

A Humanist in Wartime France: Wang Jingwei during the First World War

Zhiyi Yang

Frankfurt

z.yang@em.uni-frankfurt.de

August 1912, Wang Zhaoming 汪兆銘 (1883–1944; better known as Wang Jingwei) left China for France. A leader of the nationalist movement, he had been imprisoned by the Manchu Regime for a failed attempt on the Prince Regent's life. Now that the Republic had been founded, he chose to reject all offers of government positions. Instead, he decided to continue his study in France, under the tutelage of his anarchist friends. This erstwhile assassin would emerge from WWI France as a humanist opposed to all forms of violence.

Employing rarely studied archival materials, this paper analyzes his poems during those *Lehrjahre* and *Wanderjahre*. It argues that, far from being idyllic pastorals as many biographers assume, they show a man torn by conflicting ideologies, agonizing over unfulfilled commitments, and tormented by his inner demons. Through these poems, he also creates an identity that is a traditional scholar-bureaucrat, an anarchist philosophe, a modern knowledge professional, and a statesman all in one – an identity that was unique in China's transition into a modern polity. Wang's later protean ideological allegiances, including his infamous collaboration with Japan under the banner of Pan-Asianism during WWII, arguably illustrated his intellectual hybridity. This paper will in particular examine a poem that ostensibly “translated” Jean-Pierre de Florian's fable “La Brebis et le Chien” into a pentasyllabic ballad, elaborating on pacifism and the strength of the weak. It was both a personal response to the wartime upheaval and a harbinger of his future fate.

August 1912, a handsome young Chinese boarded a steamship from Guangdong to Penang, destination France. Released only nine months ago from prison, he had since been offered, and declined, the governorship of Guangdong. He was Wang Zhaoming 汪兆銘 (1883–1944), better known by his penname Jingwei 精衛, the poster child of China's nationalist revolution, Dr. Sun Yat-sen's

(1866–1925) most trusted propagandist and fund-raiser. From April 16, 1910, to November 6, 1911, he was incarcerated in Beijing, sentenced to life for a botched attempt at the Prince Regent's life.¹ Now, the Revolution had succeeded, and he was a king-maker who brokered for peace among nationalists, constitutional monarchists, and loyalists, a process that resulted in Yuan Shikai's 袁世凱 (1859–1916) ascension to Presidency. He then abruptly decided to leave politics and to continue his study in France, the birthplace of modern revolutions. As he declared in a letter to Southeast Asian comrades, even though the Republic had been founded, the Chinese mind still needed to be reformed to become that of democratic citizens; he thus would like to follow the Buddha's teaching of enlightening himself first before enlightening others.²

Scholarly research on Wang Jingwei has so far focused on his political activities, especially during the last five years of his life when he became China's chief collaborator in her war against Japan, part of which morphed into the Pacific Theater of the Second World War.³ He defected in December 1938 from the position of KMT's Vice Chairman, second in rank only to Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek 蔣介石 (1887–1975). Even the least sympathetic historians struggle to explain his motivation, arguing that it was either his greed for power or his cowardice in continuing the resistance that led to his betrayal. Both explanations seem at odds with the idealistic young man who rejected all awards of power and left for France on that bright summer day of 1912.

Without attempting to offer a teleological explanation for all choices that Wang made in his life, in this paper I explore his little examined years in France from 1912 to 1919 – his *Wanderjahre* and *Lehrjahre*. His epistles, essays, and classical-style poems demonstrate his intellectual transition from a nationalist to a humanist, a crucial link to his later persuasions. I have gathered original

1 For Wang's English biographies, see Howard Boorman, "Wang Ching-wei: China's Romantic Radical", in: *Political Science Quarterly* 79.4 (1964), pp. 504–525; and idem, "Wang Ching-wei: A Political Profile", in: Chün-tu Hsüeh (ed.), *Revolutionary Leaders of Modern China*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1971, pp. 295–319.

2 "Wang Zhaoming qishi (gao Nanyang renshi)" 汪兆銘啟事 (告南洋人士), KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 09679. Recorded also in: Ho Manghang 何孟恒 [aka. He Wenjie 何文傑], *Wang Jingwei xiandai Zhongguo* 汪精衛現代中國, manuscript (xerox copy at New York Public Library), pp. 50–51.

3 For English studies on Wang's collaborationist Reorganized National Government (RNG, 1940–1945), see Gerald E. Bunker, *The Peace Conspiracy: Wang Ching-wei and the China War, 1937–1941*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972; David P. Barrett / Larry N. Shyu (eds.), *Chinese Collaboration with Japan, 1932–1945*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001; and Rana Mitter, *Forgotten Ally: China's World War II, 1937–1945*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013, to list a few.

materials, including memoirs, manuscripts, and archives from Taiwan, USA, and France, which help to reconstruct a private picture of Wang's European sojourn, punctuated by his returns to China to assist Sun's campaigns. Special attention is paid to dating his activities in Europe, a virtual blank page in all Wang's biographies and chronicles published so far. I argue that, far from being the idyllic pastorals many biographers assume them to be,⁴ his poems show a man torn by conflicting ideologies, agonizing over unfulfilled commitments, and tormented by his inner demons. Through poetry, he also creates an identity that is a traditional scholar-bureaucrat, anarchist philosophe, modern knowledge professional, and statesman all in one—an identity that was unique in China's transition into a modern polity. Wang's later protean ideological allegiances, including his brief alliance with Chinese communists and his apparent endorsement of Pan-Asianism, continued a journey toward greater intellectual cosmopolitanism that started in WWI France. I will in particular examine a poem that ostensibly "translated" Jean-Pierre de Florian's fable "La Brebis et le Chien" (The Lamb and the Dog) into a pentasyllabic ancient-style ballad, elaborating on pacifism and the strength of the weak. It was both a personal response to the wartime upheaval and a harbinger of his future fate.

Wang's *Wanderjahre*

Before 1910, Wang Jingwei was best known among the reading public as an essayist and polemist. It was in the prison of Beijing that he transformed into a poet. The passionate verses limning his revolutionary dedication were published soon upon his release and became instantly popular, burnishing his image as a romantic hero.⁵

Even though he joined the classical literature group Southern Society on April 18, 1912,⁶ he did not participate in their practice of writing occasional poetry during gatherings. Only a pentasyllabic landscape quatrain survived

4 Cai Dejin, for instance, does not even bother to cite the poems, but simply dismissed them as "flowers in the wind, moon in the water" (i.e. frivolous pastime); see Cai Dejin, *Wang Jingwei pingzhuàn* 汪精衛評傳, Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1987, p. 61. Chen Dawei's 陳大為 biography does cite quite a few poems, but calling them only pastorals, betraying Wang's detachment from China's ongoing revolution. See Chen Dawei, *Wang Jingwei dazhuàn* 汪精衛大傳, Beijing: Huawen chubanshe, 2010, pp. 33–35.

5 See Zhiyi Yang, "The Road to Lyric Martyrdom: Reading the Poetry of Wang Zhaoming (1883–1944)", in: *Chinese Literature: Essay, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)* 37 (2015), pp. 139 f.

6 See his registration card (under the name Wang Zhaoming) in: *Nanshe rushe shu* 南社入社書, vol. III, manuscript material collected in the National Library of China.

the nine months after he regained his freedom.⁷ He was busy. Aside from taking charge of Party affairs in North China, in mid-February he founded the “Promote Virtue Society” (*jindehui* 進德會) together with Wu Zihui 吳稚暉 (1865–1953; also known as Woo Tsin-hang), Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1868–1940), and Li Shizeng 李石曾 (1881–1973), fellow members in the nationalist Revolutionary Alliance (Tongmenghui 同盟會) and China’s greatest anarchists.⁸ Wu in particular exerted intellectual mentorship over Wang during those years, and epistles sent by Wang to Wu, now preserved in the KMT Party Archives in Taipei,⁹ offer precious glimpses into Wang’s life and thoughts. Members committed themselves to different degrees of “virtues.” The strictest prohibitions included not only common vices like drinking, gambling, opium, or taking concubines, but also assuming government positions or becoming parliament members. Wang Jingwei subscribed to the strictest precept. The purpose was to improve China’s social mores and to educate a modern citizenry. But his allergy to institutional power betrayed also an obsession with moral purity.

At the same time, Wang also jointly founded the Diligent Work-Frugal Study program, through which more than 1,500 Chinese students would come to study in France in the following decade. Given their immediate contact with the French labor movement, many of these worker-students would be attracted to Communism.¹⁰ Though he himself did not engage in physical labor, Wang practiced what he preached: to study. It was not without hesitation: he declared whether he would actually go depended on whether the Fatherland was in danger.¹¹ The Fatherland seemed fine. He finally boarded the ship from

7 Wang Jingwei, “Deng Gushan” 登鼓山, in: *Shuangzhaolou shici gao* 雙照樓詩詞稿, ed. by Wang Mengchuan 汪夢川, Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu, 2012 (hereafter SZL), p. 41.

