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# *Building Fukan as a Chinese Public Sphere: Zhang Dongsun and Learning Light\**

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## ABSTRACT

This article attempts to explore the relevance of the public sphere, conceptualized by Jürgen Habermas, in the Chinese context. The author focuses on the case of *Learning Light* (*Xuedeng*), one of the most reputable *fukans*, or newspaper supplements, of the May Fourth era (1915–1926), arguing that *fukan* served a very Habermasian function, in terms of its independence from power intervention and its inclusiveness of incorporating voices across political and social strata. Through examining the leadership of Zhang Dongsun, editor in chief of *Learning Light*, as well as the public opinions published in this *fukan*, the author also discovers that, in constructing China’s public sphere, both the left and moderate intellectuals of the May Fourth era used conscious effort and shared the same moral courage, although their roles were quite different: The left was more prominent as passionate and idealist spiritual leaders shining in the center of the historic stage, whereas in comparison, the moderates acted as pragmatic and rational organizers, ensuring a benevolent environment for the stage.

**KEY WORDS** Jürgen Habermas; Public Sphere; *Fukan*; May Fourth; Zhang Dongsun

On March 4, 1918, the *China Times*, one of the most popular daily newspapers in Shanghai, delivered the opening announcement for its *fukan*, which literally means “the minor part of the newspaper” or “newspaper supplement.” This *fukan*, titled *Xuedeng*, or *Learning Light*, was the earliest of the “Four Big *Fukans*”<sup>1</sup> during China’s May Fourth era.<sup>2</sup> All four of these *fukans* offered comprehensive introductions to and played crucial roles in spreading new ideas and customs. These *fukans* provided overviews of international trends in the arts and organized prompt discussions and debates on contemporary events both inside and outside China in the late 1910s and early 1920s.

*Fukan* is a tradition unique to Chinese newspapers, included with the main part of the newspapers and sent to subscribers every day. “Newspaper supplement” is only a

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rough translation, as it is hard to find counterparts in the West. *Fukans* first appeared in late Qing, and in the beginning, these early-stage newspaper supplements were considered to be of low prestige because they mainly published articles of leisure and amusement. Around the turn of the twentieth century, however, both constitutional reformers and revolutionaries began to remodel the *fukans* into propaganda tools similar to flyers, and to bring their contents more in line with the main part of newspapers. By 1919, the supplements had evolved into substantial parts of newspapers, with their own appeal; compared to the main papers, the supplements provided coverage of greater depth in a much smaller size.

*Fukans* are significant in examining the relevance of the concept of the public sphere, originally theorized by Jürgen Habermas, in the context of Chinese history. In this article, I will take *Learning Light* as a model, by looking at the leadership of its chief editor, Zhang Dongsun, as well as looking at its publication of the discussion about the patriotic student demonstration in 1919, to exemplify how *fukans* served a very Habermasian function and how May Fourth intellectuals put conscious effort into constructing and disciplining China's public sphere. Primarily, we need to review the original definition of public sphere and justify the *fukan*'s qualification as a model.

## **PUBLIC SPHERE AND FUKANS**

Jürgen Habermas (1989) gave a thorough and systematic conceptualization of “public sphere” in his milestone scholarship, according to which Joan Landes succinctly summarized the definition of public sphere as an “informal association of private persons oriented to general interests, [that] served to mediate between the economy and network of intergroup relations and the state” (Landes 1988: 5–6). This suggests three key features of the public sphere. The first is independence, which means that the public sphere is a mechanism independent from both the government and society, so that it stands neutral to the interests of the two. The second is a disregard of status, which means every participant in the public sphere should be seen as an equal member, regardless of social class or professional title. The third is inclusivity, suggesting that the public sphere should incorporate various voices and all levels of participation, denying any monopoly or domination. The public sphere was also a mark of modernity. According to Habermas, the rise of a liberal democratic public sphere was central to the modernization of late-eighteenth-century societies (Landes 1988: 5). Besides Habermas, other scholars have contributed to theorizing the public sphere. A common thread in their work is that political action is steered by the public sphere and that the only legitimate governments are those that listen to the public sphere. Democratic governance rests on the capacity of and opportunity for citizens to engage in enlightened debates.

Habermas proposed various types of the public sphere that had helped foster Western democracy and, in a broader sense, modernity. Salons and coffee shops of eighteenth-century France were typical examples. Another important form of the public sphere was print media—newspapers in particular. Early Western newspapers did not touch upon political issues, because of government pressure and censorship, but their wide readership and capability to evoke public emotions allowed them to contribute to

the formation of later revolutions from which modern society was forged. Since the 1980s, scholars have been applying the concept of the public sphere to Chinese studies, mainly in urban history and in studies of the history of print media. It is not coincidental that print media becomes the research focus in this regard for both Western and Chinese scholars, as it contains a much larger volume of the accessible records of public opinions than any other source.

