspaper's elusiveness was compounded by dispositions of its producers and consumers, China's literary traditions, and the influx of imported journalistic discourses and practices. The protean nature of the modern Chinese newspaper posed a serious problem for both newspapermen and state censors. Although English-language works on journalism history in modern China proliferate in the past two decades, most of these studies adopt an approach of focusing on individual newspapers or journalists. Thereby, they implicitly suggest that a newspaper be produced for specific purposes, ranging from preaching reformism, whipping up nationalistic sentiments, fomenting revolution, ushering in modern ways of life, promoting new womanhood, articulating a self-identification in a new urban milieu, to amusing its subscribers. The readers of such newspapers consumed this information for the same reasons. Therefore, the newspaper is viewed as nothing but a carrier of messages delivered by producers of the press.

Barbara Mittler's monograph about *Shen bao*, for example, highlights a host of topics featured in this time-honored Shanghai-based newspaper, including revolution, new womanhood, nationalism, and the identity of *Shanghairen* (Shanghai people), for her investigation into the power of the press.¹ The present study differs from most of the existing works by placing the newspaper at the center of research. For the purposes of this book, what mattered was not necessarily what was printed in the newspaper, but its format, style, and means of distribution and circulation. My viewpoint is akin to Marshall McLuhan's now-famous assertion that, "the medium is the message." McLuhan notes that the content of the media is "ineffectual in shaping the form of human association" because the uses of the media are remarkably "diverse."²

The emphasis on highly diverse uses, by both journalists and readers, of the press in this book allows me to unravel a widely accepted historical narrative of the Chinese press that a new breed of intelligentsia capitalized on this novel

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medium to advance their societal and political agendas in modern China. Chin-chuan Lee, for example, posits that “enlightenment” (*qimeng*), “revolution” (*gemin*), and “quest for the modernization of the nation” (*zhuiqiu guojia xiandaihua*) constituted the three central themes in the Chinese press in the past century.³ By contrast, this book emphasizes the newspaper’s nature as an elusive and multi-vocal institution. Richard Terdiman has likened the newspaper’s way of displaying and consuming the printed information to the “shopping mode” in a department store—a customer is not obliged to make a purchase when entering a store.⁴

The structure of organization of the newspaper leads to inattentive or casual reading (like window-shopping)—a reader does not have to read and accept everything printed in the paper. Inattentive reading prevailed among newspaper consumers after the early 1900s in China when newspapers switched from book format to broadsheet or tabloid printing. Such an alteration led to the messiness of the newspaper’s layout—political comments, national/international news, sensational stories, gossip/rumors, commercial information, novels, and advertisements/notices coexisted in the same paper, and were sometimes juxtaposed on the same page. Marshall McLuhan would call such juxtapositions of information on one sheet “mosaic,” confirming the modern newspaper’s capacity to host “communal” rather than “private” voices.⁵ Hence, the credible weight of editorials or critical comments—namely intellectuals’ “private voices”—that they aimed to spotlight decreased, if not vanished. Plentiful evidence has shown that a reader could read only some portions of a newspaper, such as serialized fiction or crime news during the Republican times, but skipped political news and commentaries altogether.

The newspaper’s principle of organization effectively challenges the above-mentioned assumption about Chinese intellectuals’ dominant role in the press. In doing so, I address a disjuncture between the real-life experience and the historical narrative. Paul Cohen notes that the actual experience is “messy, complicated, opaque, while history ... brings order and clarity into chaos.”⁶ As the newspaper marks the complicated and chaotic pattern of social existence,⁷ a historical narrative tends to do injustice to the experience of an actual newspaper consumer. As Raymond Williams observes, the history of the British press has left an impression that the *Times* was the most widely read and thereby “the characteristic paper” in Britain in the mid-nineteenth century, but, in actuality, it was far from the most circulated daily newspaper of the day.⁸ In a similar vein, recent studies on the Chinese press have, as I shall survey in this chapter, focused on some big-name periodicals. Not only a far more complex world of the press, but the highly diverse constituencies of those newspapers or journals are thereby grossly simplified to fit into a particular press historiography.

In this historiography, newspapers were made to disseminate prescribed messages and were consumed for designated purposes. Accordingly, newspapers were classified based on their “functions.” For example, Ying Pin Wang (Wang Yingbin, 1897–1971) categorized Chinese newspapers as the “Party Organ,” the “Short-lived Patriotic Daily,” and the “Commercial Daily” at the turn of the

twentieth century.⁹ Meanwhile, the significance or meaningfulness of a newspaper is related to its size. Broadsheet or large-sized papers were called *dabao*, while the tabloid or small-sized papers were referred to as *xiaobao*. The two different sizes are, in the journalistic discourse, proportional to their quality. Juan Wang, for instance, notes that *xiaobao* means “‘little’ or ‘minor’ papers” and *dabao* means “‘big’ or ‘important’ papers.”¹⁰ Such classifications narrativize a teleological history of the Chinese newspaper, that is, intellectual-newspapermen’s self-conscious endeavor to “professionalize” the newspaper, and their involvement in a two-pronged war against a heavy hand of the state and excessive commercialization.

To battle this teleological historiography based on a neat classification of newspapers and an oversimplified reality of the Chinese press, this book uses five cases to destabilize various artificially drawn boundaries between partisan and commercial newspapers (see Chapters 1 and 3), the political press and the entertainment one (see Chapter 4), *dabao* and *xiaobao* (see Chapter 5), intellectual-journalists and entrepreneurs (see Chapter 1), liberal journalists and Party ideologues (see Chapter 3), and the newspaper and other means of communication (see Chapter 5). Meanwhile, I address some key issues related to journalism history in China during the early twentieth century, such as intellectuals’ self-appointed role as political critics and analysts (*wenren lunzheng* or literati-cum-political commentators), liberalism, the graft of Missouri-style journalism education into China, and the journalistic public sphere, in my discussion of those five cases, all of which either took place in, or could be traced back to, the specific year of 1917.

