

# THE RISE OF POLITICAL INTELLECTUALS IN MODERN CHINA

*May Fourth Societies and the  
Roots of Mass-Party Politics*



SHAKHAR RAHAV

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*To Inbar,*

*To Itamar, Ella, and Avigail,*

*And of course to Luc*



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## PREFACE

When I began this study, some years ago, popular revolution seemed a thing of the past, no more than a subject for historical study. At the time of this writing, though, revolution has suddenly become again a topic of popular discussion and speculation. Repercussions of the “Arab Spring” which was sparked in late 2010 in Tunisia, are still felt through the Arab world; and since then around the globe popular movements, from Egypt, through Ukraine, to “Occupy Wall Street” in the United States, have successfully mobilized people in protest on a scale not seen since the late 1980s, when mass demonstrations from Berlin to Beijing rocked the international political order. The political order that wrought globalization is now being questioned, often intertwining with other grievances. Many wonder whether contemporary China too is susceptible to this wave of popular mobilization and if so what the ramifications of such a mobilization might be.

Circumstances might be radically different by the time the reader encounters this book. But to the reader interested in popular mobilization and political activism this book will hopefully provide historical perspective and perhaps raise new questions concerning protest and political activism, for the questions that are studied here in detail transcend a particular time and place. Questions such as, what, beside ideas, is needed for mobilization? How, if at all, do ideals affect the way in which activists act? What is the relationship of grassroots organization to political parties? And questions about the effects of literacy, media, organization, education, and sociability, on social mobilization.

This study began with a wish to better understand the role of intellectuals in effecting social and political change. My interest in Chinese intellectuals was sparked during a seminar with Vera Schwarcz at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. There I was constantly struck by the parallels I could see between May Fourth intellectuals and Israeli intellectuals struggling to enlighten their society. At Berkeley, while studying the writings of Lu Xun at the time of the 1999 election campaign in Israel, I continued drawing uncritical parallels between these two groups of self-appointed enlighteners. At some point, I realized that since the case of May Fourth intellectuals had been presented as a successful case of changing society under the guidance of a handful of visionary intellectuals, I wished to learn from those whom I saw as my Chinese counterparts how to change my own society, while better understanding my own role in it. Over the years I have grown more critical of the various

strands of idealism and identification that drew me to the topic, yet something of that admiration of intellectuals as courageous, smart, insightful leaders of their own societies remains, and I have long been fascinated by the ability and attempts of some intellectuals to translate vision into reality.

Far into my research, in conversations with friends and colleagues, I began to realize that part of my interest in idealist youth associations in May Fourth China stemmed from my own experiences in the socialist-Zionist youth organization *Hashomer Hatsa'ir* (The Young Watchman), where I grew up intellectually and politically. Discussions about the material made me realize that I saw actual parallels in the social dynamics of small groups that clustered around a political or social ideal.

At the same time, another motivation for this book was the desire to better understand the lives of May Fourth activists. As a student, I was attracted to the images of activists as larger-than-life idealists who heroically overturned a stultifying tradition in an attempt to bring enlightenment to their society. Yet I was dissatisfied with the small glimpses I had into the actual lives of these heroes. As I studied the period more deeply, I also felt that this mythical perspective gave an unsatisfactory explanation of both the significance of May Fourth, and of the way in which it became a watershed in Chinese history. This book therefore stems as well from an attempt to gain a better understanding of May Fourth and how it looked to those who participated in it at the time. In what follows, I hope to capture some sense of how idealist youth in a Chinese city like Wuhan around 1920, tried to change their world, and of their hopes and follies, and to the extent that they succeeded, to understand how they did so.



Key locations in Yun Daiying's political career.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The genre of acknowledgments by now deserves its own study. Yet, as I approach this academic ritual I realize the truths its clichés can convey. Although I wrote this book, it is a product of numerous inputs, influences, contributions, and quite simply help, of many teachers, colleagues, acquaintances, and friends.

I am grateful to the many wonderful teachers I have learned from over the years. Echoes of undergraduate studies with Iddo Landau, Yaron Ezrahi, Emmanuel Sivan, and Meir Shahar, ring through these pages. Vera Schwarcz introduced me to Chinese intellectuals and May Fourth as topic of study and encouraged me to embark on graduate studies abroad; I have benefited from her poetic enthusiastic mentorship ever since.