Among the various types of print media, the *fukan* is an ideal and in some ways better Habermasian model than newspapers and journals. Firstly, *fukans* flourished in the May Fourth era, which is generally regarded as the most “free” period for literature in Chinese history, with the exception of the Spring and Autumn and the Warring States periods (which together lasted from approximately 771 BC to 221 BC). New dictatorship was not yet established in this chaotic warlord era after the collapse of the Qing dynasty, which allowed *fukans* to be largely free from government control. Secondly, they had much more inclusive readership and authorship. For example, in high-profile journals such as *La Jeunesse (New Youth)*, the authors were mainly famous scholars and distinguished students, but the voices from lower social classes were seldom presented, and the circulation volume of such journals was obviously much less than for daily newspapers and *fukans*. For popular daily newspapers such as *Shenbao*, in spite of its huge readership, authors were mainly employed journalists and editors, and the writings were often “reporting” and brief commentaries rather than in-depth discussions. In comparison, *fukans* won out in that the audience for and contributors to them came from the entire literary population, and their circulation was no less than that of the parent newspaper. Moreover, *fukans* published both segmented opinions and large-scale debates on specific topics. Members of the elite read and wrote for *fukans*, but they were outnumbered in these roles by members of other groups, such as primary- and middle-school teachers, rural and urban students, local gentry, urban professionals, merchants, artisans, and so on. Even those belonging to more marginal groups were involved with *fukans*. I have found examples, for instance, of a poor Buddhist nun expressing her aspiration of “serving the new society” (*Learning Light*, April 1920) and of a low-ranking soldier using a *fukan* as a medium for describing his dislike of warlords (*Awakening*, May 1920). Thirdly, the editors of *fukans*, the people in charge of discussions and debates by way of selecting writings to be published and adding editorial comments, were mostly moderate in their respective political and cultural standings, which enabled them to avoid arbitrariness or prejudice like that of the extreme left or right.<sup>3</sup> This moderateness also made the editors appear more approachable, which in turn added to the potential readership and authorship.

Now let us start to focus on the particular *fukan*, *Learning Light*, under examination in this article. Its parent newspaper, *Shishi xinbao* (the *China Times*), was initially the mouthpiece of late-Qing constitutional reformists, headed by Liang Qichao. After the 1911 Revolution, Liang Qichao and his followers used *Learning Light* to advocate republicanism, and the *fukan*'s pages were filled with pieces by authors actively involved in the campaigns against Yuan Shikai. *Learning Light* started its publication as a weekly supplement but became daily in January 1919. It was the first newspaper supplement to publish vernacular literature, such as Guo Moruo's poems and Mao Dun's

translations of Russian short novels. Its major authors included Zhang Dongsun, Kuangseng, Yu Songhua, Li Shicen, and Zheng Zhenduo, among which Zhang Dongsun, who was born into a culturally elite family and once studied Western philosophy in Japan, served as the chief editor. *Learning Light* under Zhang's leadership bore an obvious moderate color, with no less critical strength than its contemporary pro-left newspapers, journals, and *fukan* (*Awakening*, for example).

In the opening announcement of *Learning Light*, Zhang Dongsun stated, "These days, society is a den of whores and gamblers, politics suffers from the poison of wanton selfishness, [and] we few good men are left without a place to abide. Rather than contend with them, I would open up a new world for us. ... [Our purposes are] first, promote the cause of education and foster the growth of culture; second, prevent factionalism and solicit many topics for discussion; third, this [*Learning Light*] is not just for the editors and the editors' friends to publish their articles, but for people from the whole of society to voice their opinions" (*Learning Light*, March 4, 1918).

This announcement conveyed two messages. The first stated purpose indicated that *Learning Light* would practice the tenets of the New Culture Movement. The last two of the stated purposes emphasized *Learning Light's* inclusiveness, implying that this *fukan* was to be remarkably different from late-Qing revolutionary pamphlets and even from those influential new culture journals such as *La Jeunesse* and *New Tides* (*Xin Chao*); *Learning Light* was not just a propaganda organ of a certain political or cultural faction. This feature qualifies *Learning Light* as a possible model of the public sphere, whereas, in comparison, most of the late-Qing and New Culture print media could be seen only as "civil societies."

In the following two sections, I will show how *Learning Light*, with the keynote established by Zhang Dongsun, advocated principles of rationality, tolerance, openness, and pragmatism, which are crucial to the construction of the public sphere. I pay attention to the discussants' language as well as arguments. By comparing their tone, phrasing, and argumentation, we can also see the different influences exerted by the moderate and left-wing intellectuals.