1917

The year I zero in on, 1917, was of no obvious significance in modern Chinese history. The eventful decade of the 1910s witnessed the revolution in 1911, the fall of the Qing dynasty and the birth of the Republic of China shortly afterwards, Yuan Shikai’s (1859–1916) ascendance to presidency in 1912 and brief stint as the emperor from 1915 to 1916, the rise of warlordism, and, finally, the tumultuous May Fourth Movement in 1919. One of the few noteworthy incidents that occurred in 1917 was General Zhang Xun’s (1854–1923) failed attempt to restore the defunct Qing dynasty. However, historians tend to dismiss it as a mere interlude in early Republican politics or even “a comic opera,”¹¹ rather than an event of profound impact. Meanwhile, for anyone who lived through 1917 and paid attention to national politics, this year could be remembered as particularly unpleasant or even disturbing. Newspaper readers were under the impression that Chinese politics was downward-spiraling due to a series of traumatic events, including the fierce rivalry between Prime Minister Duan Qirui (1865–1936) and two presidents, Li Yuanhong (1864–1928) and Feng Guozhang (1859–1919), the dissolution of parliament, the creation and collapse of several cabinets, the confrontation between northern and southern warlords, and the fading hope of national unity, besides the aforementioned General Zhang’s

4 Introduction

unsuccessful Restoration. Hence, the year of 1917 is portrayed in historical narratives of both the Nationalist Party (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a typical year in warlordist China (1916–27), characterized by political factionalism, societal decadence, and cultural conservatism.

The year of 1917 was not particularly exciting for historians of Chinese journalism, either. No high-profile Chinese-language newspapers or journals were established in that year. On the contrary, its summer saw the demise of fourteen newspapers because of Zhang Xun's Restoration.¹² Neither institutions of journalism education, nor influential, nationwide organizations for journalists were founded in 1917. In this seemingly off year, however, things were brewing and would have major impacts on the development of the Chinese newspaper in the decades to follow. On January 3, 1917, Hu Zhengzhi (1889–1949)—a seasoned newspaperman who was then linked to the Duan Qirui-led Anhui Clique (*Wanxi*)—publicly vowed to carry out a reform of both the format and content of *Dagong bao* (*L'Impartial*, established in 1902),¹³ a Tianjin-based daily of which he began to take control in 1916. In the same month, John Benjamin Powell (1888–1947), a graduate from the University of Missouri, sailed from San Francisco to Shanghai. In June 1917, Powell assisted Thomas Franklin Fairfax Millard (1868–1942), another journalist from Missouri, in starting a new journal, *Millard's Review of the Far East* (renamed as *The Weekly Review of the Far East* in 1921 and *The China Weekly Review* in 1923). In November and December 1917, the New World (*Xin shijie*), an amusement center located in the heart of the Shanghai International Settlement, and its affiliated newspaper, *The New World* (*Xin shijie*), hosted a competition for upper-echelon courtesans. Under the rubric of the “All-flower Election of the New World” (*Xin shijie qunfang xuanju dahui*), it captured public attention as the first courtesan contest in the Republican era.

All three events were of considerable relevance to the history of the Chinese press. Hu Zhengzhi's commitment to reforming *Dagong bao*, then the mouthpiece of the Anhui Clique, signaled a scholar-journalist's endeavor to transform this partisan paper into an independent enterprise, problematizing the line between the advocacy newspaper and the commercial one that journalism historians tend to draw. John B. Powell's arrival in Shanghai marked the massive influx of Missourian journalists in China and, more importantly, the introduction of Missouri-style journalism education into China. Three years later, Don Denham Patterson—Powell's former student in Missouri and his colleague in *Millard's Review of the Far East*—experimented with offering journalism classes at St. John's University, a Shanghai-based Episcopalian university. In 1922, St. John's became the first higher-education institution in China to run a journalism program as its president hired Maurice Eldred Votaw (1899–1981), another Mizzou alumnus, as a full-time professor in journalism. Finally, the 1917 courtesan election symbolized not only the revival of such contests ever since the closing decade of the Qing, but also the resurgence of *xiaobao*, a journalistic genre usually linked to entertainment and sensationalism in Shanghai.

An overview of scholarship on journalism in China

English-language works on the history of the Chinese-language newspaper could fall into two categories. The first category features such works as Ying Pin Wang's *The Rise of the Native Press in China* (1924), Roswell S. Britton's (1897–1951) *The Chinese Periodical Press, 1800–1912* (1933), and Lin Yutang's (1895–1976) *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China* (1936). All those authors in the Republican times adopted a comprehensive history approach to give full accounts of Chinese journalism since the imperial times. They, along with their contemporaries writing in Chinese, collectively constructed a historical narrative of Chinese journalism that prevails even until today. For example, all those scholars tended to build up their narratives along the line of political history in modern China. Both Ying Pin Wang and Lin Yutang viewed the 1911 Revolution as a watershed of the development or regression of Chinese newspapers. Wang hailed the year of 1911 as the starting point of China's "modern native press,"¹⁴ whereas Lin contrasted the "Golden Age" of Chinese journalism in the late Qing to the backward press during the post-1911 years.¹⁵

Such a historical narrative resulted in the classification between the politics-oriented newspaper and the non-political press, as both authors privileged the former over the latter. Lin's assertion that the period from 1895 to 1911 was the "Golden Age" sprang from his observation that the press then functioned as "a medium for expressing public opinion." In a similar fashion, Roswell Britton contended that, "the entire new press during 1900–1911 was revolutionary. No paper or magazine could hold attention unless in more or less accord with the new temper of the time."¹⁶ Ying Pin Wang's account of the history of *Shen bao* revealed his deep-seated prejudice against non-politics-oriented newspapers by accusing this newspaper in its early stage of its failure in "gathering news of real value," but filling its pages with "insignificant gossipings." Only after the paper underwent a reform—that is, increasing the dosage of political commentary—did it become meaningful.¹⁷