At Berkeley, Wen-hsin Yeh's incisive comments continuously challenged and inspired my thinking, pushing me to problematize any conclusions I might have reached, while pulling out of my formulations conceptual threads far before I could see them; her work remains a source of inspiration. I first articulated some of the ideas in these pages in conversations with the late Frederic Wakeman. To an extent, this work was shaped by a challenge he scribbled in the margins of the first research paper I wrote for him—could one sketch an organizational tree of May Fourth associations? To my great regret Professor Wakeman did not see the completion of this project. Andrew Jones provided references and support. David Johnson enriched me greatly with his straightforward enthusiasm for things Chinese. My comparative interests were whetted by Carla Hesse, who introduced me to the sociology of knowledge, and by Andrew Barshay, who kindly engaged my interest in intellectuals in enjoyable tutorials. I learned profound lessons from Beshara Doumani about history, global processes, and political struggle. His friendship and trust were a precious gift in dark days.

My research is greatly indebted to the foremost scholars of the May Fourth movement in Wuhan, Tian Ziyu and Li Liangming. Professor Tian and Professor Li hosted me with extraordinary generosity, sharing with me sources, references, scholarly insights, contacts, and much valuable time and knowledge. From them I learned what it means to break new ground in one's research. Professor Tian and Professor Liang graciously invited me to present my preliminary work at a conference on Yun Daiying in Wuhan. I am grateful for their support and hope that this book will be some repayment of my

debts to them. Most recently, Professor Tian has once more benefited me with his generosity by sharing with me historical photographs.

My research was also facilitated by the generosity of Zeng Chenggui at the Hubei Academy of Social Sciences, Zhang Zhuhong at Beijing University, and Li Yuan, Chu Feng, and Yong Guiliang at the Central Party School in Beijing. For help in obtaining photographs I am grateful to Zhang Yuhan and the Museum of the First National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party.

Peng Wei, Chu Feng, and Chen Gang provided much assistance and companionship. Joanne Zhong, Merav Brenners, and Eva Ringleb offered the hospitality of their respective homes. Joseph Gansel and Tali Gruber graciously shared the life and apartment of Beijing diplomats.

My thinking about China, history, intellectuals, and more took form in conversation with John Danis—*zhi yin*. John shared his intelligence, humor, and above all companionship, over endless cups of espresso and tea; he has read far more drafts of my work than any one should. The other interlocutor who greatly shaped this work is Orit Avishai, whose sharp thinking and keen editorial talents were matched only by her friendship. More recently I have been delighted to return to the digressive creativity of Yotam Hotam. In expatriating and repatriating, the lives and careers of Ayelet Ben-Yishay and Ofer Shorr have intertwined with my family's and mine—I am thankful for their warm and witty companionship.

These days, when academia is being eroded, I have been especially fortunate to find a warm scholarly home and vibrant intellectual community at the University of Haifa. I am immensely grateful for the moral and institutional support I have received from all my colleagues at the Department of Asian Studies—especially Guy Podoler, Miki Bul, and Ornit Shani.

Vera Schwarcz and Joan Judge kindly read earlier drafts of the book and offered valuable comments and guidance. Joshua Fogel generously shared with me his translation of Yoshiro Ishikawa's valuable work, and Stephen Platt and Fabio Lanza kindly shared their work. Guan Lin, Ye Bin, and Liu Wennan readily helped me with translations. The critical comments and constructive suggestions of the anonymous readers for the Harvard University Asia Center and Oxford University Press did much to improve the book. Had I been able to incorporate more of their suggestions the book would have been better. At Oxford I am especially thankful to Nancy Toff and Rebecca Hecht for guiding this first-time author through the steps of publishing.

Capable and good-willed administrators, librarians, have been crucial to this project, as they are to academia itself. I especially want to thank Mabel Lee, Cathy Lenfestey, and most of all Elinor Levine, whose support in all matters was invaluable. Educators and caregivers—especially Hanne Kravin, Marie Corwin, and Yu-fong Wong—allowed me to work with an ease of mind. Wu Yifeng helped secure materials. The interlibrary loan services at Berkeley and Haifa have been exemplary.

Closer to home, my parents, Nurit Rahav and Giora Rahav, helped at some crucial junctures and years earlier sowed the interests that underlie this book. My mother in-law Naomi Hurvitz helped with our children at significant points. More than anyone else, my dear aunt Cindy sustained my family and me during long periods of research and writing. Cindy's warmth, generosity, and steady support nurtured our bodies, souls, minds, and hearts. We are blessed to have her, and were especially fortunate to have her an inseparable part of our day-to-day lives for so long.