### **DISCIPLINING THE PUBLIC SPHERE: HEALTHY PERSONALITY, TOLERANCE, AND RATIONALITY**

Zhang Dongsun never systematically described the specifics of what a public sphere was; in his words, it was "the mechanisms that check the government and are responsible to society." Through his writings and editorials, however, people can see how he consciously tried to set rules, though sometimes implicitly, to construct *Learning Light* as a public sphere, according very closely with two basic characteristics formulated by Habermas: "disregard of status" and "inclusivity." Specifically, the "disregard of status" means treating each discussant with an equal attitude and courtesy, which was part of his conceptualization of a "modern people" with a healthy personality. This was especially significant for the chief editor of the newspaper supplement as a moderator of the public sphere. "Inclusivity," just as Zhang Dongsun stated in the opening announcement, means

preventing factionalism and incorporating as many discussion topics as possible, which could be achieved only in an atmosphere of tolerance and rationality.

As early as September 1918, Zhang Dongsun proposed that an ideal personality should be refined and kind, as opposed to vulgar and arbitrary (*Learning Light*, September 16, 1918). To achieve such a personality, a liberal arts education was essential: “Look at British people; even a hairdresser knows John Milton’s poems, so no wonder their courtesy is so desirable.” (*Learning Light*, September 16, 1918). Zhang Dongsun believed that acquiring such a personality was a precondition to participating in the discussions of a public sphere. This belief enabled his style as chief editor to be polite, mild, and significantly more low-key than many left-wing editors. From the May Fourth era and throughout the 1930s, left-wing intellectuals, such as Lu Xun and Chen Duxiu, tended to be honored as “advisors of the youth” (*qingnian daoshi*), partly because their forthright arguments against social injustice sparked hero worship in the minds of many young people. The left wing possessed an elitist consciousness as vanguards and leaders, often implicitly positioning themselves above the common man or woman, and they tended to “preach” to and “teach” the masses (*baixing*). People, especially young intellectuals, admired and “listened to” them. In comparison, moderate intellectuals, such as Zhang Dongsun and Hu Shi,<sup>4</sup> tended to show up with a more mild attitude. They were the ones whom common people and young intellectuals felt they could have easy conversations with. For example, in December 1919, a young rank-and-file soldier wrote to Zhang Dongsun to question his arguments on the military situation of the world. In his reply, Zhang Dongsun used honorifics to address the soldier and in the end modestly stated that the soldier’s opinions were not necessarily correct (*Learning Light*, December 20, 1919). The moderates also differed from the left wing in that they tended to avoid face-to-face confrontations and preferred to comment on the actual facts rather than on particular objects. For instance, in November 1919, an anonymous reader revealed a scandal that might involve a famous publishing house. Zhang Dongsun, in his comments, did not even mention the name of the publisher as the reader had done; instead, he referred to it as “some book company” and then focused on the scandal itself.

Numerous “unknown” people developed an affinity toward Zhang Dongsun’s mild and polite style and thus were attracted to the discussions in *Learning Light*, where they could talk about their opinions freely without fearing public humiliation. Sensitive young intellectuals did not need to worry that their fragile academic egos would be hurt when facing Zhang Dongsun and his coeditors. The discussions were mostly concentrated in the correspondence section. The layout of *Learning Light*, like that of many other journals and newspaper supplements of that era, carved out different sections for political commentaries, translations, new literature, and others. Most of the journals and newspaper supplements had a correspondence section, which was a column for publishing letters from the audience as well as editors’ replies. Thanks to the approachable personality of Zhang Dongsun, the volume of the letters in the correspondence section of *Learning Light* was among the top of its peers. The other most popular correspondence section was in *Awakening*, the *fukan* of *Republican Daily*, whose chief editor was Shao Lizi, serving as the “peacemaker” for the negotiations between the Nationalist Party and the Communist Party at several crucial historical junctures during

his life. Obviously, Zhang Dongsun and Shao Lizi shared a competence of communicating with different groups of interests.

The correspondence section not only strengthened the feature of the *fukan* as a model for a public sphere but also bore out the goals of the New Culture–May Fourth Movement. The correspondence section had its counterparts in China’s earliest newspapers, such as the *Shenbao*, but at that time, the letters in the section were written in classic Chinese and the topics were quite limited. In the correspondence section of left-wing journals such as *La Jeunesse*, the tone, wording, and structure of the letters were formal, and the topics were mostly about serious academic and intellectual issues. In contrast, the letters in the correspondence section of *Learning Light* and *Awakening* were written in a vivid colloquial style. This certainly went far to encourage the development of vernacular Chinese, a cornerstone of the New Culture Movement. Moreover, these letters did not have to be well organized essays or focus on a certain thesis or argument. They flowed organically with the contours of the writer’s (in some cases untrained) mind. One letter could touch several random topics. Objectively, this sped up the spread and exchange of information and formed a virtual network among the readers. For instance, one could talk about religion and church schools in the letter and end by soliciting a book from Zhang Dongsun, or he could deliver his opinions on breaking social events at length and in depth and then share information on applying for colleges in France, which might interest the readers who sought to study abroad. The correspondence section therefore worked in a fashion similar to online electronic message boards today, and the editors played the role of discussion leaders of these message boards.

As the readership and topics of debate broadened, discrepancies, contentions, and even conflicts naturally emerged. Zhang Dongsun and his coeditors realized the lack of civility in the discussions and sensed that if they did not approach issues with discipline, the nascent public sphere would be ruined. They adopted a guideline based on tolerance and rationality.