Lin Yutang was the most radical writer to attack profit-making newspapers, particularly "the poorly edited" *Shen bao* and "the unedited" *Xinwen bao*, two Shanghai-based papers with the largest circulation numbers in the 1930s. By comparison, he lauded *Dagong bao*, a heavily political daily newspaper, as "the most progressive and best edited paper in Chinese in this country."¹⁸ Interestingly enough, American specialists in journalism heaped praise on *Shen bao* and *Xinwen bao*. Maurice Votaw, for example, considered them as "newspapers that had good reputations" in China so that they could "compare favorably with American papers."¹⁹ In the mid-1920s, Votaw established the sole criterion for a valuable Chinese newspaper: not "accepting gifts" from political factions or interest groups. Only *Xinwen bao* met the criterion.²⁰

The preference of the political over the non-political press could be dated back to Liang Qichao (1873–1929) and his comrades, who were eager to create an image of "new journalism" (or political journalism, in Joan Judge's words²¹) to disparage "his former colleagues in earlier decades."²² Liang's press historiography

had a tremendous impact on researchers of journalism not only during the Republican times, such as Ge Gongzhen (1890–1935) and Roswell Britton, but today. Fang Hanqi (b. 1926), for example, devotes five chapters to reformist, revolutionary, and partisan periodicals in the late-Qing era and early Republican times in his seven-chapter monograph on modern Chinese journalism history.²³ Chin-chuan Lee attempts to complicate the picture of the Chinese press in the twentieth century by putting forth three paradigms—commercial (*shangye*), professional (*zhuan ye*), and partisan (*dangpai*) newspapers. Here, professional newspapers were by no means the independent press, but were a platform for “literati-cum-political commentators.” In other words, they were news institutions run by scholar-journalists to offer political commentary.²⁴ Lee particularly stresses the press’s role in political mobilization. He, for example, proposes that the “liberal-Confucian model” of the press, whose journalists served as enlightened teachers in the first half of the twentieth century, be the dominant paradigm of the Chinese newspaper.²⁵

Fang Hanqi and Chin-chuan Lee, their different political orientations notwithstanding, share two things in common: their insistence on the dichotomy between the political and commercial newspaper and their disdain for *xiaobao*. *Xiaobao*, which occupies only four pages in Fang’s 776-page-long book, is dismissed as a deviation of the development of Chinese newspapers.²⁶ Likewise, Lee considers *xiaobao* as nothing but an “escapist” (*taobi shi*) medium that does not deserve much scholarly attention.²⁷ The hostility toward *xiaobao* had already been manifest when neither Ying Pin Wang, nor Lin Yutang, nor Roswell Britton spared any thoughts on *xiaobao* in constructing their narratives of journalism history. Such a purposeful omission unmasks another underlying but pervasive discursive practice in the press historiography: to polarize *xiaobao* and *dabao* and to devalue the former.

The historical narratives constructed by both English- and Chinese-language literatures in the first half of the twentieth century continue to inspire students of the Chinese press. For example, Joan Judge’s research into *Shi bao* (the *Eastern Times*)²⁸ and, to a lesser degree, Barbara Mittler’s work on *Shen bao*²⁹ are devoted to addressing a question regarding how newspapers induced sociopolitical changes. The past two decades witnessed the publishing of a large number of works on the history of the newspaper in China during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Mostly adopting a case-study approach, they focus on specific periodicals such as *Shen bao*,³⁰ the *Eastern Times*,³¹ *Minguo ribao* (the *Republican Daily*),³² *Dagong bao*,³³ *Youxi bao* (translated as “Entertainment” by Catharine Yeh, “Fun” by Juan Wang, “Journal of Leisure” by Christian Henriot, and “Recreation News” by Gail Hershatler),³⁴ *Jing bao* (the *Crystal*),³⁵ and *Chen bao* (the *Morning Post*),³⁶ or individual journalists such as Bao Tianxiao (1876–1973)³⁷ and Fan Changjiang (1909–70).³⁸ Through the lens of those periodicals or journalists, various scholars investigate a plethora of issues, ranging from a Chinese public sphere or “middle realm,”³⁹ electoral democracy,⁴⁰ nationalism,⁴¹ commercialism,⁴² intellectuals-led political participation,⁴³ cosmopolitanism,⁴⁴ state censorship,⁴⁵ wartime mobilization during Japan’s invasion (1937–45),⁴⁶ the rise of entertainment in the urban milieu,⁴⁷ and petty urbanites (*xiao shimin*).⁴⁸

With their incredible width and depth, those works have collectively contributed to branching into a wide range of specialties and spreading into new scholarly territories. Moreover, they are exempt from a bias that “mass media in Africa, Latin America and Asia have developed as derivatives of those in the West”⁴⁹ by recognizing the Chinese press’s nature as a transcultural product⁵⁰ and Japan’s role as a mediator between China and the West.⁵¹ As the majority of those studies regard the press as a medium—or in Joan Judge’s word, the “lens”⁵²—through which China’s political, societal, and cultural conditions became knowable, scholars have yet to grasp the complexity of such concepts of the “newspaper” or “news” in the context of modern China. As noted earlier, the structure of organization of a newspaper contributed to significantly diluting the effect of intellectual-newspapermen’s political discourses and distracting the readers. Donald Denham Patterson found that a typical *Xinwen bao* in the early 1920s featured four sheets with sixteen pages in total, in which eleven pages contained advertisements or public notices. The fact that this daily newspaper’s first two pages (Pages 1 and 2 of Sheet 1) were occupied by nothing but advertisements, and an editorial did not make its appearance until Page 4 was a sure indicator that the profit-making business carried more weight than any discussion of political issues. As Patterson observed, some Chinese dailies did attempt to highlight political commentaries by featuring editorials on every sheet, but they had to vie for readers’ attention with all kinds of information and amusements.⁵³