8 See Cai Dejin 蔡德金 and Wang Sheng 王升, *Wang Jingwei shengping jishi* 汪精衛生平紀事, Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1993, p. 17. The “Promote Virtue Society” is briefly examined in: Arif Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p. 120.

9 Most of Wang’s private materials are likely collected in archives in Mainland China, especially the Second Historical Archives of China at Nanjing, but access has been categorically denied to researchers to date.

10 See Paul Bailey, “The Chinese Work-Study Movement in France”, in: *The China Quarterly* 115 (1988), pp. 441–461.

11 As retrospectively accounted in Cai Yuanpei’s letter to Wu Zihui, Nov. 16, 1912, KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 07865. Also found in: *Cai Yuanpei quanji* 蔡元培全集, ed. by Zhongguo Cai Yuanpei yanjiuhui 中國蔡元培研究會, Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 1997–1998, Vol. 10, p. 165.



FIG. 1.

Wang in Penang, 1912 (photo from Wangjingwei.org, reproduced with the approval of The Wang Jingwei Irrevocable Trust)

Penang to Marseille. [Fig. 1] Traversing the Indian Ocean, he wrote two poems onboard:

低首空濛裏
心隨流水喧
此生原不樂
未死敢云煩
淒斷關河影
蕭條羈旅魂
孤蓬秋雨戰
詩思倩誰溫

Lowering my head among grey vapors of the sea,
My heart chimes with the flowing waves.
This life has always been a stranger to pleasure;
But before death, I dare not declare it a burden.
Sadly fade the shadows of [China's] fortresses and rivers;
Utterly desolate is this soul of a road-trapped traveler.
A lonely boat's roof battles against autumn rains;
Who would gently warm up the poet's thoughts?

鐙影殘宵靜
濤聲挾雨來
風塵隨處是

Shadows of the lamp become still in the remnant of the night;
The sounds of waves rise, borrowing the power of the rain.
Everywhere is filled with wind and dust;

懷抱幾時開	When would this chest and bosom ever open up?
肱已慚三折	A thrice-broken arm knows frustration;
腸徒劇九迴	Intestines in anguish twist nine times in vain.
勞薪如可爇	If a tired piece of firewood can still be lit,
未敢惜寒灰	It dares not decline to turn into cold ashes. ¹²

In these poems, Wang betrays a melancholic bend that would accompany him through his life. As a matter of fact, he did not travel alone. He was accompanied by his loyal comrade and newly-wed wife, Chen Bijun 陳璧君 (1891–1959), and by their best friend Fang Junying 方君瑛 (1884–1923) and her widowed sister-in-law Zeng Xing 曾醒 (1882–1954). The four young adults further brought with them four children: Fang Junying's sister Junbi 方君璧 (1898–1986), Zeng Xing's brother Zhongming 曾仲鳴 (1896–1939), her son Fang Xianshu 方賢俶 (1900–?), and Bijun's brother Changzu 陳昌祖 (1904–1994). The last was picked up from Penang, where Bijun was also born. Cantonese was their common tongue. This small group, bounded by blood ties, friendship, and idealism, would in later years become Wang's most faithful coterie of supporters, separable only by death. They were by his side through wars, assassinations, glory, and disgrace. But despite their intimate and at times raucous company, Wang's self-image is a traveler trapped on an eternal journal of life, a lonely boat battling cosmic adversities, or a tired piece of firewood yearning to burn and turn into ashes. The last metaphor is a frequent self-image in Wang's letters, essays, and poems. It first appears in a letter that Wang wrote to his comrade Hu Hanmin 胡漢民 (1879–1936) in November 1909, before embarking on a journey of no-return to Beijing. In it he declares that he himself should be the firewood, soon to be burnt, and that Hu should be the pot that would bring warm food to the mouths of the people.¹³ He reused the image in a poem in prison (1910), written purportedly upon seeing a worn wooden wheel being chopped into pieces. To Wang, this wheel personified the qualities of endurance and sacrifice.¹⁴ Wang survived prison; meanwhile many of his comrades, Zeng Xing's late husband Fang Shengdong 方聲洞 (1886–1911) amongst them, died in the battles prior to the victory of 1911. I suspect that he was tormented by survivor's guilt. The firewood became a metaphor for his death wish for realizing the meaning of life through sacrifice.

12 Wang Jingwei, "Yinduyang zhouzhong" 印度洋舟中, in: *SZL*, p. 44.

13 See Wang Jingwei, "Yu Hu Hanmin shu" 與胡漢民書, in: *Wang Jingwei quanji* 汪精衛全集, Shanghai: Sanmin gongsi, 1929, Vol. III, p. 173.

14 Wang Jingwei, "Jian ren xi chelun wei xin wei ci zuge" 見人析車輪為薪為此作歌, in: *SZL*, p. 22.

When they arrived at Sri Lanka, Wang went to see the famous Reclining Buddha statue in the Degaldoruwa Temple. Moved by the atmospheric tranquility, he wrote a long poem, from which four lines are cited below:

回頭問臥佛	I look back to ask the Reclining Buddha:
爾乃能安眠	How could you sleep so contently?
問佛佛不應	I ask the Buddha but the Buddha does not respond;
自問亦茫然	I ask myself, and find no answer too. ¹⁵

The Buddha, Wang suggests, is taking a restful break despite his resolution to save the world from its suffering and despite the fact that the world never ceases to suffer. The poem ends with a silent image of round ripples in a deep pond. It indicates a temporary resolution to find inner peace, by emulating the Buddha who settles in the transience of being. Later Wang Jingwei would continue to find inspirations from tales of Buddhist compassion.

This group of eight arrived at Marseille on a cold November morning. The man who welcomed them on the deck was Li Shizeng, descendant of a prominent Mandarin's house, revolutionary, and the proud owner of the first tofu factory in France.¹⁶ According to Chen Changzu's English memoir, they boarded a train to Paris the same evening, arriving at the Gare de Lyon. Riding a horse-drawn carriage to their hotel, the Capital of the World left a strong impression on the young Chinese: the sound of hooves on paved stones, the hotel beds with mattresses and sheets and blankets, the two-feet-long breakfast baguette, the *métro*. The next day the ladies immediately went shopping, trading their Chinese clothes for Victorian style garbs. Their local guide at Paris was Chu Minyi 褚民誼 (1884–1946), a student of pharmacology who would later become Wang's brother-in-law and Foreign Minister in his collaborationist regime. A few days later they left for Montargis, renting a house on Rue Gambetta, close to Li Shizeng's home.¹⁷ [Fig. 2] They lived on scholarships from the Chinese government, 400 Gold Francs per month for each of the four adults.¹⁸ To put that into perspective, in 1911–1912, a female French vineyard worker's

15 Wang Jingwei, "Zhou bo Xilandao [...]" 舟泊錫蘭島 [...], in: *SZL*, p. 45.

16 This factory was set up in 1909 by Li and his fellow researchers of oriental biology. It not only was meant to make themselves economically independent and provide working opportunities for Chinese students, but also to promote soybeans as a nutrition source. See Xian Yuhao 鮮于浩, *Liu Fa qingong jianxue yundong shi* 留法勤工儉學運動史, Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2016, pp. 2 f.

17 See Chan Cheong-Choo [aka. Chen Changzu], *Memoirs of a Citizen of Early XX Century China*, self-published, 1978 [1992; first print 1967], pp. 30–32.

18 Chan, *Memoirs of a Citizen*, p. 28.



FIG. 2. *Wang and company in Montargis, 1912 (photo from Wangjingwei.org, reproduced with the approval of The Wang Jingwei Irrevocable Trust)*
 Front row (left to right): Fang Junbi, Chen Changzu, Fang Xianshu, Zeng Zhongming
 Back row (left to right): Fang Junying, Zeng Xing, Wang Jingwei, Chen Bijun

annual income was just 445 francs.¹⁹ It was a generous scholarship to award a founder of the Republic. Soon, however, due to the escalating conflict between nationalists and the Central Government, the latter often stopped paying.²⁰

With the residence of prominent Chinese intellectuals and the eventual arrival of students, the quiet French town Montargis would be transformed into the center of the Chinese work-study program in Europe. Many students registered in its agricultural, technical, and preparatory schools.²¹ Today, Li's home at 31 Rue Gambetta bears a brass plate, commemorating his sojourn. In

19 Laura Levine Frader, *Peasants and Protest: Agricultural Workers, Politics, and Unions in the Aude, 1850–1914*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991, p. 84.

20 See, e.g. Li Shizeng's letter to Wu Zhihui, dated June 4 (1913?), KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 06679; Chen Bijun's letter to Wu Zhihui, dated July 18 (year unknown), KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 07653. The Cantonese government might have taken up the tab.