The greatest impediment to my work, and the most joyful one, has been my family. Itamar and Ella have accompanied me from the project's beginnings, Avigail joined us as it was nearing completion. I am grateful to them for keeping me from my work and keeping me going, with their patience, encouragement, laughter, love, and occasionally even mild interest. Lucario welcomes me with unhesitant ecstasy. Without Inbar Hurvitz's support I would never have embarked on this journey. As I contemplate past revolution, Inbar helps me understand the challenges and achievements of engaging in present-day reform. Inbar's faith, endurance, friendship, and love saw me through this adventure, and by now many others. It's strange to think how long this project has been part of our shared life. I am glad to now let it go and look together to new horizons.

Shakhar Rahav  
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## Introduction

In August 1918 a young university graduate named Yun Daiying arrived with a couple of friends from central China's biggest city, Wuhan, at mount Lu in Jiangxi province to attend a camp for young Chinese organized by the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). Attempting to capture his feelings as he climbed the mountain, he wrote in his journal:

While climbing the mountain I thought constantly of [John] Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*. When we reached the middle of the mountain it was like entering paradise (taoyuan 桃源); such must be the joy of a hermit's life! As the Catholic minister said, Laozi says, "We look at it but do not see it, we name this 'the elusive' (yi 夷); We listen to it but do not hear it, we call it 'the rarefied' (xi 希); We feel for it but cannot grasp it, it is called 'the infinitesimal' (wei 微). Elusive, rarefied, infinitesimal, this is Jehova."<sup>1</sup>

For all the Christian and Daoist allusions of this passage, two months later Yun launched a small association named the Mutual Aid Society in reference to the work of the Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin, an association whose activities included a form of qigong, hikes, searing discussions, and singing. This hodgepodge of cultural reference points and activities guided Yun Daiying and many of his friends toward revolutionary cultural and political activities during the May Fourth Movement that transformed China's politics in the subsequent years.

China's May Fourth Movement (1915–1923) and the turbulent politics that followed it are commonly identified with figures such as Mao Zedong, Chen Duxiu, and Hu Shi, and with high-minded ideological discussions that took place in Beijing and in Shanghai.<sup>2</sup> In this book I examine May Fourth by looking at the activities, social world, and organizational efforts of Yun Daiying, a less-known activist, mainly in the central China city of Wuhan. This examination will lead me to make two arguments: First, although Beijing and Shanghai were of vital importance, the movement was a product of dialogue with the hinterland. Second, the social facet of informal May Fourth

associations, the movement's sociability if you will, rivaled the importance of the ideas themselves in making May Fourth radicalism into a significant political and cultural force.

The May Fourth Movement has been portrayed as a turning point in Chinese history, a moment in which modernity and enlightenment arrived in China. Consequently, the period has been presented as a crucial and necessary stage in China's revolutionary development, when intellectuals explored a variety of cultural and political ideas (most prominently Marxism) thereby preparing the ground for the emergence of the Nationalist Party (Guomindang, or GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (Gongchandang, or CCP).<sup>3</sup>

Prevalent narratives of May Fourth focus on the ideological development of intellectuals, concentrated almost exclusively in the coastal cities of Beijing and Shanghai. And although scholars have pointed to the importance of the many cultural-political societies of the period, they have largely neglected to examine these associations, treating them only as seedbeds of communism and of future communist leaders like Mao Zedong. By contrast, this book offers a microhistory of cultural-political societies founded in Wuhan—China's most important hinterland city at the time—by the local activist Yun Daiying (1895–1931). It thus paints a portrait of the everyday life of May Fourth activists and their societies in the provinces and examines the way in which radical politics developed in hinterland urban centers, grew from there into a nationwide movement, and ultimately provided the basis for the emergence of mass political parties, including the Nationalist Party and the CCP.

Narratives of May Fourth present intellectuals as playing a crucial role in the transformation of society. Subsequent generations of intellectuals have, therefore, taken the movement as a model and template for activism.<sup>4</sup> As an educator, journalist, and activist in the central China metropolis of Wuhan, and an eventual Communist Party member, Yun Daiying was, in many ways, emblematic of the intellectuals who have become identified with this cultural revolution. Yun is best known for his activities as a prominent communist journalist and leader in Shanghai and Wuhan during the mid and late 1920s, but in fact his political career began earlier, as part of the May Fourth Movement and New Culture Movement. By closely examining the early revolutionary career of Yun Daiying, this study attempts to understand the ways in which intellectuals like him sought to shape China.