The elusiveness of the newspaper was exacerbated by peculiar understandings of such categories as the “newspaper” (*bao*) and “news” (*xinwen*) in modern China, as they took shape because of a negotiation among foreign journalistic norms, China’s literary traditions, and an indigenous mode of communication. Barbara Mittler, for example, has insightfully indicated that late-Qing *Shen bao*, as an alien medium, was widely accepted by Chinese readers because it gained legitimacy and power from the *jingbao* (*Capital Gazette*).⁵⁴ Hence, the character, *bao*, in both papers was perceived as mutually transferable and translatable. Admittedly, naming the alien news medium after a Chinese *bao* started as an expediency of Christian missionaries and a commercial gimmick to capture Chinese readers’ imagination, but ended up instilling in the reading public and researchers alike an assumption that the Euro–American newspaper and Chinese *bao* were direct counterparts, if not exact equivalents. In the next section, I follow Mittler’s line of thought, but take a step further to examine the ramifications of adopting *bao* to name this exogenous news medium.

“Bao,” “xinwen,” and rumor

From newspaper to bao

Bao was not one of the countless neologisms imported from Japan at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, the rise of Chinese-language newspapers in Hong Kong antedated Japan’s modernization. Some periodicals published in China,

such as the English-language *Chinese Serial* (*Xiaer guanzhen*, established in 1853) and the Chinese-language *Liuhe congkan* (*Shanghai Serial*, established in 1857), were widely circulated in Japan on the eve of the Meiji Restoration (1868).⁵⁵ It was not surprising that the Japanese translation for the newspaper, *shimbun*, failed to gain currency in China. Using *bao* by Christian missionaries to translate the newspaper took place at the latest in the mid-eighteenth century. Robert Morrison (1782–1834) had already identified *jingbao* as a type of newspaper in the 1820s. Walter Henry Medhurst (1796–1857) listed a few translations, including *xinwen pian* (news sheet), *dibao* (court gazette), and *jingbao*, for the entry of “Newspaper” in his *English and Chinese Dictionary* (1842–3). By the mid- to late 1860s, *bao*, *jingbao*, and *Xianggang zhongwai xinbao* (“Sino-Foreign News,” a Hong Kong-based Chinese-language daily newspaper) were included in the same category in Wilhelm Lobscheid’s (1822–93) *An English and Chinese Dictionary* (1866–9).⁵⁶

Bao in classical Chinese, as Lien-sheng Yang (1914–90) finds, can be translated as “reciprocate” and “retribution” in English.⁵⁷ “Reciprocate,” “retribution,” and many other compound words starting with *bao* connote “response” (*fanying*) or “repayment” (*huanbao*). Therefore, when *bao* is used to refer to “reporting,” it continues to carry the meaning of the action in *response* to what one sees and hears.⁵⁸ In Imperial China, therefore, *bao* was used for both officially distributed *dibao* or *jingbao* and unofficial publications such as *Kaiyuan zabao* (“Miscellaneous *bao* of the Kaiyuan reign”) of the Tang (618–907), both of which gathered and delivered information in response to edicts issued by the governments or other informal sources. As it carried the name of *bao*, *Kaiyuan zabao*—an unofficially printed pamphlet to report various information about occurrences between 724 and 735—has long been deemed one of the archetypes of the modern-day newspaper in China.⁵⁹ In reality, the name of the publication, *zabao*, was problematic. There was a greater likelihood that it was not given a name at all in its own time, but was retroactively referred to as *zabao*, considering its nature as a compilation of miscellaneous information or reports.⁶⁰ In short, *bao* in Imperial China was used to refer to a medium where a whole spectrum of information—official or unofficial, verified or unverified, recent or in the distant past—was released and found. Hence, the medium was not held accountable for the truthfulness of what was published.

News, xinwen, and “recording whatever is heard”

While *bao* approximates to reporting and made it comparable with the newspaper, *xinwen*, the assumed equivalent translation for “news,” diverges more widely from this English term. The compound word *xinwen*, which literally means “newly heard,” was used at the earliest during the Tang dynasty to refer to the “new and weird [things] seen and heard [by people]” (*xinqi de jianwen*). On some other occasions, the term could also mean newly written texts. Writings entitled as *xinwen* usually fell into the category of *xiaoshuo* (“small talk” or chit-chat) in bibliographic classification, implying the texts’ unofficial,

unverified, and unorthodox nature.⁶¹ During the Song dynasty (960–1279), *xinwen* garnered a new connotation: information about officials' promotion and demotion from unauthenticated, if not false, sources.⁶² With an assumption that *xinwen* was similar to rumor or gossip, it was no surprise that *Shen bao* in its inaugurating issue overtly solicited "amazing, stunning, and pleasing affairs to renew people's knowledge" (*kejing ke'e kexi zhishi zu yi xin ren tingwen*). What *Shen bao* differed from "chit-chat" during ancient times, according to the paper's editorialist, was its ability to make such anomalous information widely accessible.⁶³ Rania Huntington thus notes that "knowledge and individual accounts of the weird" could thereby be "transmitted and consumed in new ways."⁶⁴ As the editorialist managed to equate the publishable information with the semi-factual or even fictional genre of "chit-chat," news and *xinwen* were viewed as mutually translatable on day one of *Shen bao*.