The major writers to realize the lack of civil discourse were Lan Gongwu and Kuang Seng. Both of them were Zhang Dongsun’s friends, and Kuang Seng was also the coeditor of *Learning Light*. Lan Gongwu pointed out, “In Europe and America, the more people argue, the closer people are to the truth. In China, that is a totally different story. People only get more confused. The reason is that everyone fears to lose face and would not admit that other people are stronger than themselves, which is totally irrational. Thus any kind of debate turns out to be a political struggle ... people like to compare others’ defects with their own strength. ... The only purpose is to win. In so doing, they attack trivial things rather than look at the general argument so that sometimes in the end they forget what they are arguing about” (*Learning Light*, February 28, 1919). Kuang Seng used a metaphor to describe this situation: “When Westerners argue, they act like two cars driving toward the same direction along different parallel lanes, so they are always moving forward and making progress, while we Chinese are like two cars driving face-to-face in the same lane, only to end in a crash” (*Learning Light*, March 1, 1919).

Both Lan Gongwu and Kuang Seng attributed the existence of such attitudes to the left-wing intellectuals associated with *La Jeunesse*, including Chen Duxiu.<sup>5</sup> In January 1920, Chen published “An Open Letter to the Comrades of the New Culture

Movement,” and soon, a couple of “comrades” replied to the open letter, complaining that Chen Duxiu was so eager and hasty to attack that he did not even look through each comrade’s opinions and then confused the two (*China Times*, January 1920). The left wing’s style could be seen as a continuity of the tradition of Chinese political culture that the oppositional party could never substantially exist—as the saying goes, “one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers.” There are studies even attempting to relate the Chinese left to the Jacobins of the French Revolution, arguing that the culture of intolerance implied genealogical connections between the two (Gao 1991).

*Learning Light* was the first among its contemporaries to point out that the culture of intolerance would negatively influence the New Culture and May Fourth Movements and, in the longer term, the future of public life in China, whether in public debate or public policy. In contrast, though Lan Gongwu and Kuang Seng did criticize the language style of left-wing intellectuals, they objectively stated that it was the dark social reality, rather than the left-wing intellectuals, that should take the blame. Lan Gongwu believed “it is no doubt that the achievement of *La Jeunesse* in this intellectual revolution is paramount ... some people said that *La Jeunesse* curses too much, but I do not agree. Today’s China is full of things that deserve to be cursed ... cursing is unavoidable as long as the decaying old things still exist” (*Learning Light*, March 1, 1919). He further explained that he was not justifying cursing but that “we just should learn to discern different curses. It is reasonable to curse social injustice; however, if you intended to use mean words to attack your rival, then it makes an ill habit. ... The debate itself was to show the audience the opinions from both sides, not to eradicate either one of the two sides. ... Were *La Jeunesse* to delete those mean words, their reputation would be doubled” (*Learning Light*, March 1, 1919).

In setting the rule of language use in this public sphere, Kuang Seng specifically wrote an editorial, “The Attitudes of Debaters,” and Zhang Dongsun placed the article in the most prominent position of that issue of *Learning Light*: “The debate is not for honor but for truth. ... To reach truth, we need to ‘eliminate self and work for public interests (*Quji Shanggong*).’ ... Any kind of hegemony or disregard of others is only to degrade oneself. ... So we should respect rationality and hold back emotion, pursue truth rather than unnecessary conflicts” (*Learning Light*, March 20, 1919). According to this rule advocating rationality and tolerance, Zhang Dongsun and his colleagues moderated multiple discussions and debates on contemporary social and political issues and events, among which the discussion on the “student wave” in 1919 was the most influential one.

## **DISCUSSION ON THE “STUDENT WAVE (*XUECHAO*)”**

The term “student wave” refers to the student demonstration that happened on May 4, 1919, as well as the strikes in the following months. During this turbulent time, various print media in China expressed their concerns in their own ways. What is worth noting is the differences between newspapers and *fukans* in the treatment of the student wave. In most cases, newspapers such as the *Shenbao* performed the basic job of print media: reporting the breaking news in a timely fashion, combining pictures, vivid descriptions, sometimes exaggerating for eye-catching purpose, with random comments from famous

pressmen, distinguished scholars, or senior officials. To a large degree, their treatment of these issues was based on commercial interests. *Fukans*, on the other hand, solicited viewpoints and suggestions from every possible reader the circulation could reach. In this sense, the discussions published in *fukans* were more representative of public opinion, and *fukans* are therefore a closer definition of the public spheres than are big commercial newspapers.

*Learning Light* followed the student wave from March, when the tensions between Peking University and the warlord government emerged, until the student wave's final pacification in September. The articles selected by Zhang Dongsun and his coeditors proposed concrete and pragmatic measures and suggestions, trying to protect the interests of the students and to avoid any unnecessary loss and destruction. It should be pointed out that holding back radicalism does not mean they exhibited less courage or bore less responsibility for patriotic endeavors. The moderate intellectuals were unlike the left wing, which, both in language and action, glorified sacrifice and devotion regardless of the price.