21 According to a document submitted by La Société franco-chinoise d'éducation to the French Foreign Ministry on Feb. 21, 1921, 101 Chinese students were registered at Collège de Montargis, the largest Chinese student group in a single French school. Cited in Xian Yuhao, *Liu Fa qingong jianxue*, pp. 319–321.

contrast, no record of Wang's house number is left. The *damnatio memoriae* in China's mainstream historiography works equally effectively for the French tourist industry.

Half a year later, in April 1913, Chen Bijun gave birth to a boy, later to be named Wenying 汪文嬰 (1913–2011), the first of their five children to come. It was, however, an inopportune moment. On March 20, Song Jiaoren 宋教仁 (1882–1913), who led the KMT to win China's first parliamentary election, was shot in Shanghai Train Station and died two days later. Yuan Shikai was immediately accused to be behind the assassination,²² and a civil war was brewing. Wang Jingwei was summoned by Sun Yat-sen to return to China to join his comrades' campaign.²³ In May Wang and his wife left for China, leaving their baby to the care of Zeng Xing and Fang Junying. They went by train from Marseille to Berlin, arriving on May 4,²⁴ to meet Cai Yuanpei, who in 1912 had similarly declined the appointment as Minister of Education to study in Germany. The Wang couple left Berlin three days later while Cai departed on May 18.²⁵ Wang and Cai issued a joint statement after the latter arrived at Shanghai on June 2, seeking a ground of compromise between the South and the North, but to no avail. A civil war, known as "Second Revolution" (*erci geming* 二次革命), broke out on July 12. The nomenclature indicates that the "first revolution" in 1911, for which Wang risked his life, had failed. The ill-equipped KMT army suffered immediate losses and in September the Central Government won the war. In the aftermath, Sun sought asylum in Japan while Wang escaped to Penang. Cai Yuanpei visited him on Sept. 18 at the Chen family mansion.²⁶ Wang was back in Paris on Nov. 25 and went to Montreuil to visit Li Shizeng. On Dec. 18, they went to Paris together.²⁷ On Dec. 21, Wang went to London to visit Wu

22 Some, however, suspected the nationalists themselves, as Song's path would lead to parliamentary politics and legitimization of Yuan's presidency. For a recent scholarly work that summarizes the controversy, see Zhang Yaojie 張耀傑, *Shui mousha le Song Jiaoren 誰謀殺了宋教仁*, Beijing: Tuanjie chubanshe, 2011.

23 On May 6, 1913, Chen Jiongming 陳炯明 (1878–1933), Governor of Guangdong, telegraphed Sun and Wang, asking them to negotiate between the South and the North. See *Chen Jiongming ji* 陳炯明集, eds. by Duan Yunzhang 段雲章 / Ni Junming 倪俊明, Guangzhou: Zhongshan daxue chubanshe, 1998, p. 156. It is unclear if Sun's message to Wang was sent before or after Chen Jiongming's plea.

24 See Li Shizeng's letter to Wu Zhihui, KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 06679. Wang had been delayed by sickness.

25 See Cai Yuanpei's diary, in: *Cai Yuanpei quanji*, Vol. 16, pp. 9 f.

26 *Ibid.*, p. 19.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

Zhihui and came back together to Paris around the New Year.²⁸ In the spring²⁹ of 1914 the Wang couple travelled back to Montargis.

The intra-Europe trips must have been eye-opening experiences for Wang Jingwei. Wu Zhihui wrote about his 1914 trip to France, recording in detail the discount tickets, the queuing, the train ride, the orderly landscape, the ferry across the Strait, the clean hospices... The French, in his opinion, were even superior to the English, as they were rational and creative, manifested in quotidian objects like public clocks and modern school dormitories. He was constantly reminded, however, of China's "backwardness." Despite his admiration for modern European nations, reading news about their seeking colonial interests in China only added to his sense of distress and shame. Together with Wang Jingwei, he visited the Palace of Fontainebleau, finding in it a new exhibition room with Chinese objects, looted from the Summer Palace in 1860 during the Second Opium War.³⁰ In short, they admired Europe but could not help feeling constantly humiliated as citizens of a third-class country.

Since Chen Bijun's mother came along to help with the baby care, the house on Rue Gambetta was too crowded, so they moved to another house which was by the canal and faced a park,³¹ leaving the Gambetta house to the Zengs and the Fangs. The frugal Wu Zhihui noted that the new house cost thirty francs a month to rent. He was impressed by the beauty of the surroundings, especially the ancient trees in the park.³² The following two quatrains that Wang penned under the title of "Morning Mist" (*xiaoyan* 曉煙) describe these trees around the canal house:

榭葉深黃楓葉紅	The oak trees have turned deep yellow; maples red;
老松奇翠欲擎空	An old pine, an emerald wonder, extends its fingers into the sky.
朝來別有空濛意	The dawn brings an atmosphere of misty rains,
只在蒼煙萬頃中	When it stands amidst ten thousand acres of grey vapor.
初陽如月逗輕寒	The early sun like a moon plays with a light coat of chill;
咫尺林原成遠看	The forestland, one step away, becomes a distant vista.

28 See Cai Yuanpei's letters to Wu Zhihui, in: *Cai Yuanpei quanji*, Vol. 10, pp. 184–193.

29 This is Chen Changzu's account. Ho Manghang, however, dates their return as summer 1914.

30 Wu Zhihui, "Jiayin you Fa ji" 甲寅游法記, in: *Wu Zhihui xueshu luncong xubian* 吳稚暉學術論叢續編, Shanghai: Chuban hezuoshe, 1927, pp. 145–153.

31 The house is likely located on the crossroad of Rue de Loing and Canal de Briare.

32 See Wu Zhihui, "Jiayin you Fa ji", p. 148.

記得江南煙雨裏 I recollect the misty rains to the south of the lower Yangtze valley:
 小姑鬟影落春瀾 Reflection of the Little Sister's hair bun falls into the spring waves.³³

Years later, on October 7, 1923, Wang would send these two poems in a letter discussing poetry with Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), student of John Dewey and China's most vocal advocate of vernacular literature. In it Wang argued that the progress of Chinese poetry was not a revolution; vernacular poetry, though necessary, should be an addition to the cacophony of genres, and not a radical break with China's literary past as Hu Shi proposed. These two poems, in his opinion, bore much similarity to Hu Shi's own poem on mountain mists, composed a few days previously.³⁴ Wang seemed to be particularly fond of a misty landscape, a liminal view that lacks clarity. In his focus on nature, the view exhibits little distinctions from a Chinese landscape. In effect, by using the recollected image of Little Sister Mountain, he effectively transformed the tiny canal into the rolling Yangtze—soothing, perhaps, his nostalgia.

Now that the young Changzu could live at home, Wang Jingwei set out to teach him classical Chinese poetry, lest he became French. The method was purely traditional: Wang would write down the poems in large calligraphic fonts with a brush and make the boy chant it twenty, forty times, until he had committed the poem to memory.³⁵ It was probably how Wang Jingwei learned poetry under the guidance of his father, a local scholar who provided legal services to various county magistrates and was already sixty-two when Wang was born. Applying this method to a teenager more versed in English and in French than in Chinese, however, was a failure. Chen Changzu developed an allergy to classical Chinese that stayed with him throughout his life. Wang's education of

33 Wang Jingwei, "Xiaoyan" 曉煙, in: *SZL*, p. 46. The "Little Sister" refers to the "Little Sister Mountain" (*Xiaogu shan* 小姑山, also written in homophone as 小孤山) in Anhui Province, standing by the Yangtze.

34 Wang's letter is copied verbatim in Hu Shi's diary on October 7, 1923; see *Hu Shi riji quanbian* 胡適日記全編, ed. by Cao Boyan 曹伯言, Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2001, Vol. 4, pp. 67 f. Wang was in the middle of a campaign against a bribed presidential election, but nonetheless spent a day with a few literary scholars to watch the tidal bores at Haining. On September 29, after Wang's departure, Hu wrote two poems and most likely sent them to Wang in a letter on October 1 (*ibid.*, pp. 59–61). On the debate between classical-style poetry and vernacular poetry and on Wang Jingwei's attitude, see Zhiyi Yang, "The Tower of Going Astray: The Paradox of Liu Yazi's (1887–1958) Lyric Classicism", in: *Modern Chinese Literature and Culture* (MCLC), 28.1 (2016), pp. 174–221.

35 Chan, *Memoirs of a Citizen*, pp. 33 f.

the elder Zeng Zhongming was more fruitful. Despite him earning a BA and an MA degree in chemistry, Zeng finally yielded to his true passion and received a doctorate in literature in 1922 from the University of Lyon, with a dissertation titled *Essai Historique sur la Poésie Chinoise* (Lyon: Édition Jean Deprelle, 1922).³⁶

In July 1914, the whole family went on holiday to Luzerne, Switzerland. They stayed in a hotel on the summit of Pilatus with a majestic view over the valley and lake.³⁷ It was truly beautiful. “Then in the evening some people coming up by the last train brought the shocking news that war had been declared. Fourth Sister (Chen Bijun) and Fourth Brother (Wang Jingwei) must have had a rather bad sleep that night planning our next move,”³⁸ Chen Changzu recalled.