The question of intellectuals' role in effecting social, political, and cultural change is not limited to China and the May Fourth Movement but has broader relevance, especially for the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century age of state formation.<sup>5</sup> And although this study focuses for the most part on a particular locale during a transformative period for China, its significance looms large when we pause and note the global context of China's transformations in this period. Narratives of political transition from empires and colonies to nations struggling for sovereignty and statehood often point to

intellectuals as harbingers of ideas that shaped the ensuing polity and culture. Intellectuals are presented as agents of social change in the histories of the Russian Empire, the Ottoman Empire, the Qajar Empire in Persia, and France—where intellectuals have had a special status, and where the very term “intellectuals” was coined at the turn of the twentieth century. Indeed, such narratives of political transition beg the question of intellectuals’ role as harbingers of ideas in effecting social and political change.

The current study explores the “dynamics between ideas and mobilization” by undertaking what Robert Darnton has termed a social history of ideas.<sup>6</sup> As Timothy Cheek notes in his study of communist intelligentsia under Mao, “we still need *social histories* of intellectuals as agents in China’s socialist revolution.”<sup>7</sup> In the following pages I explore the interplay of ideas and revolution by examining the social infrastructure that propagated ideas of radical reform, attempted to realize them, and distributed them further in society. In order to understand the ways in which intellectuals actually contributed to social movements during this pivotal time, the study focuses on the small, local organizations in which Yun Daiying was involved in Wuhan, and asks simply: What did members of these organizations do?

## Political Intellectuals

The term “intellectual” deserves some elaboration. There is an enormous amount of literature about intellectuals, yet for all the scholarship on the subject there are no widely agreed definitions of the term. I find useful Edward Shils’s definition of intellectuals, which conceptualizes them as “some persons with an unusual sensitivity to the sacred, an uncommon reflectiveness about the nature of their universe, and the rules which govern their society.”<sup>8</sup> We should note that the term “intellectual” was political from its inception, when it was coined as a pejorative term denoting critics of the French military and government who supported Alfred Dreyfus during the Dreyfus Affair in turn-of-the-twentieth-century France.<sup>9</sup> Therefore subsequent researchers and theorists have often seen the term as inextricably bound up with politics. However, the meaning of the term has often changed in accord with different contexts. In China, the 1920s witnessed a change in terminology as the term *zhishi jieji* (intellectual class or intellectual stratum)—an umbrella term for various occupations associated with literacy, such as student, writer, and journalist—was largely replaced by *zhishi fenzi* (intellectual elements). After the ascendance of the Communist regime in 1949, *zhishi fenzi* was used as a form of social classification for purposes of different government policies, policies that in themselves created new senses of identity as intellectuals.<sup>10</sup>

The intellectuals I discuss in this study were members of the so-called intellectual stratum (*zhishi jieji*)—educated elites—who involved themselves

in politics, often using the burgeoning press. I therefore use the term “political intellectual” to refer to knowledgeable, educated individuals who in a time of turmoil consciously tried to bear on the political and envision what they saw as a proper social order. These political intellectuals derived much of their identity and authority from the traditional status of the literati and scholar-officials in China as well as from their familiarity with new forms of (Western) knowledge, and from their access as consumers and producers to the media of the age—the printed word.<sup>11</sup> In China the written word was historically particularly imbricated with the possession of political and ritual power.<sup>12</sup> The new print media was therefore a vital medium for intellectuals to disseminate their views and ideas, and participate in discussions on the nature of “the rules which govern their society” (as Shils puts it).<sup>13</sup> Thus, political intellectuals were those who, as Antonio Gramsci might have it, specialized in dealing with society’s superstructures—those who maintained these superstructures or tried to dismantle them, in order to change society’s underlying infrastructure.<sup>14</sup> The point of their discussions was to envision a new social order—including fundamental social relations (such as gender and family), culture, education, economics, and political institutions—and a path to realizing it. Coming, as they did, from different locales, they used the print media not only to disseminate their questions and ideas but also to create new communities around these discussions.