Compared to those in other *fukans*, the articles about the student wave published in *Learning Light* possessed three prominent characteristics. First, many of them consciously regulated the relations between the different interests involved, including government, students, teachers, and all levels of civil societies, which highlighted the role of *Learning Light* as part of the public sphere. Second, they not only recognized the patriotic contribution of the student wave but also (and perhaps more so) emphasized its significance in Chinese enlightenment. The articles published in *Learning Light* gave credit to the students' courage but were cool-headedly aware that students alone could not make much of a difference. They cared more about the development of people's civic values than about the call for "all Chinese to unite to fight." The authors of these articles valued the experiences of self-government that emerged among student organizations, which in their eyes was part of the same continuum of local self-government that had started to emerge in the late Qing period. The young students' practice might prepare for building democracy in China. In other words, the student wave was an enlightenment movement with a patriotic face. Third, as the student wave began to come to a close, *Learning Light* was one of the earliest among all *fukans* to reflect upon this movement's legacies, including both positive and problematic ones.

The earliest two related pieces on student activism appeared in March 1919, when the student wave was being fermented. *Learning Light* agreed with the left wing on criticizing the dictatorship of the warlord government but also pointed out the defects within the intelligentsia (*xuejie*). The first article was entitled "Voicing Discontent on Behalf of Expelled University Professors" and argued that it was a violation of the freedom of speech to expell Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi from Peking University for their writings against the warlords (*Learning Light*, March 5, 1919). This was followed by "The Expulsion of University Professors Should Serve as a Warning to All Parties Involved," written by Zuo Xuexun, a professor of Fudan University (*Learning Light*, March 11, 1919). Zuo mentioned that because the government was already unpopular, the intelligentsia should not hurt itself with internal factional struggles: "I heard that the professors and students at Peking University were divided into two groups: the new

faction and the old faction. The two cannot stand with each other under the same roof and often generate emotion-driven conflicts (*ganqing yongshi*). ... The government will take advantage of this to turn down our appeals” (*Learning Light*, March 11, 1919). “Emotion-driven” was used, as opposed to rational treatment, which *Learning Light* had advocated all along. Zuo Xuexun also used the term *dangtongfayi*, which literally means “form cliques with those similar and destroy those who dissent,” to describe how intense the relation between the two factions could be.

As the student movement progressed, it became more and more apparent that left and moderate intellectuals played sharply different roles. The left intellectuals more often acted as spiritual leaders while the moderates were better in taking care of pragmatic issues. The students of early May 1919 sometimes engaged in radical acts, including injuring their bodies (e.g., writing out a slogan in one’s own blood) to demonstrate their passion for the cause. After that, throughout May and June, the left wing continued their heroic acts of radicalism. Chen Duxiu and his student followers spread pamphlets in parks and teahouses in Beijing, activities that eventually led to Chen Duxiu’s arrest in mid-June. During this period, besides *La Jeunesse*, Chen Duxiu edited another famous journal called *Weekly Commentaries (Meizhou Pinglun)*. In this journal, he published “Research Room and Jail,” one of his most inspiring pieces: “World civilization originated from two kinds of places: scientific research rooms and jails. We young people must learn to take turns to live in research rooms and jails, and this is the true high-minded life. Civilization born out of these two places is true civilization” (*Weekly Commentaries*, June 8, 1919).

The left wing was generally more gifted than the moderates in writing and in using rhetorical devices. Though many of these writers had long advocated vernacular Chinese, they often combined traditional poetic writing skills with their vernacular prose to make their articles more phonetically pleasant, a practice reminiscent of late-Qing revolutionary pamphlets written by Zou Rong and Chen Tianhua, and thus appealing to ardent young people. For example, Li Dazhao used to passionately exclaim, “I wish for nothing more for my beloved youth than to live in youth and die in youth” (*La Jeunesse*, September 1, 1916), and Chen Duxiu claimed that “we shall never decline (our responsibility) even if we must be beheaded and shed blood” (*La Jeunesse*, January 15, 1919). Of course, this was indispensable in creating the great and symbolic historic events that are remembered and celebrated by later generations. When it came to realist struggles, however, this radicalism might cause unnecessary losses.