They crossed the frontier to France via Geneva just a few hours before it became closed to traffic. The two-day train trip back to Montargis gave Wang a close brush with the war, as the tracks were jammed with troop trains leaving for the battle zone up North. Wang decided to leave Montargis, probably thinking it was too close to Paris. They moved first to Nantes and eventually to Laon, into a farmhouse bare of utilities. A few melancholic poems written in Laon suggest that Wang was deeply shaken by the outbreak of the war. The desolate landscape and dislocation added to the distress. Even though “at such a remote location there shall not be beacon fires” 地僻應無烽火傳 and “the landscape has not changed—my sighs are in vain” 風景不殊長太息,³⁹ his world of beautiful Europe had been transformed into that of deserted gardens, dimming sunrays, and abandoned fortresses. His five heptasyllabic quatrains on red leaves⁴⁰ repeatedly use allusions from *Songs of the South* (*Chuci* 楚辭), a collection of poems compiled in the decades before the Common Era and attributed to earlier Southern poets who lost their kingdom during the Qin (221–206 BCE) unification of China.

In actual fact (though no one in Wang’s coterie seemed to recall), Laon fell on September 2, 1914, and was held by the German forces until late 1918.⁴¹

36 See Zeng’s student dossier (registered under the name Tsen Tsonming), 2400 W 802, Dossiers des étudiants de la faculté des lettres de Lyon (1898–1960), Archives Départementales du Rhône.

37 Probably Hotel Pilatus-Kulm, opened in 1890. Unfortunately it no longer has the guest-book from 1914.

38 Chan, *Memoirs of a Citizen*, p. 35.

39 Wang Jingwei, “Ouzhan ji qi, bibing Faguo dongbei zhi Langxiang [...]” 歐戰既起, 避兵法國東北之閭鄉 [...], in: *SZL*, p. 48. “Beacon fire” was used by ancient Chinese military to send emergency signals. It thus became a stock phrase for warfare.

40 See *SZL*, pp. 50–52.

41 Jean Marquiset, *Les allemands à Laon: 2 Septembre 1914–13 Octobre 1918*, Paris: Bloud & Gay, 1919.

Montargis, in contrast, never fell—Wang clearly miscalculated. But a few Chinese behind the Western Front did not seem to attract too much attention. When winter came the group migrated south. In November they made their way to Toulouse, where Cai Yuanpei and Li Shizeng already found refuge.⁴² It was here that Wang and Chen's second child, later to be named Wenxing 汪文惺 (1914–2015), was born in December, prematurely at only six and a half months old. The doctor pronounced that she had no chance, which greatly distressed the young parents. The life of the adults evolved around her care now, and Wang Jingwei was in charge of buying logs, transporting them home on his shoulders, and heating the house to keep the baby warm. It was quite demanding for a man not used to manual work. Against all odds, the girl survived.

It was probably in the Toulouse spring that Wang translated De Florian's poem, to be discussed later in greater details.

With Japan imposing the Twenty-One Demands on China and Yuan Shikai plotting to pronounce himself emperor, Wang Jingwei again responded to his comrades' call to arms. His senior friends – Wu Zhihui, Cai Yuanpei, and Li Shizeng – were vehemently against the plan. They were worried that Wang sacrificed his study for short-term political utility – in Wu's words, "sacrificing his qualification to become an owner of the New China." Cai Yuanpei blamed it on the strong-willed Chen Bijun.⁴³

Nevertheless, Wang and Chen departed on March 20, 1915,⁴⁴ and arrived at Shanghai in June. Not much was known of Wang's activities in this second anti-Yuan movement, which would escalate into the National Protection War. He must have left Malaya in December and arrived at Marseille on January 12.⁴⁵ They did not go home to Toulouse, but to Royan, as the children had moved there to stay with Cai Yuanpei. According to Chen Changzu, the adults had "rather an exciting trip in the Mediterranean, as the French liner on which they travelled barely squeezed through the German U-boat net." Had they not stayed an extra two weeks in Malaya at the request of Bijun's mother, their ship would have been torpedoed.⁴⁶ But Wang was not in the mood for excitement. In a letter that he sent to Wu Zhihui four days after his return, he fumed over wasting almost a whole year of his life for nothing. He had tried, again, to find compromise between the government and the nationalists, but it was to no

42 See Cai Yuanpei's letter to Wu Zhihui, in: *Cai Yuanpei quanji*, Vol. 10, p. 229.

43 See Cai Yuanpei's letter to Wu Zhihui, KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 07810.

44 Ho Manghang, *Wang Jingwei xiandai Zhongguo*, p. 55.

45 See Wang Jingwei's letter to Wu Zhihui, dated January 16 (1916), KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 09385. Ho Manghang's memoir dates his return to be June 1916, which is wrong. Chen Changzu's memoir also confirms that the adults were back home in early 1916.

46 Chan, *Memoirs of a Citizen*, p. 40.

avail. He was also responsible for fund-raising among the Southeast Asian Chinese, to provide for the military campaign and for setting up a press publishing foreign books in translation. He found himself, however, in the crossfire, and his compromising stance aroused comrades' suspicion. Not able to linger any longer in Penang or return to China, he found no other way out than coming back to France in frustration. He therefore swore, upon touching the ground of Marseille, that he would never return to China again before succeeding in his studies; if China fell, he would commit suicide facing in her direction, without physically heading east.⁴⁷

Wang's resolution was dramatic, but the awkward situation he found himself in was, in hindsight, typical through the course of his life. He seemed to be naturally prone more to compromises and deal-making than military actions. If violence was inevitable, he preferred individual radicalism, such as assassination, over collective sacrifice.

As the young adults wanted to take university classes, the group moved to Bordeaux. Fang Junying went to study mathematics, Zeng Zhongming chemistry, and Fang Junbi painting. They rented a villa in peaceful surroundings. On June 6, 1916, Yuan Shikai died and the crisis in China was temporarily relieved. Their only problem now was turning on the old gas geyser, if they ever wanted to take a bath. It was like lighting a canon. Wang's fearlessness was now put to good use. It provided endless amusement for the family to watch him, tiptoeing, crouching, arm outstretched, turn on the water tap.⁴⁸

In the following, the major part of Wang Jingwei's energy was redirected to organizing Chinese students to study in France. On June 22, half a month after Yuan Shikai's death, La Société franco-chinoise d'éducation (SEFC, or *Hua Fa jiaoyuhui* 華法教育會) was officially founded in Paris, and Wang was elected Vice-Director. The same day a Chinese labor school was opened, which received support and funding from the French government.⁴⁹ Because of the war mobilization of its labor force, France was in a labor shortage.⁵⁰ Together with Cai Yuanpei and Li Shizeng Wang sent an open letter to Chinese provincial governments, asking them to send Chinese workers to France, which

47 Wang Jingwei's letter to Wu Zihui, KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 09385.

48 Chan, *Memoirs of a Citizen*, p. 43.

49 See Xian Yuhao, *Liu Fa qingong jianxue*, p. 11.

50 See John N. Horne, *Labour at War: France and Britain 1914–1918*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991.

would also benefit the domestic labor force through knowledge transfer.⁵¹ An unstated reason was also joining the Allied war effort in order to have a foot in the winning team, without violating China's then neutrality.⁵² Eventually more than 140,000 Chinese laborers came to France and England to assist their war efforts, even though their contribution was rarely acknowledged. Inter-Allied victory medals, awarded to everyone who served in the fighting or worked as civilians contracted to the armed services in every allied country, were denied to them.⁵³

Wang also began to promote Chinese-language publishing and education in France. On August 15, the first issue of *Study in Europe* (*Lü Ou zazhi* 旅歐雜誌), a Chinese-language biweekly, was published in Tours, with Wang being the chief-editor and main contributor. He founded a Chinese printing press at Tours (known as Imprimerie chinoise or Du'er Zhonghua yinziju 都爾中華印字局)⁵⁴ and had a set of Chinese types casted and transported to France, probably using the funds he raised in Southeast Asia. This press was later transported to Lyon after the Institut Franco-Chinois de Lyon (IFCL, or Li'ang Zhong Fa daxue 里昂中法大學) was founded in 1921, also under Wang, Cai, Wu, and Li's initiative. Zeng Zhongming would become the first and longest serving secretary general of IFCL, before he went back to China in 1925 to become Wang's personal secretary, together with his wife Fang Junbi.