The discursive practice to make *xinwen* a Chinese equivalent to "news" resulted in a peculiar mindset among Chinese newspapermen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries: the confluence of rumor and fact. To publish hearsays, newspapermen across China further implemented a journalistic practice of "recording whatever is heard" (*youwen bilu*), which put emphasis on a newspaper's entitlement to put into print anything meaningful or intriguing that its journalists had heard of, without the responsibility for verifying the authenticity of its sources. The journalism researcher Ning Shufan (b. 1920) finds that the practice was initiated by newspapers in both Shanghai and Guangzhou in the 1880s. To be more specific, the phrase, *youwen bilu*, appeared in a *Shen bao* news report on the Sino-French War (1884–5), in which the reporter stated that the newspaper was unable to discern the truth or falsity of the information because of the distance between the battlefield and Shanghai. Therefore, *Shen bao* just published the information to "conform to the practice of 'recording whatever is heard'" (*yifu youwen bilu zhi li*).⁶⁵ "Recording whatever is heard," however, was not without its critics during the late-Qing era. Young John Allen (1836–1907) accused it of fabricating facts.⁶⁶ During the mid- to late 1910s, some self-appointed journalism researchers joined the choir led by foreign missionary-journalists to lash out about this practice. Xu Baohuang (1894–1930), for example, pointed out that if "recording whatever is heard" could be acknowledged as a valid journalistic practice, there would have been no distinction between news and idle gossip.⁶⁷

Xu Baohuang, a University of Michigan graduate in the 1910s, clearly subscribed to "objective reporting," a newly minted journalistic code in the United States back then. However, to charge "recording whatever is heard" for its violation of the journalistic commonsense was anachronistic, for "objective reporting" did not become a norm in America until the late nineteenth century.⁶⁸ Despite the gradual introduction of American-styled journalism in the opening decade of Republican China, "recording whatever is heard" continued to gain ground. In a court session in Zhejiang in May 1912, the judge reportedly accepted a reporter's self-defensive statement that "recording whatever is heard" was a manifestation of "public opinion" (*yulun*) and was therefore trustworthy.⁶⁹

The assumption that rumor was equivalent to public opinion had a very long history. In the Imperial times, “folk proverbs” (*yaoyan*), an oral means of transmitting information with rhythmic verses or songs, were oftentimes cited as viewpoints of the majority of the people by self-righteous literati-officials in their memorials.⁷⁰ Bao Tianxiao, who worked for the *Eastern Times* in the 1900s and 1910s, similarly accepted this assumption by recognizing “recording whatever is heard to defy brutal forces” (*youwen bilu, buwei qiangbao*) as a valuable virtue of a newspaperman.⁷¹ In other words, failure to record what was heard was indicative of the newspaper’s lack of conscience and loss of independence. Ren Baitao (1890–1952), who authored a few books about journalism in China, considered that the integrity of preserving their independence, as trumpeted by journalists, originated from imperial censors’ (*yushi*) right to cite hearsays to impeach other officials and even attack the emperors in Imperial China. Therefore, “recording whatever is heard” was a purely homemade journalistic practice in China.⁷²

Ren Baitao, like his contemporary journalism researchers, blamed practitioners of “recording whatever is heard” for spreading rumors and instilling a false consciousness of the freedom of speech.⁷³ The scholarly discourse to equate “recording whatever is heard” with rumor-mongering was in complicity with the GMD’s state to lay a heavy hand on the press in the late 1920s and 1930s. It supplied excuses to GMD officers for enforcing news censorship.⁷⁴ Hu Zhengzhi observed that with the proliferation of laws and regulations against the press, newspapermen were silenced and began to switch their long-held practice of “recording whatever is heard” to “refusing to record what is heard” (*youwen bulu*).⁷⁵ Despite this, rumor remained an indispensable constituency of the Chinese press throughout Republican times.

In Chapter 5, I shall show that rumor played a vital role in furnishing leading daily newspapers in Shanghai with local news in the early 1920s when full-time, professional local news-gatherers and reporters were non-existent. Chapter 3 shows that the rumor about high-ranking GMD officials’ corruption was published by the Party’s organ newspaper, *Zhongyang ribao* (the *Central Daily News*), to serve the dual purposes of fueling factional struggles and commercializing this heavily partisan daily newspaper. The use of rumors in political fights proved to be highly effective. Maurice Votaw, for example, noted that the Communists succeeded in whipping up an anti-GMD sentiment by making up a story about Madame Kung’s (Song Ailing or Eling Soong, [1889–1973]) insider trading in the stock market.⁷⁶ Decades after his arrival in China, Votaw was continually amazed by the muddled distinction between rumor and news reporting. He was once told by a Chinese newspaperman in the 1940s, “There’s a rumor running around and so I put it in the paper. If it doesn’t happen, then it doesn’t make any difference. But if it does happen, then I had it first.”⁷⁷

Presumably, it was the intertwining between news and rumor that unsettled foreign-educated or influenced Chinese to frown upon the press in China. Votaw felt disappointed shortly after he began to offer journalism courses in Shanghai by the fact that parents of his students usually dissuaded them from taking up a

career in a Chinese-language newspaper.⁷⁸ While Votaw had every reason to feel disturbed by such a journalistic practice, one which blurred the line between rumor and truth, he did not realize that such key journalistic concepts as objectivity and factuality were mere cultural constructs.⁷⁹ In the context of the late-Qing and Republican China eras, rumor and news were not diametrically opposite to each other, but collectively constituted *xinwen*, one of the major constituencies of a newspaper, or *bao*.