With no less moral courage than intellectuals on the left, moderate intellectuals, often using plain language, paid more attention to the actual effects of concrete measures. By May 19, 1919, groups of students had been arrested, and Cai Yuanpei, then president of Peking University, was forced to leave office. The original purpose of the student strike had been to support Cai retaining his position and to protest against Japanese attempts at formalizing its acquisition of Shandong. The moderates agreed with the left on the just nature of the strike but were reserved in terms of strategy. Their primary concern was controlling the scale of the strike:

We need to be clear that the purpose of student strike is to ask Sir Cai (Yuanpei) back. ... We should unite with other

powers to press the government to release the arrested students rather than limitlessly broaden the scale of the strike. ... In Shanghai, many primary school students joined the strike, and they do not even understand what is happening. ... Also we need to consider how long should the strike last, and after all, study should be the major task for students. (*Learning Light*, May 21, 1919)<sup>6</sup>

Some stated frankly that the student strike was not an effective measure at all: Japanese encroachment could not be stopped, but the education of Chinese youth, who were the hope of China, was being delayed (*Learning Light*, May 23, 1919).

On May 27, 1919, *Learning Light* published a formal announcement soliciting opinions about how to solve the problem of the student strike:

Since the college students in Beijing started the strike, other cities followed. The patriotic affection should be commended. However, the overall strike was a huge sacrifice to our society and country. We must reach a desirable effect worth this sacrifice. So we hereby solicit opinions about (1) What measures should the students take during the strike? (2) What kind of attitude should college professors and staff have? (3) How do all the sections of society view the strike?

This announcement recognized the justice of the strike, which was no different than the left wing, but it made clear, by noting, “one-sided accounts of events would not be published” (*Learning Light*, May 27, 1919), that the moderates cared more about the actual effect, such as how to avoid or diminish unnecessary loss by all means. There was nothing wrong with pursuing justice and progress, yet to prepare for the future in the event that their pursuits could not be immediately realized, it was important that every part of their forces be protected—that is to say, the security of hundreds of thousands of individual students be secured. Furthermore, the announcement stated clearly that what the *fukan* wanted was concrete solutions, not slogans. Chow Tse-tung mentioned in his book (1960) that *Shishi Xinbao* (the *China Times*) and *Minguo Ribao* gained popularity for their follow-up on the student wave. The reason for the popularity of *Shishi Xinbao* lay at least in part in the opinion soliciting of *Learning Light*, which made every effort to make the interests of the students a priority.

Opinions, most of which were quite detailed, swarmed in during the following days. The authors of these articles were Shanghai citizens from various backgrounds. For example, a writer with a Daoist pen name, *guanyu*, suggested that students should divide their labor, with energetic ones going to other cities to lecture and bookish ones staying local (*Learning Light*, May 29, 1919). Another writer, with the pen named *zongyuan*, with a Buddhist stylization, contributed tips on public lecturing:

Students are unable to avoid passionate words in their lectures, but I hope you guys can be a little more reserved:

Japanese are seeking excuses to send troops, do not give them any. They also cannot wait to see us behave like the Boxers and spread rumors to the international community, so never express xenophobic emotions. Some people think the strike is meaningless; then you need to explain your grievances patiently. (*Learning Light*, May 31, 1919)

Chow Tse-Tsung (1960) pointed out that one reason for Shanghai to take Beijing's place as the center of the student wave was that the students in Shanghai "seemed" to know more clearly the power of the classes of merchants and workers and thus were the first across the country to unite with the two groups. This argument could not be more accurate, but Chow did not examine the question of how, as it was not the focus of his book. The answer to this question can be found from the opinions published in response to *Learning Light*'s solicitation of opinions on the student strike.

At the beginning, the students themselves did not realize that they could mobilize the merchants—not until it was later suggested: "Now the students [are] striking, but they alone cannot make it. [They] have to unite the merchants and the industrialists to intimidate the government. Now the chamber of commerce has been controlled by national traitors, so [the students] must make every effort to push the reorganization of the chamber" (*Learning Light*, May 28, 1919). This opinion was published on May 28, which means by then, the students and merchants had not yet united, which accords with Chow's (1960) description that the merchants and the industrialists "seemed" to not support the students. Following that opinion, more people gave concrete suggestions, such as "Though somebody has suggested reorganizing the chamber of commerce, how can we persuade those merchants who only care about profits? Hometown fraternity is an easy way to go (*xiangyi jihou, lianluo jiaoyi*). Cantonese students should turn to the guild of Canton (*yuebang*), and Ningpo students should turn to the guild of Ningpo (*yongbang*). ... We should notice that a great portion of our students' fathers and brothers are merchants or industrialists, why not go home often" (*Learning Light*, May 29, 1919).

Later news reports showed that these suggestions were effective, and this fact can, at least to some degree, demonstrate the role of the *fukan* as a part of the public sphere that regulated civil societies. *Learning Light* helped students negotiate with, besides the merchants and industrialists, all other parties involved. There were opinions meant to persuade the government and simultaneously remind the students not to propose too many appeals for the government to handle at once (*Learning Light*, May 28, 1919). Some parents of the students requested university professors to not stop teaching, even though teaching time had to diminish. A self-proclaimed "insider" suggested that the students could unite with all other members of society except the military, because the complexities within military troops were beyond the reach of young students (*Learning Light*, May 30, 1919). There were even compliments on a certain group of the police for their maintenance of order to avoid casualties during the strike (*Learning Light*, May 29, 1919).