In September 1916, Cai Yuanpei was appointed President of Peking University. In December he invited Wang to head the Chinese literature department. Wang accepted the invitation and took departure in mid-January, 1917.⁵⁵ They left exactly half a month after Hu Shi – another professor newly hired by Cai Yuanpei – published his famous “Preliminary Suggestions on the Improvement of Literature” on the January 1st issue of the *New Youth* magazine.⁵⁶ Despite its modest title, the article's criticism on the ills of traditional literature (especially

51 See Wang Jingwei, Cai Yuanpei, and Li Shizeng, “Zhi gesheng xingzheng jiguan han” 致各省行政機關函, in: SEFC (eds.), *Lü Ou jiaoyu yundong* 旅歐教育運動, Tours: Lü Ou zazhi she, 1916, pp. 82 f.

52 This initiative was originally proposed by Liang Shiyi 梁士詒 (1869–1933) in 1915. The French War Ministry accepted the proposal in November 11, 1915. See Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front: Chinese Workers in the Great War*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011, pp. 14–17.

53 Guoqi Xu, *Strangers on the Western Front*, pp. 1 f.

54 See *Lü Ou jiaoyu yundong*, pp. 45–47.

55 Reported in *Lü Ou zazhi*, no. 12 (Feb. 1, 1917), p. 7. Cai's letter in *Zhongguo Cai Yuanpei yanjiuhui, Cai Yuanpei quanji*, vol. 10, p. 295, is erroneously dated to be March 15, 1917.

56 Hu Shi, “Wenxue gailiang chuyi” 文學改良芻議, in: *Xin Qingnian* 新青年 01. 1917.

traditional poetry) and its promotion of vernacular to become the only vehicle for all genres of Chinese literature harbingered a storm: it would start a New Culture Movement that would fundamentally change China's modern literature, culture, politics, and society.⁵⁷ As mentioned previously, Wang Jingwei was not against the writing of vernacular poetry, but disagreed with Hu Shi's notion of literary revolution, proposing instead the peaceful coexistence and positive competition of all genres. Had he indeed assumed the deanship at the Peking University, his debate with Hu Shi might have assumed a whole new level of relevance to the history of Chinese literature.

To observe the revolutionary storm in Russia, and perhaps to avoid German submarines, Wang took the detour through St. Petersburg and Siberia to Beijing. Upon arrival, he was caught immediately in the vortex of domestic politics. On February 8, 1917, he met President Li Yuanhong 黎元洪 (1864–1928) and Premier Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865–1939) to offer his observation of the European war and to discuss China's strategies. Wang advised them to join the Allied Powers and declare war on Germany.⁵⁸ As he writes in an article published later, his suggestion was based on three reasons: first of all, the principled resistance to militarism; second, in case of a German victory, it would turn China into its colony anyway, even if the latter remained neutral; and if Germany loses, being a victor would help China to resist Japan's claim on the German colony in Shandong.⁵⁹ Only Duan was persuaded. On March 4, his cabinet threatened to resign if Li did not cut off diplomatic ties with Germany. On April 6, the USA declared war on Germany. On May 7, Duan directed the State Council to submit a motion to the House of Representatives to declare war as well. On May 16, however, Sun Yat-Sen openly stated his objection to China entering the war. And on May 18, the English language *Peking Gazette* reported that Duan's real plan was to borrow money from Japan (also an Allied Power) and prepare for a civil war against the southern revolutionary army. The long conflict between the two factions intensified. On June 13, Li Yuanhong dismissed the congress. The loyalist warlord Zhang Xun 張勳 (1854–1923) entered Beijing on the pretext of solving the crisis and on July 1 announced the restoration of Manchu monarchy. It lasted only 12 days. Having nominally recovered the Republic, however, Duan Qirui declared that he would abolish

57 There are numerous research monographs, volumes, and articles on the New Culture Movement. See, e.g. Gerome Grieder, *Hu Shih and the Chinese Renaissance: Liberalism in the Chinese Revolution, 1917–1937*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970.

58 Ho, *Wang Jingwei xiandai Zhongguo*, pp. 56 f.

59 Wang Jingwei, "Bali hehui yu Zhong Ri wenti" 巴黎和會與中日問題, in: *Wang Jingwei ji* 汪精衛集, Shanghai: Guangming shuju, 1929, Section II, pp. 34 f.

its Provisional Constitution. On July 17, Sun Yat-Sen started the Constitutional Protection Movement.⁶⁰ Despite their different opinions on China's position in the World War, Wang was summoned to be Sun's Deputy Secretary General. With China in a total chaos, he did not find the leisure to become a scholar after all.

But Wang had not entirely relinquished his anarchist ideal and remained adamant in refusing formal appointment to government positions. He worked mainly as Sun's private advisor and lieutenant. November 11, 1918, the First World War ended with the Allies' victory. The Guangdong Military Government appointed him their representative to the Paris Peace Conference, which he declined again.⁶¹ Nonetheless, he decided to go to the conference as a private "observer." This time he took the detour through Japan and San Francisco. It was a leisurely trip: he left Shanghai on March 8 and arrived at Kobe on March 12; he departed for San Francisco on March 26 and arrived on April 2 in the USA; on April 23, he finally arrived at Paris. Poems written onboard show a lighthearted mood – perhaps the only time in his life when he reveals a desire to decouple his fate from China's. He reflects upon his own melancholy and sighs:

故國未須回首望 I shall not look back at the Fatherland, left behind –
小舟深入浪千層 This small boat has ventured deeply into a thousand
 folds of waves.⁶²

The Paris Peace Conference however greatly disillusioned China's internationalists. European powers rejected the Chinese claim on Germany's rights in Shandong and rewarded them instead to Japan. On May 4, 1919, the outraged students in Beijing marched onto the street to demand a stronger stance from the government. It became a water-shed event in Republican China's history. The intelligentsia since became politically energized and the Chinese Communist Party would be founded in 1921 by intellectual leaders of the movement. Under public pressure, the Chinese delegation refused to sign the Treaty of Versailles. Nonetheless, the Japanese occupation of the former German colony in China became a done deal.

60 Guo Tingyi 郭廷以, *Zhonghua minguo shishi rizhi* 中華民國史事日誌, Taipei: Academia Sinica, vol. I, 1979, pp. 288–318.

61 I surmise that he did not want to assume a formal diplomatic position for a separatist government, which could sabotage the Central Government's mission.

62 Wang Jingwei, "Zi Shanghai fangzhou [...]" 自上海放舟 [...], in: *SZL*, pp. 69 f.

Wang Jingwei, an eye-witness of the unfolding diplomatic fiasco, was equally outraged. He was prompted to reflect on China's crisis from a more international perspective. His response would lead to an eventual departure from anarchism and, after his return to China on November 7, 1919, to his deeper engagement in China's domestic politics. His *Wanderjahre* were over.

Wang's *Lehrjahre*

Anarchism was a prominent intellectual strain among China's early nationalists.⁶³ Li Shizeng and Wu Zhihui founded the first Chinese anarchist society in Paris in 1906 after they had joined the Revolutionary Alliance in 1905 in Tokyo, shortly after the latter's founding. As Arif Dirlik remarks, the political involvement of the Paris anarchists contradicted their own professed opposition to politics; and if the contradiction had been easier to ignore before 1911, after the foundation of the Republic it became increasingly problematic.⁶⁴

Wang's plan to assassinate the Manchu Prince Regent was clearly inspired by European anarchists' regicidal attempts. Though he was a faithful follower of Sun Yat-sen, who as a principle opposed assassinations, he seemed to be easily attracted to anarchism due to his romantic disposition. In late Qing China, psychological taboos against regicide were lifted. The assassinations of Alexander II of Russia (31 March 1881), of Umberto I of Italy (27 June 1900), and of Alexander I of Serbia (11 June 1903) were broadly relished across progressive newspapers and journals. An article published in the *People's Journal* (*Minbao* 民報) in 1908 even declared its time "an Era of Regicide." As the author argues, royal authority was once seen as sacred and emperors viewed as "sons of Heaven." Darwin's theory of evolution, however, proved that human beings were just another type of naked animal, lacking divinity. Therefore, all men were born equal, and regicide no longer a crime against Heaven. Instead, all rulers should be warned that "a big flood is coming."⁶⁵ This "big flood" referred to a global revolution. Seen in such a light, Chinese domestic assassins could

63 See Peter Zarrow, *Anarchism and Chinese Political Culture*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1990; Dirlik, *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution*; Edward S. Krebs, *Shifu: Soul of Chinese Anarchism*, London: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.

64 Arif Dirlik, "The Revolution That Never Was: Anarchism in the Guomindang", in: *Modern China* 15.4 (1989), pp. 419–462; citation from pp. 422 f.