The use of newspapers

While *xinwen* was an equivalent to news with a Chinese characteristic, many other components of the Chinese newspaper were, in a similar vein, uniquely Chinese. For example, editorials prior to the 1940s were signed by individual authors, rather than representing the voices of newspapers. A personal announcement in the press could gain recognition from political and judicial authorities. Maurice Votaw noted that putting a notice about divorce in the newspaper during Republican times was a conventionally acknowledged way to make it official.⁸⁰ An obituary printed in the press functioned not only to inform readers of the decease of a certain person, but also to show off the grandeur of the upcoming funeral procession.⁸¹ A most salient feature of the Chinese newspaper was, and still is, *fukan* or *fuzhang* (supplement), which is produced to variously provide readers with knowledge, information, and entertainment. Xiao Qian (1910–99), who had worked for *Dagong bao*'s supplement in the 1930s, asserted that there was no such thing as the supplement in newspapers outside China.⁸² As I shall give a fuller account of the evolution of the newspaper supplement below, suffice it to say here that the existence and popularity of the supplement was a manifestation of how the Chinese literary tradition had left an imprint on the modern news media. Thus far, I have enumerated various “uses” of the newspaper in the context of late-Qing and Republican China eras.

I am indebted to Perry Link to invoke the notion of “use.” Link probes into various “functions that literary works actually had” in his analysis of the production of novels in the early times of the People's Republic of China (1949–present). The thrust of Link's argument is that different readers consumed fiction for different purposes at both extremes of instrumentality and noninstrumentality, which was beyond the control of the authors and the Communist state.⁸³ In this book, I extend the concept of “use” to both production and consumption of the newspaper. As Barbara Mittler notes, variegated constituencies of the newspaper, even in the early stage of its history in China, made it “a polygeneric text” or a “polyphonic” site.⁸⁴ Richard Terdiman likens a newspaper to a department store, which offers varieties of commodities to choose from.⁸⁵ Hence, the behaviors of the customers of a store and those of readers of a newspaper are not governed by producers and promoters. On various occasions, Chinese journalists, as well as scholars, were intrigued, puzzled, and offended by readers' peculiar ways of consumption, which made the newspaper an even more elusive entity. Prior to the twentieth century when newspapers in China were printed in book format,

attentive reading was possible. Liu Dapeng (1857–1942), a scholar in late-Qing northern China for example, had a habit of reading newspapers in an atmosphere not designed for “selective reading.”⁸⁶ Ge Gongzhen also confirmed that some leisured readers tended to read newspapers “from the start to the end without missing a character.”⁸⁷

The transition from book to broadsheet format in the opening years of the twentieth century redefined both the newspaper and the mode of consuming it. Marshall McLuhan posits that the press is “a mosaic successor to the book-form,” and such a format “commands [newspaper readers’] deep participation.”⁸⁸ Here, I challenge McLuhan’s assumption that the juxtaposition of disparate information would necessarily lead to a deepened participation. I argue that readers/consumers took the initiative to participate in some specific aspects provided by the press. Although different components such as news, comments, advertisements, and supplements were, in theory, given separate spaces, they more often than not clustered together, as the above-mentioned analysis by Don Patterson has shown.

Before the 1940s, for example, the front page of virtually every newspaper in China was designed to accommodate both advertisements or public/private notices and news. It is very likely that Chinese newspapermen modeled the layout of their papers after their British counterparts in the nineteenth century,⁸⁹ which viewed advertisements as “the great feature.”⁹⁰ Some attempts were made for a change. Hollington Tong’s (Dong Xianguang, 1887–1971) *Yong bao* (“Mediocre daily”)⁹¹ and the English-language *China Press*,⁹² both of which were linked to the American journalistic tradition, ousted advertisements from the front page. Despite this, advertisements dominated the first page until the end of World War II in most Chinese newspapers. The diversification of the contents of the newspaper resulting from the reconfiguration of its space led to a novel way of reading, namely, inattentive reading or “fast reading and consumption.”⁹³ The journalist Xu Zhucheng (1907–91) recalled that he had to stand to read newspapers, as they were posted on a wall across the city-god temple in the late 1910s and early 1920s.⁹⁴ Xu’s experience was indicative of the rise of “standing-up reading” that replaced “sitting-down reading” with the rise of the newspaper as a mass-consumed product.⁹⁵ After Xu went to high school, he discovered that most of his classmates preferred to browse pages of national and international news, but not the whole thing.⁹⁶

Students’ attention to political news did not guarantee their embracing of political commentaries. At the height of nationalism in the 1930s, for example, editorials in *Dagong bao*, which had been canonized as the exemplary journealese in modern China, drew little interest from high-school students in northern China who were more fascinated by literary works and sports news in the same papers.⁹⁷ For less-educated or very busy readers, as Bao Tianxiao realized, national news and political commentaries could be passed up.⁹⁸ Readers were not necessarily held accountable for their neglect of political news. A distinctive journalistic practice of printing telegrams verbatim should share the blame. Xu Zhucheng found that politicians’ brief alternative names or even nicknames in

the telegraphic news always confused light consumers of the newspaper in the 1920s.⁹⁹ Beginning in the 1930s, many newspapers reformatted their page layouts by, for example, using larger-font titles to spotlight political news. Yet, such a change did not prevent some readers from concentrating on other segments of the newspaper. The journalist and scholar Guan Yixian (1899–1951) remembered that an aged woman rushed to subscribe to a daily newspaper for three consecutive months in the late 1930s or early 1940s only because it began to serialize a historical novel. Guan conducted a survey in the early 1940s, confirming that 5 percent of government employees, 20 percent of students, and 30 percent of higher-level professionals privileged commentaries or editorials over news, advertisements, novels, and other types of entertainment published in the newspaper. No businessmen or urban laborers showed any interest in the political commentaries.¹⁰⁰ In other words, intellectual-journalists' deafening voice of nationalism and enlightenment could well be greeted with indifferent readers' deaf ears.

While lower-class laborers with some literacy enjoyed reading serialized fiction, the illiterate were not excluded from using newspapers. As Xu Zhucheng observed, his fellow townspeople in a small village in the Yangzi Delta often wrapped up daily-use articles or filled holes in the wall with newspapers.¹⁰¹ In the 1937 film, *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, directed by Yuan Muzhi [1909–78]), the protagonists, lower-class men in Shanghai, papered their wall with newspapers (see Figure I.1). Newspapers could be resold for cash either as scrap



Figure I.1 The two protagonists of *Street Angel* (*Malu tianshi*, 1937) papered their walls with newspapers.