By discussing alternative forms of social and political order, based on their intellectual and moral authority with an expanding readership these intellectuals positioned themselves as articulators and arbitrators of different political visions. Although China at this time was controlled by multiple warlords, it was this multiplicity that created a crisis of political legitimacy, with no consensus as to what might constitute the basis for legitimate political authority.<sup>15</sup> Intellectuals mediated between the public and contending visions of political legitimacy, or as Edward Shils puts it, “rules which govern society.”<sup>16</sup> In a situation where there was no monopoly on power, no consensus about political authority or mechanisms, nor any certainty about the trajectory of the country’s future development, by publicly debating different aspects of society and adjudicating between alternative visions of social order intellectuals were in fact brokering political legitimacy, a point to which I return in the Conclusion.

Intellectuals were not alone in creating the cultural changes of May Fourth. Since the late 1990s, studies have called attention to the ways in which labor swelled in size and underwent important changes at this time, and new professions emerged in tandem with a rising consumer culture that was mobilized to strengthen national identity and a sense of citizenry; at the same time a changing educational system tried to cultivate a sense of citizenship.<sup>17</sup> These developments all contributed to new senses of identity on the one hand and new forms of organization and mobilization on the other. Some

might therefore question the role of intellectuals in May Fourth, highlighting instead the role of other social groups, such as workers or commercial elites in creating a new political culture.<sup>18</sup> Yet intellectuals gave voice, notably in writing, to widely held dissatisfaction and frustration, and articulated these sentiments in ways that helped crystallize radical views and foment political activism.<sup>19</sup> This study does not try to evaluate the role of intellectuals as compared with that of other social groups. Rather, it hopes to clarify the ways in which intellectuals did act and contribute to the formation of a new political culture and to the rise of mass party politics.

## Scholarship on May Fourth

Studies of May Fourth have for the most part interpreted it either as a transition to enlightenment and cultural modernity or as a setting of the stage for the rise of the Chinese Communist Party. Chow Tse-tsung's foundational account of the movement, first published in 1960, celebrated the triumph of an urban liberal movement headed by intellectuals and the emancipatory qualities of a sharp break with the past.<sup>20</sup> Subsequent scholarship on May Fourth can be divided into studies that focus on the cultural aspect of May Fourth as a watershed in literary culture and those that focus on the political aspect of the movement. The latter have been guided by questions that ultimately revolve around the ascendance of Chinese communism. In the People's Republic of China (PRC), the triumphant Communist Party has overseen studies that testify to the importance of the party and the historical necessity, if not inevitability, of Communist victory. Under the influence of the Cold War, early English-language scholarship about the origins of the Communist Party was similarly occupied with a desire to explain the rise of communism in China and thus fathom the loss of China to a rival political system.<sup>21</sup> Relying on accounts and scholarship by participants of May Fourth, these studies often imbibed the participants' view of the movement as a sharp break with the past led by intellectuals and the ideas they professed.

The post-Mao liberalization allowed access to previously unavailable sources. Subsequent studies have sought to place the rise of Chinese communism within a broader intellectual context, highlighting approaches such as anarchism that formed alternatives to the CCP interpretation of communism.<sup>22</sup> Since the late 1990s studies have become increasingly critical of self-serving narratives created by May Fourth activists and their progeny, and sought to alter the view of May Fourth as a sharp break with the past. By pointing to continuities between May Fourth and the late Qing, or to later developments as being fruits of May Fourth, these studies have sought to “de-center” May Fourth and interpret it not as a unique pivotal point in China's transition to modernity but rather as one in a series of movements and

developments that transformed China beginning in the late nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Other studies might not explicitly seek to dethrone May Fourth but have taken something of a “cultural turn” and examined perceptions, institutions, and attendant shifts in political culture that helped shape the movement.<sup>24</sup> For example, Wen-hsin Yeh’s *Provincial Passages* has pointed to the importance of institutional, cultural, and psychological dimensions as crucial for understanding the appeal of radical ideas to Chinese intellectuals, while expanding the geographical space of May Fourth historiography to include inland “middle” counties.<sup>25</sup> Timothy Weston has explored the institutional facet of May Fourth and explored the making of Beijing University (also referred to as Beida or as Peking University) into a national symbol, due in large part to its identification with the movement. And more recently, Fabio Lanza has probed the emergence of “students” as a category of political identity.<sup>26</sup> Historians’ view of the movement, then, is shifting to include organization, institutional settings, and social practices.<sup>27</sup> These studies all seem to agree that the early Republican era did indeed constitute a turning point in numerous aspects of Chinese politics, not the least of which was a significant change in the way in which politics were practiced; in other words, in the *form* of politics. By viewing May Fourth political changes within a wider context than ideologies and political parties these studies all depict the movement as much more complex than the mere result of a handful of visionaries who seek to modernize China. Taken together, these studies show how society, led by the educated elites and the intelligentsia in particular, became increasingly politicized. This process eventually led to the emergence of mass politics—a subject I discuss in chapter 5.