65 Jishou 无首 (trans.), "Diwang ansha zhi shidai" 帝王暗殺之時代, in: *Minbao* 民報 21 (1908), pp. 80–85. It was ostensibly a translated article. I have yet to identify the original text.

be perceived as active participants in a worldwide movement and pioneers of Chinese modernity. As demonstrated in the previously cited epistle to Hu Han-min, Wang did recognize the importance of collective political action, but he preferred radical individual heroism for himself. His series of statements after 1911 against assuming government positions were continuous proof of his intellectual persuasion. His active involvement in founding the “Promote Virtue Society” and the Work-Study program instead reveal his focus on behavioral improvement and on education.

Wang’s own education program, however, had been seriously hobbled by his lack of foreign language talents. On August 9, 1912, he sent a letter to Sun Yat-Sen and declared that a major purpose of his trip to France was to learn the language, so as to master the source of knowledge on science and philosophy.⁶⁶ After arriving at Montargis in November 1912, he immediately hired a French tutor.⁶⁷ Soon, however, he was frustrated. Half a year later, he reported that he spent his whole day learning French, but he kept forgetting everything he learnt and progressed extremely slowly.⁶⁸ In a letter dated May 13, probably written in 1914, he declared his resolution to reading more and writing more, “despite my lacking proficiency in French.”⁶⁹ Two years later, another letter written on March 21, 1916, further betrayed his anxiety.

Since the outbreak of the World War, he declared, it was no longer possible for him to maintain an anarchist opposition to political engagement. But if he renounced anarchism and became a politician, would he not one day become a “runner-dog” or a “puppet”? The best method for an anarchist opposition, Wang reasoned, was assassination. He then recounted that upon his arrival at Shanghai in June 1913 he had attempted to meet Yuan Shikai privately, on the pretext of brokering compromise or even pretending to betray Sun, in order to assassinate Yuan. But Yuan had been very cautious and declined to grant him an audience. He had also thought of learning the technique of facial transformation (*yirongshu* 易容術) to approach Yuan. A man of action, he went to study it in Paris – but, alas! – it was only offered as a stage device and was not nearly as magical as novels described. Wang seemed to acknowledge the difficulty and uncertainty of employing assassination as the primary method of a radical opposition, as he had failed twice as an assassin. As for the anarchist

66 See Cai / Wang, *Wang Jingwei shengping jishi*, p. 23.

67 See Wang Jingwei’s letter to Wu Zhihui, November 10, [1912], KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 09576.

68 See Wang Jingwei’s letter to Wu Zhihui, March 3, [1913], KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 09573.

69 See Wang Jingwei’s letter to Wu Zhihui, May 13, [1914?], KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 07595. Wang mentions in this letter that he was just over thirty-years-old. I date it as 1914 instead of 1913, since in May 1913 he was already planning to go back to China.

ideal of realizing a utopia through education, he conceded with pain that he was not able to become an educator. In his metaphors: though a hammer can be recast into a saw, if the recasting fails, the material becomes useless; now he is stuck being an ex-hammer and pre-saw. To be an educator, he had to learn Western languages to drink from the proverbial source. Previously, in Japan, he could at least use Japanese books as reference tools (reading Japanese was fairly easy for educated Chinese); now, could he similarly resort to French classics and textbooks? “All these issues—the moment I think about them, I feel ashamed, laughable, pitiable, detestable, and despicable.” As a result, he suffered from cephalemia, cardiac arrhythmia, and dizziness, often unable to control his temper or words.⁷⁰

This letter, showing intensive psycho-somatic distress, was the last one that I found in Wu Zhihui’s dossier from Wang Jingwei complaining about his lack of progress in study. It also immediately predated his engagement in founding SEFC and in setting up a Chinese press in France, activities that might signal his redirecting energy from learning to doing.

Wang’s failure to become a scholar, however, does not mean that all his efforts were futile. Living among the Chinese student communities in Montargis, in Toulouse, and in Bordeaux gave him rich opportunities to share their intellectual progress. Prominent scholars like Wu, Cai, and Li were his friends as well as mentors. The First World War, furthermore, allowed him to observe a civilized society in wartime and to reflect upon China’s position in the post-war world. At its outburst, Cai Yuanpei predicted that this war would become a milestone in world history; living through it would be the greatest learning experience for young students, enabling them to observe the transformation of civil rights, philosophical theories, social organizations, and national mentalities.⁷¹ The total war and its mobilization exerted a strong impact on Wang Jingwei’s mind. In a speech delivered in 1919, he praised nationalism for its power to mobilize all members of the society to sacrifice their comfort, assets, personal agenda, and lives for their nation, even though victory looked remote and unpredictable.⁷² He admitted that he realized the mistake of fellow Chinese intellectuals like himself to escape from political engagements.⁷³ On the other hand, if anarchism seemed utopian or at least too removed from the

70 See Wang’s letter to Wu Zhihui, dated March 21 [1916], KMT Archives, Zhi 稚 09381.

71 See Cai’s statement for Chinese students at France, Cai Yuanpei, “Wuchai hegu er yu guiguo hu” 吾儕何故而欲歸國乎 (Aug. 1914), in: *Cai Yuanpei quanji*, Vol. 2, pp. 298 f.

72 Wang Jingwei, *Wang Jingwei xiansheng zuijin yanshuo* 汪精衛先生最近演說, Tours: Imprimerie chinoise, 1919, Speech I, p. 7.

73 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

current urgency to bear any immediate impact, he also witnessed the disastrous outcome of militarism, a viral brand of nationalism. A Darwinian competition among nations only led to endless aggressions and annexations, to the extent that even a strong and civilized country like France was barely able to defend itself. What should China, a weak country cherishing an aspiration for national renaissance, do?

Wang reflected on China's position in the world in two long articles that he wrote in 1919 in France and published in *Construction Monthly* (*Jianshe yuekan* 建設月刊), titled "The Co-existence of Humanity" ("Renlei zhi gongcun" 人類之共存) and "The Paris Peace Conference and the Sino-Japanese Problem" ("Bali Hehui yu Zhong Ri wenti" 巴黎和會與中日問題). Both essays were collected in the anthology *China and the World after the Paris Peace Conference* (*Bali Heyi hou zhi shijie yu Zhongguo* 巴黎和議後之世界與中國), which was edited by Wang Jingwei and published in 1920. The title of the first article was slightly modified to become "Human-Co-Existentialism" ("Renlei gongcun zhuyi" 人類共存主義) as the preface of the anthology. The revised title suggests Wang's attempt to construct a coherent theory of his own.⁷⁴

The first article is of particular interest for the study of Wang's intellectual transformation. As I have analyzed it in some detail elsewhere,⁷⁵ I will only provide a brief summary here. Wang's "Human-Co-Existentialism" is a form of cosmopolitanism and humanism. Influenced by Kropotkin's theory of "mutual aid,"⁷⁶ he argues that the "survival of the fittest" principle, if applied to the human society, would only encourage negative competition and reduce social diversity. To encourage positive competition and collaboration, one therefore needs Human-Co-Existentialism. China, a weak country, first has to promote Human-Co-Existentialism to protect her own existence; and second, since equality means equal not only in rights but also in responsibilities, she should strengthen herself and fulfill her obligations to the international society and to her own citizens. The enemy of Human Co-Existentialism, in Wang's opinion, is primarily militarism, represented by Germany. The First World War shows that German militarism cannot be defeated by Russia, which was similarly a

74 Both articles would be later included in Wang's collected anthology. See *Wang Jingwei ji*, Section II, pp. 1–65.

75 Zhiyi Yang, "Nationalism, Human-Co-Existentialism, Pan-Asianism: on Wang Jingwei's Intellectual Transformation", in: Iwo Amelung / Sebastian Riebold (eds.), *Revisiting the "Sick Man of Asia": Discourses of Weakness in Late 19th and Early 20th Century China*, Frankfurt: Campus, 2018 (forthcoming).

76 Li translated the first three chapters of Kropotkin's *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* (1902) into Chinese and published it in the *New Century* (*Xin shiji* 新世紀) journal (Paris, 1907–1910), issues 31–51 (1908).

militarized country, but can be overcome only by democratic and liberal countries like France and the USA, which promote justice and science among their people, who in consequence have something to fight for. Wang's conclusion is that human independence depends upon justice and not upon violence, and that the best defense against aggression lies in promoting knowledge and learning and not in military force. In this sense, Wang regards the Paris Peace Conference as marking a transition from the era of militarism to the era of Human-Co-Existentialism.

Despite China's perceived weakness and her urgent existential crisis resulting from Japan's jingoistic ambition, on which he offers a capable analysis in "Paris Peace Conference and Sino-Japan Problem," Wang's optimism in this essay is quite striking. He believes that 1919 marks the end of the era of militarist Social Darwinism. As he has previously argued in an essay "The Meaning of Sacrifice," published in 1916, weakness and strength alternate over time and nations develop in uneven speeds. A currently weak nation or civilization could evolve into a strong one in the future.⁷⁷ Social Darwinism, however, regards the process of evolution as lineal, ignoring the reality of uneven development and eliminates the possibilities of catch-up games. Second, a global society that develops according to the Social Darwinian vision would see cultural diversity reduced, leading to the dominance of a single culture, a single race, or a single person. Thus the doctrine of the "survival of the fittest" would become its own enemy, ultimately eliminating competition all together. Wang therefore regards himself a humanist, as the Darwinian competition could exist among animals or between humans and animals, but not among men.