Source: film clip, *Malu tianshi* (dir. Yuan Muzhi, 1937).

paper or as readings for the second- or third-round readers. The journalist Gu Zhizhong (1898–1995) recalled that, before the 1920s, he usually read a low-priced daily each day after 5 or 6 p.m. when a newspaper had been transferred twice or thrice on the same day.¹⁰² Its multiple reuse and recycling complicate the assertion that the newspaper is a commodity “made to be perishable, purchased to be thrown away.”¹⁰³ Its use value was beyond the imagination of any newspapermen who produced it. Such a use of the newspaper had a major impact on newspaper producers, whose success was gauged by the ability to supply maximal sheets of paper, but not necessarily the content. *Yishi bao* (*Social Welfare*, established in 1915), a Tianjin-based newspaper, featured more pages and therefore reached more subscribers in northern China than its competitors, including *Dagong bao*, a nationally reputed daily famous for its reporting of political news and publishing of political remarks in the 1920s and 1930s.¹⁰⁴

The commitment to accommodating the readers’ highly diverse uses of the newspaper testifies to journalists’ desire to reach maximal readers to gain profits and, more importantly, to fulfill the moral obligation to serve *gong* (public or “all the people” in Confucian ethics), about which I shall give a fuller analysis later. Paradoxically, maximizing the readership by means of making the newspaper a polygeneric entity that featured texts of varied sub-genres drowned out intellectual-journalists’ voices in the press, and was therefore detrimental to their endeavor to (re)assume a role as the participant of political affairs and the tutor of the masses. Intellectuals’ agenda to intervene in politics was an outgrowth of a historical trend of their marginalization (*bianyuan hua*) after they switched roles from literati (*shi*) to “free-floating” modern intellectuals in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁵ They, however, had dreamed of embarking on the modern news media to regain their political privilege. In 1901, Liang Qichao promised, “today’s editor-in-chief [of a newspaper] can be a great prime minister [or] great president [of tomorrow].”¹⁰⁶ Two years later, Liang’s assertion was further bolstered by the introduction of the notion of the “fourth estate” with the publication of the Chinese translation of Matsumoto Kunpei’s (1870–?) *Study of Journalism: The Newspaper Business in Europe and the United States* (*Shinbungaku: ōbei shinbun jigyō* or *Xinwen xue: Ou Mei xinwen shiye*). The highly optimistic Matsumoto summarized that the progress of human society was marked by the transferring of power from monarchs to governments, to parliaments, and finally to the press.¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, such high hopes were quickly dashed. Their commentaries and editorials were easily diluted by innumerable other elements in the newspaper. Readers consumed the newspaper for reasons that they did not wish for. Meanwhile, journalists, who continued to be disparaged and discriminated against by society, oftentimes succumbed to the political authority’s aspirations. Huang Tianpeng (1909–82) deplored that journalists, the “uncrowned king” (*wuguan diwang*), abandoned every particle of self-respect to fawn on politicians in order to edge themselves into the political circles.¹⁰⁸ It was presumably not until the outbreak of the war against Japan in the late 1930s that journalism gained “heightened public recognition.”¹⁰⁹

The disillusioned scholar-journalists thus pointed their fingers at newspaper readers or “users.” Xie Liuyi (1898–1945), one of China’s pioneering journalism educators, impeached readers for their “bizarre” (*qiyi*) ways of reading newspapers. Some only cared about news of sexual assaults, while others browsed nothing but newspaper supplements. If such modes of consuming the newspaper persisted, the pessimistic Xie bemoaned in 1931 that the Chinese press would never improve.¹¹⁰ In this manner, Xie portrayed an image of passive readers who were mesmerized by trivial, non-political elements in the Chinese press and therefore failed to direct their gazes at the meaningful sections of the newspaper. More than a decade later, Ma Xingye (1909–91), an American-educated journalist and GMD bureaucrat, wrote to caution against the poisonous effect of “social news” (*shehui xinwen*) and demand newspaper readers to enhance their “ability to tell vice from virtue” (*bianbie shan’e*).¹¹¹ Indeed, Xie and Ma joined the chorus of resentful intellectuals throughout the early twentieth century such as Lu Xun (1881–1936)¹¹² and Ye Chucang (1887–1946),¹¹³ who complained of their compatriots’ variously fixing their apathetic or overzealous gazes upon wrong places, and therefore called for disciplining their action of looking. To cultivate a desirable readership, Xie emphatically pointed out that the newspaper ought to be a “university of culture” (*wenhua daxue*), with the masses being its student.¹¹⁴ Xie’s argument typified a discourse of liberal journalism that cast the newspaper in a role as the tutor, guide, and enlightener of the people.

In this book, I refuse to take at face value the intellectual-journalists’ claim to their success in advancing agendas of revolution, enlightenment, or modernization. Despite his opposition to the “poisonous” social news, for example, Ma Xingye would tolerate or even make use of news about crimes and sensations to boost sales of his *Central Daily News* in the late 1940s. I thus highlight the fluidity of various boundaries among newspapers that most press historians have drawn. By using five cases that I will present in the remainder of this chapter, I shall explore the commercialization of partisan newspapers, the politicization of the entertainment press, and the blurred line between *dabao* and *xiaobao*, among other things. The aim is to paint a picture of the messy and opaque world of the press and to bolster my argument that the need to accommodate readers’ diverse uses contributed to evading classifications and generalizations of newspapers in the first half of the twentieth century.