This study pursues a line of inquiry similar to the “cultural” studies noted above, though it differs in several respects. I am concerned here not with motivations for adopting radical ideologies such as communism, but rather with the way in which provincial intellectual youth attempted to realize their ideals. And whereas the concern with the origins of Chinese communism and the organizational form it assumed as the Chinese Communist Party has often led narratives from the hinterland to Shanghai, this study asks: how did a local movement come about? What did youngsters who were attracted to ideas of social equality, liberty, rationality, and national sovereignty actually do within the environment of their particular local society? I share with Lanza the assumption that “ideas are never abstract, nor do they exist outside of practices, in which they are embodied and by which they are defined.”<sup>28</sup> I address these questions by studying the early political career of Yun Daiying, particularly the organizations he founded and their activities and practices.<sup>29</sup>

Much of the English-language scholarship on May Fourth, particularly its political aspect, has been characterized by an inquiry into the ideological development of intellectuals. Yet studies of May Fourth and the rise of communism have alluded to the importance of the myriad small organizations—societies and associations—that dotted China’s political and cultural

landscape at this time for subsequent political and cultural developments.<sup>30</sup> Arif Dirlik, for example, in his thorough survey of organizations that preceded the CCP, writes, “the study societies’ role in shaping their members’ attitudes draws attention to them as the social context for ideology formation in May Fourth China.”<sup>31</sup> Yet due to the focus on ideological development and the ascendance of communism, the function of these associations as informal social institutions that were crucial to the political and cultural transformations of the time—not merely seedbeds of Chinese communism—has been largely neglected. As Michel Hockx similarly notes in his study of the era’s literary societies, “the actual functioning of literary societies as institutions” has not been studied in detail.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, as a result of the focus on the Communist Party, those associations that have been studied in detail are all associated with Marxism and with the party’s future leaders such as the societies for the study of Marxism and Marxist theory at Beijing University (respectively, the *Makesi zhuyi yanjiu hui* and *Makesi xueshuo yanjiu hui*), or the or the New Citizen Study Society (*Xinmin xuehui*), of which Mao Zedong was a founding member.<sup>33</sup> This teleological focus has come at the expense of other contemporary organizations, and has thus obscured the political ecology from which the Communist Party emerged.

Moreover, to the extent that organizations related to the rise of the Communist Party have been studied, scholars have examined their ideology and organization (Fabio Lanza’s study providing an important exception).<sup>34</sup> Yet ideology and organization are categories of analysis that stem from a party-based narrative; they are categories well suited to analyzing an established political party—especially a Leninist political party—however they do not necessarily accommodate the nascent stage of political organization when May Fourth cultural-political organizations were composed of a fluctuating membership that held a vague and fluid ideology. This study hopes to avoid such problems by attempting a microhistory of May Fourth intellectuals, tracing not why they became involved in politics but rather how did they do so.<sup>35</sup>

In what follows, I will argue for the importance of sociability and the interaction of social networks with ideology for understanding May Fourth; by extension I hope to suggest this dimension’s importance for understanding other cultural-political movements as well.<sup>36</sup>

## Yun Daiying and May Fourth

Yun Daiying serves as a narrative anchor for this study for several reasons. To the extent that researchers have acknowledged the role of small organizations in the politics of the time, the organizations that Yun Daiying founded and within which he acted are recognized as having played a significant role



in the rise of radicalism in Wuhan and in central China.<sup>37</sup> In addition, Yun's activities as journalist, activist, educator, and journal editor are emblematic of May Fourth intellectuals, and like many other intellectuals of the time Yun underwent a significant stage of utopian socialism and attraction to anarchism before eventually joining the Communist Party. At the same time, as a capable organizer, appealing writer, and impressive speaker, Yun became an influential individual who was crucial to the spreading of the New Culture Movement in central China and in the evolution of a new political culture there.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, from his arrival in Shanghai in 1923 to assume party propaganda work until his premature death in 1931 Yun was an important figure in the CCP, and many of his peers rose to prominence later in their careers. Had he not been captured and executed by the Guomindang, Yun may well have attained an important position in the CCP and been more prominently reflected in the subsequent historiography it generated.