Throughout the student wave, the left wing emphasized the theme of national salvation and sacrifice for truth, while the moderates, through their continuing concerns

for concrete and pragmatic issues that emerged during the strike, found that the real significance of this movement, labeled as patriotic and anti-imperialistic by left-wing elites, lay in its practice of the enlightened principles that had been advocated since the beginning of the New Culture Movement around 1915. In other words, the left wing focused on high ideals, while the right wing cared more about the implications of changes that affected countless people. Metaphorically speaking, the left wing stood on center stage to be worshiped and memorialized, while the moderates made up the backdrop. From June to July 1919, Zhang Dongsun and his coeditors published several opinions that dealt with the enlightenment dimension of the student strike, and it seemed a gesture to their left-wing counterpart: No matter how pressing the call of national salvation was, the pursuit of enlightenment should not be abandoned.

Many of these opinions were about the National Student Union established during the student wave—a mark of progress in self-consciousness and gender equality. The union was the first student organization in China that recruited both male and female members (Chow 1960). “This great union across the nation marks a great awakening of college students. This was not just made for the issue of Shandong or for the secret diplomacy with Japan. It is a congregation that strives for themselves, not just to fight against the authority of the warlord government” (*Learning Light*, July 7, 1919). John Dewey, the world-renowned American educator, also joined this discussion. He wrote his opinions to Dr. Jiang Menglin, a top administrator at Peking University, and then *Learning Light* published the translation by Jiang. Dewey suggested that the union system be kept forever and expected that all the female students in China take this as the first step and then start their own course of participation in politics, just like women in the United States (*Learning Light*, May 31, 1919).

The performance of college students during this turbulent time was also seen as an example of the practice of local self-government, following trends that had started to emerge since the late Qing period. The power of students to influence the government might be limited, but people found a silver lining:

Dr. Dewey said that a school is a miniature of society. At school, students should learn how to behave in society as well as textbook knowledge. Students should be able to manage themselves. We taught local self-government in the textbook of politics, but before the student wave, they never had a chance to practice it. This time they organized themselves, and they did even better than a conference of college professors in terms of maintaining order and division of labor. ... Our China has tried the experiment of local self-government in the late Qing and were promised a good future in the beginning of the Republican period. But since Yuan Shikai took the throne, the first thing he did was to abolish local self-government. When it comes to the election of the legislature, people could sell their personal dignity and citizenship for a bribe of a three-hundred silver

certificate. ... Merchants belong to the upper middle class of society; [they should have taken more responsibilities] but they always claimed “businessmen only do business (*zai shang yan shang*).” So our people do not take any responsibilities for local society. Now when we want to restore local self-government, the student wave provides a precious opportunity for practice. This time the students formed a union, and they actually put the knowledge of “separation of powers” learnt from textbooks into place, such as setting up elections and organizing the board of executives, which helped them accumulate rich experiences for the future. ... One day when they stepped out of the school gates, they could go ahead to continue ideals we have had since the late Qing. (*Learning Light*, June 3, 1919).

Kuang Seng, as coeditor of *Learning Light*, in his commentary, added other details regarding the development of civic values (see *Learning Light*, July 3–4, 1919). For example, the students aided the citizens of Shanghai in identifying fake and inferior goods when they delivered lectures on boycotting Japanese goods. Students also paid great attention to the maintenance of sanitation in the city.

Kuang Seng emphasized that a remarkable achievement made by the student wave was that people changed the custom of simply obeying their superiors and instead learned to work as a team, which implied equal participation of all members. Since the New Culture Movement had begun, various scholars had advocated liberty and equality on paper, but most people, including students, did not have many opportunities to experience them in everyday life or as a political reality. Most of them still had to obey family patriarchs in choosing their spouses. Consequently, many articles against arranged marriages were published in journals and newspapers. Even Sun Yat-sen, the “progressive” national father, still compelled his followers to pledge allegiance to him in 1914, not to mention the despotic bureaucracy of the warlord government. Kuang Seng, through his interview with the students participating in the strike, sensed that “they have learned to tell the difference between ‘respect’ and ‘obey.’ They respect the decisions made by the board of the student union, which also include their own will by voting, but never obey blindly” (*Learning Light*, July 3–4, 1919).

In September, after Chen Duxiu was released from jail, both the left and the moderates began to reflect on the student wave. The left wing concluded that “truth eventually won over might,”<sup>7</sup> but Zhang Dongsun and his coeditors again took a different approach, describing the student wave with disenchantment and attempting to show future generations the truth behind the beginning of the wave. Zhang Dongsun believed that there must be reasons, other than nationalist sentiment, that made the student demonstrations spread so quickly from Beijing to Shanghai and other cities, and he thus called for articles on this topic. Among all the articles in response, Zhang Dongsun expressed appreciation for an article titled “Student Demonstration and Mass Psychology,” authored by Ms. Ma Jiandong. This pen name

literally means “strengthen the East,” with a masculine connotation. It is easy to imagine that the author was a typical “new woman” during the May Fourth era.