This period shows the evolution in Wang's ongoing reflection on China's weakness. For the young Wang Jingwei devoted to the anti-Manchu nationalist revolution, "weakness" was simply a declined state of the Chinese nation, to be overcome by revolution. During his stay in France and especially since the breakout of the First World War, however, he began to reflect more on the ethical dimension of "weakness." His reflections are demonstrated in "A Translation of De Florian's Fable,"⁷⁸ a poem inspired by the French poet Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian's (1755–1794) fable "La Brebis et le chien."

The Ethics of Victimhood

As Wang's poetry anthology is chronically arranged, the position of this poem suggests that it was composed around the time of moving from Laon

77 Wang Jingwei, "Xisheng zhi yiyi" 犧牲之意義, in: *Lü Ou zazhi*, no. 1 (August 15, 1916).

78 Wang Jingwei, "Yi Folaoliang yuyanshi" 譯佛老里昂寓言詩, in: *SZL*, p. 53.

to Toulouse. And since the first section of the poem describes a spring scene that does not exist in De Florian's original, it probably reflects his immediate surroundings, a hypothesis that would allow us to date the poem to the early spring of 1915 in Toulouse. Further evidence is the "east wind," depicted in the first couplet, which could well refer to the Levant, a warm and damp easterly breeze that brings spring to South France. It was likely that he, settled in Toulouse, used De Florian's fable to learn French, and, finding it interesting, set it to Chinese rhymes. In comparison to De Florian's original poem, however, Wang Jingwei's pentasyllabic ancient-style verse is much more detailed and elaborate. Below, Wang's poem is examined in juxtaposition to the original French one.

De Florian's fable reads:

La brebis et le chien, de tous les temps amis, / Se racontaient un jour leur vie infortunée. / "Ah ! Disait la brebis, je pleure et je frémis / Quand je songe aux malheurs de notre destinée. / Toi, l'esclave de l'homme, adorant des ingrats, / Toujours soumis, tendre et fidèle, / Tu reçois, pour prix de ton zèle, / Des coups et souvent le trépas. / Moi, qui tous les ans les habille, / Qui leur donne du lait, et qui fume leurs champs, / Je vois chaque matin quelqu'un de ma famille / Assassiné par ces méchants. / Leurs confrères les loups dévorent ce qui reste. / Victimes de ces inhumains, / Travailler pour eux seuls, et mourir par leurs mains, / Voilà notre destin funeste ! / -- Il est vrai, dit le chien : mais crois-tu plus heureux / Les auteurs de notre misère ? / Va, ma sœur, il vaut encor mieux / Souffrir le mal que de le faire."⁷⁹

My English translation:

The lamb and the dog, who are all time friends, / One day tell each other of their unfortunate lives. / "Ah!" says the lamb, "I cry and I shudder, / When I think about the misfortune of our destiny! / You, slave of man, adore the ungrateful! / Always submissive, tender, and loyal, / You receive, as price of your zealotry, / Blows of whips and often death! / I, who dress them throughout the year, / Who give them milk, who manure their field, / I every morning see one of my family / Killed by these villains! / Their fellow wolves devour the rest. / Victims of the inhumane, / Working for them alone and dying in their hands, / This is our dire destiny!" / "It is true," says the dog. "But do you believe that they are happier, / The

79 Jean-Pierre Claris de Florian, *Fables de Florian*, Paris: Delarue, 1855, p. 37.

authors of our misery? / Go, my sister: it is even better / To suffer the evil than be its doer!"

Wang's poem reads:

<p>東風和且平 眾木繁其枝 夜來有微雨 初日還遲遲 在此春光中 不樂將何為 東顧有牧場 碧草生離離 一羊蹶而趨 一犬還相隨 宛然兄若妹 情好相依依 阿妹今不歡 流淚如縷縷 嗚咽語阿兄 吾生其何之 我聞造物者 用意無偏私 跂行與喙息 所適惟其宜 如何兄與我 長日為人羈 阿兄啖餘糧 辛勤守房帷 晝防暴客至 夕畏穿窬窺 小變起不虞 生死還相持 何以報忠貞 惟有鞭與笞 主人有嬌子 蹴踏供娛嬉 慙伏敢枝梧 中慚語阿誰 至今撫瘡痍 毛血猶參差</p>	<p>The east wind is gentle and soft; Milliard trees multiply their twigs. In the evening light rains drizzled, Delaying the rise of the early sun. In such lovely lights of spring, How can anyone not be happy? To the east there is a pasture, Where supple grasses grow so lushly! A little lamb limps toward the pasture, And a dog follows her from behind. Like an elder brother, like a younger sister, They affectionately stay by each other's side. Today the sister shows no joy, Her tears streaming like a drenched rope in a well. Sobbingly she talks to the elder brother: "What is the purpose of our lives? I have heard that the Creator Has no biased intentions. All the toe-walking beasts and beak-breathing birds Find in this world their rightful places. How come that you and me, Spend our long days as someone's slaves? You dine on the leftovers, And diligently guard the house. Through the day you prevent violent robbers from entering; At night you are wary of hole-digging thieves. An unpredictable accident May demand your life as service. And what is the reward for your loyalty? Only whipping and lashing! That spoiled boy of our master's Kicks and tramples you for his pleasure! Crawling low, not daring to resist, With whom can you share your inner shame? Even now when I brush your scars, They are covered by hair and blood!</p>
--	--

阿兄既不辰	You my brother live an untimely life,
阿妹尤童癡	And I your sister am even sillier!
擣我膚中毛	They pluck the hair deep in my skin,
織彼篋中衣	To weave their basket lining;
奪我懷中乳	They snatch the milk from my breasts,
哺彼襍中兒	To feed their swaddled baby.
可憐曳行田	Pitiable! I'm dragged to walk through the fields,
搗策來無時	And any moment lashes may fall on me.
雨淋與日炙	Showered by the rain, burnt by the sun
狼藉成枯骸	This rugged me is reduced to a skeleton.
曉行庖廚下	In the morning when I pass by the kitchen,
碧血驚淋漓	I am shocked by the pool of blood.
羣饕口流沫	Spittle streams from gluttons' mouths;
談笑酬號嘶	They chat, laugh, cry, and yell.
伯叔與諸姑	My elder uncles, my younger uncles, and my aunties,
赫然在盤彝	Are piling up on their plates.
死睫不敢看	My eyelashes locked fast, not daring to peek;
驚跌不能移	My weakened feet unable to move.
投地有餘骨	Their leftover bones are thrown to the ground;
封狼朵其頤	Wolves enjoy them to their hearts' fill.
孤墳在何許	Where are their lonely graves?
溝水流殘脂	Their discarded fat floats in the sewage water!
生也為人奴	Alive we are man's slaves;
死也為人犧	In death we are man's victims.
皇皇此一息	Anxious and agitated is my frail breath--
命矣其何辭	This is the destiny from which we cannot escape!"
阿兄聞妹言	The elder brother, hearing his sister's words,
慙然止其哭	Gently stops her from crying:
弱者未云禍	"Being weak is not necessarily a misfortune;
強者未云福	Being strong is not necessarily blessed.
與其作刀俎	Compared to being the knife or the cutting board,
毋寧為魚肉	We'd rather be the fish to be gutted, the meat to be sliced."