Hu Zhengzhi, *Dagong bao*, and literati-cum-political commentators: Part I

Dagong bao in the mid- and late 1910s

Part I focuses on *Dagong bao* in the late 1910s. While the majority of scholars hail this paper during the 1920s and 1930s as an exemplary professional, intelligentsia-run paper, whose newspapermen Zhang Jiluan (1888–1941) and Hu Zhengzhi committed themselves to enlightening their readers in the midst of deepened crises in China, I turn my attention to Hu Zhengzhi’s first tenure with

Dagong bao (1916–20). In Chapter 1, I examine Hu’s blueprint of transforming this party organ of the Anhui Clique into a financially independent newspaper by restructuring its layout, reorganizing its reporting personnel, building a network with politicians, and enhancing its circulation numbers. My study of *Dagong bao* during the mid- to late 1910s is intended to fulfill a number of goals. First of all, most existing literature, both in English and in Chinese, tends to focus on *Dagong bao* in the 1930s and 1940s, when it gained a national, and even international, reputation as being “the most progressive and best edited paper,” to quote Lin Yutang.¹¹⁵ Scant attention has been devoted to this newspaper in the 1910s. Second, I attempt to challenge a commonsensical notion that the warlordist times in China was the “dark age” of Chinese culture, by arguing that even the most politicized, warlord-patronized newspaper could carry out a progressive reform. Third, an investigation into *Dagong bao* between 1916 and 1920 sheds light on the operation of this prestigious daily newspaper two decades later. All measures proposed and instituted by Hu Zhengzhi during his first stint with the paper would eventually be implemented after 1926.

Literati-cum-political commentators

My exploration of Hu Zhengzhi’s career allows for a re-examination of a distinctive practice of Chinese journalism: literati-cum-political commentators. Indeed, virtually all Chinese newspapers, even the entertainment-oriented *xiaobao* as I shall discuss in Chapter 4, featured more or less political commentaries. *Shen bao*, for example, began to publish a commentary article in its second issue, despite its editor’s promise to focus exclusively on information-gathering in its first issue.¹¹⁶ As the *Shen bao* editors kept giving critical advice to the rulers, just like Confucian officials did, the *North China Herald* literally referred to them as the “Censorate at Shanghai.”¹¹⁷ From the closing decade of the nineteenth century to the twentieth century, quite a lot of Chinese newspapers more self-consciously assumed a role as the commentator of contemporary politics. Timothy Weston notes that Chinese intellectuals had “great expectations for the press as a transformative medium” to effect change to China in the first four decades of the twentieth century.¹¹⁸

Chin-chuan Lee posits that such a unique tradition allotted to the Chinese newspaper an overriding role in preaching the leitmotif of national salvage in modern China. To accomplish the triple goals of enlightening the people, revolutionizing society, and modernizing the nation, Chinese intellectuals adroitly blended a time-honored practice of literati to instruct and admonish rulers and Western liberalism in the making of a distinctive style of “literati-cum-political commentators.”¹¹⁹ Lee thus summarizes that this journalistic practice was characterized by four salient features—first, intellectuals’ conviction to serve the nation with their writings; second, intellectual-journalists’ proclivity to discuss ongoing politics without taking part in it; third, their ambiguous relations with the ruling GMD in the 1920s and 1930s; and finally, their willingness to submit to the state authorities at the expense of journalistic freedom, especially during

times of war. Citing *Dagong bao* as a typical intellectuals-run, well-respected newspaper, Lee considers both Zhang Jiluan and Hu Zhengzhi as exemplary practitioners of such a journalistic tradition. Both Zhang and Hu, in Lee's opinion, retained an identity as a literatus, despite their education in Japan, their shared admiration for Euro-American liberalism, and their embarkation upon a very modern career as journalists.¹²⁰

While I take no issue with the assertion that "literati-cum-political commentators" represented one of the most significant ways of newspaper making, I have reservation of Chin-chuan Lee's assumption that national salvation was the overarching, if not the sole, theme in all newspapers in modern China, on which such a journalistic tradition was premised. As noted earlier, the newspaper in China was used—and journalism was understood—very differently by different people. Political commentaries could be underwhelming as they were buried in all sorts of information printed on the same page. Stephen MacKinnon is certainly right in pointing out that quite a lot of Chinese newspapers and journals acted like "competing political parties" due to an absence of "an effective legislative forum" in Chinese politics.¹²¹ Here, I would add that their owners and editors exercised only limited control over their own periodicals, precisely because of the newspaper's unique structure of organization. Moreover, while in the works of Lee and many other scholars, those patriotic and politics-minded intellectuals and journalists usually fell into the same category, I attempt to complicate the picture by arguing that those contributors to Chinese periodicals by no means constituted a monolithic group. Their understandings of the role of the newspaper, for example, varied enormously. Yuan Xinjie differentiates two types of intellectual-journalists in his book-length study of the Chinese tradition of "scholars as political commentators": intellectuals who happened to embark on the career of running newspapers, and newspapermen who identified themselves as intellectuals. Yuan further argues that the rise of the latter symbolized the elevation of journalism as an independent profession in modern China.¹²² Following Yuan's categorization, it is self-evident that Zhang Jiluan exemplified intellectuals who deftly made use of the press to pursue his political agendas, whereas Hu was a bona fide professional journalist who essentially viewed the newspaper as a marketable commodity. The difference between Zhang and Hu manifested itself in their attitudes toward political authorities of the GMD regime. Sophia Wang suggests that Zhang's allegiance to Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) be understood "within a Chinese cultural tradition in which Confucian officials often had to deal with the same dilemma when they criticized their rulers." Zhang clearly treated the nation as a family, "viewing the nation as a hierarchical organization clustered around an absolute authority of which he himself was both a loyal protégé and a critic."¹²³ Hu, by comparison, self-consciously refrained himself from maintaining overly close relationships with any political leaders after 1926.

Most significantly, I contend that the theory of "literati-cum-political commentators" as a prevalent journalistic practice across China is in need of an examination of its temporal (particularly the 1930s) and spatial (mostly northern China) specificities. The keen interest of leading dailies based in the North