Ma Jiandong gave this account of the rapid formation of the national-scale student demonstration:

Everyone has individual consciousness based on their own choice. However, individual consciousness disappears when a mass psychology is formed. When the masses gather and take to the street, even most quiet people would follow, without knowing that their own individual consciousness has disappeared. ... People without consciousness are brave ... they just do what the masses do. ... For example, if a scientist mistakenly reports that Halley’s Comet will hit the earth, then everyone will feel that the end of the world is near. Similarly, when an eloquent scholar delivers a moving lecture and sends out posters with giant characters stating that their mission is the “salvation” of China, then everyone will feel that the time to destroy the old world has come, regardless of reality, and will believe that Rome can be built in one day so long as everyone goes onto the street. (*Learning Light*, September 26, 1919)

Ma also argued that the demonstration based on this kind of approach ran the risk of either disintegrating, being taken advantage of by enemies of the students, or leading to blood being shed in vain.

*Learning Light* was the one of the few, if not the only, intellectual-edited publications that revealed the problematic side of the student wave. Zhang Dongsun’s articles in this regard actually resonated with the rising tide of iconoclasm in 1919 and 1920. When the left-wing cultural elites called on people to beat down various religious and secular icons, many of them just ignored a simple fact that they were minting the name “May Fourth” as a new icon, in that the May Fourth Movement was synonymous with justice and victory. Whenever the government violates its duty, following the precedent of the May Fourth Movement, people can take to the street and demonstrate, believing that their actions must invariably lead to success because the people who participate all bear indomitable truth in their hearts. This was a misleading mythologized narrative. Zhang Dongsun and the authors of *Learning Light* attempted to counteract this narrative, trying to leave a more realistic record for future generations. In this sense, the moderates went further in the enlightenment project than did the left wing. Actually, during the movement, they had already done similar work: The publishing of opinions on how to mobilize merchants indicated that it was the lineage and native place networks, rather than patriotic passions, that finally put things into place.

## CONCLUSION

The *fukan*, as a tradition unique to Chinese newspapers, functioned as a very to-the-point model of the public sphere in late 1910s and early 1920s, thanks to both extrinsic and intrinsic causes. The extrinsic lies in the fact that the May Fourth era was the most “free” period in Chinese history since the Autumn and Spring and the Warring States periods. The last imperial dynasty had collapsed and the new authoritarian regime of Chiang Kai-Shek was yet to be established, and the power vacuum in this interim allowed *fukan* to remain free from harsh censorship. The intrinsic cause was obviously the conscious efforts of leading intellectuals who served as chief editors, with Zhang Dongsun as a typical representative. Under the leadership of and the discipline set by Zhang Dongsun and his colleagues, *Learning Light* incorporated voices across the social stratum and the political spectrum, denying monopoly and disrespect, which demonstrated a strong Habermasian feature. In this sense, *fukan*, as a print public sphere, could also be regarded as one achievement of the May Fourth Movement.

Both left and moderate intellectuals contributed to construct this public sphere, in their respective ways. The left were more glamorous as spiritual leaders, offering high ideals shining in the spotlight of the historical stage. In comparison, the moderates served as pragmatic organizers, building the blocks and setting a benevolent environment for the stage. The left pointed out the direction for the youth to pursue, while the moderates helped the youth more with overcoming specific difficulties down the road. In spite of the differences, the left and moderates shared the same moral courage regarding public affairs.

## ENDNOTES

1. The other three, respectively, were the *fukans* of *Chenbao (Morning News)*, *Jingbao (Capital News)*, and *Minguo ribao (Republican Daily)*, which was titled *Juewu*, or *Awakening*.
2. On May 4, 1919, college students in Beijing (Peking) led a protest against what was regarded as the spineless acquiescence of the Chinese delegation to the Versailles Peace Conference in ceding the former German concessions in China to Japan. Soon, student protests sprang up in other big cities as well. The May Fourth Incident gave its name to the broader and lengthier era of cultural renewal from the collapse of the Qing empire in 1911. This era spanned from 1915, when Hu Shi, Chen Duxiu, and their peers first launched the New Culture Movement, up to around 1926. Later generations call this era the May Fourth era and often refer to the New Culture Movement as the May Fourth–New Culture Movement. Hu Shi and Chen Duxiu were, respectively, the liberalist and left-wing leaders of the movement.
3. For example, though Zhang Dongsun was a liberal intellectual and Liu Yazi, editor in chief of *Awakening*, was pro-left (in many historical occasions during life), they shared a similar centrist editorial style.
4. Hu Shi had a famous saying: “Tolerance is more important than freedom.”

5. Chen Duxiu and Li Dazhao, both distinguished professors of humanities and social sciences of Peking University, were two of the most prominent left-wing leaders of the time.
6. For an extended discussion of Shanghai demonstrations of this period, see Wasserstrom (1991).
7. These are Li Dazhao's words.

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