Since Yun's early activities were based in Wuhan, studying his early political career enhances our understanding of the political geography of May Fourth. Although scholars acknowledge the diverse geographical origins of central May Fourth figures, most studies have focused on the eastern seaboard cities of Beijing and Shanghai. Yet those recent studies that cover May Fourth in different locales suggest the importance of local conditions and culture in shaping the political proclivities of activists.<sup>39</sup> Although Yun did eventually arrive in Shanghai, this was after several years of radical activism further inland in central China and after he had joined the party and been active as a party member in the hinterland. Studying Yun therefore enables us to offset the focus on Beijing and Shanghai, and look at May Fourth as experienced outside the eastern seaboard in hinterland urban centers. It thus provides us with an opportunity to reexamine working assumptions about the relations of center and periphery during this critical time.

Yun is further appealing because few of his peers have left as comprehensive a set of materials that allow the researcher to delve into not only his thought but also his life. Although Yun's original papers remain stored in the Central Archives (Zhongyang dang'an guan) and are inaccessible to the public and to academic researchers, many of his writings have been compiled and published, including three years of his diary. These materials complement coverage of the major organizations in which Yun was involved in a set of sources on the associations of the period (*Wusi shiqi de shetuan*). Taken together, these sources allow us to recreate, to a large extent, the nature of activism in this formative age for modern China's politics and culture. Although Yun Daiying's activities form the narrative anchor of the study, this is not a biography of Yun Daiying.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the study uses Yun Daiying as an entry point that allows us to examine the May Fourth movement as experienced on the ground by a particular and unique individual, who both was shaped by the movement and helped shape it.

## Yun Daiying in May Fourth Scholarship

Sandwiched between the 1911 Revolution on the one hand and its position as seat of the Guomindang's left wing government in 1927 on the other, Wuhan of the May Fourth period has not been the subject of much study. Similarly, while Yun Daiying has been acknowledged by scholars of May Fourth and early Chinese communism as important for the development of local radicalism, his role has not been probed. Scholars of the early CCP such as Arif Dirlik and Hans Van de Ven devote a handful of pages to the activities of Yun and his associates, yet they discuss these activities only inasmuch as they prepared the ground for the formation of a communist cell in Wuhan.<sup>41</sup> In China, scholars have compiled materials and written local histories of May Fourth. Two such studies, which have been extremely helpful in my research, are a biography of Yun Daiying by local historians of the Communist Party, Tian Ziyu and Li Liangming, and a history by Tian Ziyu of the May Fourth Movement in Wuhan.<sup>42</sup> Although these accounts differ from English-language scholarship in that they are not overshadowed by Beijing and Shanghai but rather emphasize the importance of the locale, their narrative remains teleologically focused on the ascendance of Marxist thought and the rise of the CCP.

## Methodology and Structure

This study contributes to scholarship on May Fourth in both geographical scope and methodology. Much of the English-language scholarship on May Fourth, at least until the 1990s, has been characterized by an inquiry into the ideological development of intellectuals. Geographically, studying Wuhan expands the depiction of May Fourth in English-language scholarship to include hinterland cities. Although studies have mentioned that the movement reverberated across China (Chow Tse-tsung's foundational study mentions over two hundred cities in over twenty-two provinces)<sup>43</sup> and have acknowledged the diverse geographical origins of activists and intellectual ferment in other urban centers, the majority of studies have remained focused on the seaboard cities of Beijing and Shanghai, depicting them, in effect, as fountainheads from which ideas spread down through society and out through the land. The pathbreaking studies by Keith Schoppa and Wen-hsin Yeh, have ventured further inland and called attention to the importance of local culture and institutions in the adoption of radical ideas, thereby complicating the rather simplistic model of top-down, center-periphery diffusion. Important as these studies are, focusing on northern Zhejiang they have nonetheless remained in the lower Yangzi region surrounding Shanghai. Similarly, while the recent studies by Weston and Lanza add complexity to