Wang's pentasyllabic poem is written in the ancient-style (*guti* 古體), a term that arose in the Tang Dynasty (618–907) to refer to poems not following the strict prosody of the "Recent-Style Verse" (*jinti-shi* 近體詩, also called the Regulated Poetry, or *geli-shi* 格律詩). (All of Wang's octaves and quatrains translated above are in the regulated style.) In comparison to the latter, the former allows more freedom in length, language, and prosody. It had therefore often been used since the beginning of the 20th century to translate foreign poems into classical-style Chinese verses. According to Li Sichun's 李思純

(1893–1960) preface to his *Xianhe ji* 仙河集, an anthology of translated French poetry, there were three styles used to translate Western poetry: strictly regulated classical-style verses; ancient-style with relatively free prosody; and free-style vernacular. Li regarded the second option the best, since it paid attention both to the poem's original meaning and to the prosodic elegance of the Chinese language.⁸⁰

Wang's exercise elaborates on the key elements in De Florian's fable, adding not only more details limning the scenes, but also arguments borrowed from Chinese Daoist sources. The Creator, or literally "The One who creates things" (*zaowuzhe* 造物者), is a concept most notable in *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (earliest textual layer ca. 4th–3rd Cent. BCE). It is not an anthropomorphic deity, but a cosmic force that casts materials into various life forms without preference. A "material" that wills to be man is inauspicious for the cosmic life-smith (*Zhuangzi* 6.5). The lamb, citing a classic Zhuangzian doctrine, laments their unique status as pure victims. Despite their loyalty and usefulness while being alive, they are threatened by meaningless violence or reduced to food stock. The dog's answer, however, resorts to Laozi, another Daoist thinker, to find a solution. He relates the Laozian doctrine of the dialectics of misfortune and fortune ("In misfortune fortune lies; in fortune misfortune lies" 禍兮福所倚福兮禍所伏; *Laozi* 58). Thus when saying that weakness does not necessarily lead to misfortune, Wang also implies that weakness could one day become strength. In Laozi, water, the symbol of Dao [the Way], is weak, but it will ultimately overcome stronger materials like a rock (*Laozi* 78). The next two lines transform the saying: "Now others are the knife and cutting board, while we are the fish and the meat" 方今人為刀俎我為魚肉, meaning a situation in which one is under total manipulation and in mortal danger.⁸¹ Wang's adaptation is close to De Florian's in spirit, but he takes away the element of "happiness" entirely. What matters is not who is "happier," but the agency for victimhood and the ethics of power. He presents an image of the weak literally being the food of the powerful, therefore tying not only the dog's response to the lamb's lament, but also the poem to his comment:

佛氏此詩，天下之自命為強者皆當愧死。顧吾以為弱肉強食，強者固有罪矣，即弱者亦不為無罪。罪惡之所以存於天地，以有施者即有受者也。苟無受者，將於何施？是又願天下之自承為弱者一思之也。

80 See Li Sichun, "Xianhe ji xu" 仙河集序, in: *Xueheng* 學衡, no. 47 (Nov. 1925), p. 3.

81 See Sima Qian 司馬遷, "Xiang Yu benji" 項羽本紀, in: *Shiji* 史記, Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1959, Vol. 1, p. 314.

Reading this poem of De Florian's, all those who regard themselves as strong powers in the world should be ashamed to death. In my opinion, in the scenario of so-called "the meat of the weak is the fodder of the strong," though the sin lies with the strong, the weak shares the sin too. The reason that sin and evil exist between Heaven and Earth is that there are always two parties involved: the doer and the receiver. Without a receiver, who can be the doer? This is what I would like those who admit themselves to be the weak to think about.

This comment does not exactly agree with the poem. The term *ruorou qiangshi* 弱肉強食 (literally, "the meat of the weak, the fodder of the strong") is Yan Fu's 嚴復 (1854–1921) translation of the Darwinian doctrine "survival of the fittest." Wang's comment further complicates the relation between weakness and strength. Wang seems to say that though the strong commits a crime, the weak is complicit in this crime. Victims, in other words, are co-responsible for their own victimhood. Being a victim, moreover, does not entitle one to moral superiority—even though, if he has to pick a side, Wang rather sides with the innocent than the offender. The lesson is neither to stay weak, nor to perpetuate the cycle of sin. As for how to break the cycle, Wang in this poem fails to offer an answer. He does note, rather interestingly, that there is another poem which he would like to translate, namely Alphonse Daudet's "La chèvre de monsieur Seguin" (Mr. Seguin's Goat). Daudet's little goat, though well fed by her owner and warned about the ferocious wolf in the mountain, broke out of her "prison" to enjoy freedom in the mountains. When the dreaded wolf finally found her, she decided to fight—though death was inevitable, she thought, she must die in the dawn instead of in the darkness of the night.⁸² Her heroic feat of paying the price of her life in exchange of freedom for a single day forms a sharp contrast to De Florian's dog and lamb. Wang does not say with which animal he ultimately sympathizes, but simply comments that the morale of the two poems "can elucidate each other," and that he shall translate Daudet's poem too, once he finds the time. Since he left Toulouse for China in March, very likely not long after translating De Florian's poem, he seemed to have never found the time. The spirit of Daudet's freedom-loving goat, however, would be reflected in a 1929 poem of his, another free adaptation of the first part of Victor Hugo's hymn to Republican soldiers "À l'obéissance passive" (To Passive Obedience).⁸³

82 Alphonse Daudet, "La chèvre de monsieur Seguin", in: *Lettres de mon moulin*, Paris: Larousse, 2018, pp. 34–46.

83 This translation is examined in Zhiyi Yang, "Road to Lyric Martyrdom", pp. 147 f.

From “The Lamb and the Dog” to the 1916 essay “The Meaning of Sacrifice” and finally to the proposal of a Human-Co-Existentialism in 1919, we see Wang’s continuous reflection on the ethical dimension of weakness and of victimhood. The weak are perhaps co-responsible for their victimhood, but their fate is also ethically preferable to being the victimizer who denies others their right of existence. Ultimately, the answer lies in a humanist spirit applied to domestic and international relations alike. Wang hoped that the postwar world would come to share his theory of peaceful coexistence and positive competition. Japan’s encroachment of China’s territories was therefore not just China’s existential threat, but a grave challenge to this emerging new global order.⁸⁴ But the reason for Japan’s aggression should be partly found in China’s weakness, and her inability to defend herself – or even to maintain the modern infrastructure once the colonial powers retreat – should be acknowledged by every honest Chinese as a source of shame.⁸⁵ Thus, despite his disappointment about the injustice meted out on China, Wang nonetheless believed that the Paris Peace Treaty could become an acceptable ground for future work toward global peace. Moreover, its injustice, like a gadfly, had spurred the Chinese intelligentsia as well as the whole public into political action, which hopefully would lead to China’s awakening and self-strengthening.

Wang’s comment on the victims’ co-responsibility for their victimhood bears some similarity to Hannah Arendt’s chilly observation: “The so-called scapegoat necessarily ceases to be the innocent victim whom the world blames for all its sins and through whom it wishes to escape punishment; it becomes one group of people among other groups, all of which are involved in the business of this world. And it does not simply cease to be co-responsible because it became the victim of the world’s injustice and cruelty.”⁸⁶ Wang’s answer to his own share of the responsibility was to get his hands dirty and become a politician. In 1922 he would announce that improving politics is the precondition of improving education, and not vice versa.⁸⁷ In 1924 he would take up party positions in a formal capacity.⁸⁸ On July 3, 1925, four months after Sun Yat-Sen’s death, he would be elected President of China by the Nationalist Government in Guangzhou.⁸⁹

84 Wang Jingwei, “Bali Hehui yu Zhong Ri wenti”, pp. 22–25.

85 Wang Jingwei, “Renlei gongcun zhuyi”, pp. 8–12.

86 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, London: Penguin Books, 2017 [1951], p. 6.

87 Cai / Wang, *Wang Jingwei shengping jishi*, p. 39.

88 *Ibid.*, pp. 47–49.

89 *Ibid.*, p. 69.

The influence of anarchism aside, another factor that explained Wang's resistance to politics was his adherence to China's literati tradition. A Chinese literatus is primarily a scholar and poet and only circumstantially a statesman. A believer in the Ming Confucian Wang Yangming's 王陽明 (1472–1529) idealist moral philosophy, Wang exhibited a disposition to regard the individual's moral subjectivity as the most powerful political agency. Such a philosophy, however, was ill-suited to the politics of the highly volatile Republican China. Wang never tried to take control of financial or military power, a deadly hamartia exploited by his rival Chiang Kai-shek. As a result his presidency was short-lived. The Canton Coup of 20 March 1926⁹⁰ would lead to Wang's ouster and Chiang's rise to power.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

It is of historical, biographical, and literary significance for us to reexamine Wang's French sojourn of 1912 to 1919. Because of the ignominious last five years of his life, of all of China's Republican leaders, Wang Jingwei remains the one hovering in the margin of historiography. Today, most historical researches on Sino-Franco history of exchange ignore Wang Jingwei's contribution, deliberately or inadvertently. It is therefore important to correct such a punishing revisionism. Driven by the ideal of "saving China" through education, science, and industry, he played an important role in a movement that would fundamentally change China. The Montargis Chinese student community would later foster future Chinese communist leaders, including Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 (1904–1997). Wang was also instrumental in China's participation in the First World War and in bringing her labors to the Western Front. Though her joining the Allied force alone would not be enough to make China an equal actor on the international stage, as Wang and his comrades once naively hoped, it would be the first time in history when her fate and the world's were united in one.

This period in turn was transformative in Wang's life. He had the opportunity to live at the center of an ideological struggle between contestants such as nationalism, anarchism, humanism, and communism, and to reflect upon China's national identity and her modern fate. He emerged being a humanist with an anarchist ideal of cosmopolitan unity, as well as a Chinese nationalist in the

90 For a detailed analysis of the episode, see Yang Tianshi 楊天石, *Zhaoxun zhenshi de Jiang Jieshi 找尋真實的蔣介石*, Hong Kong: Sanlian shudian, 2008, vol. 1, pp. 131–154. He concludes that the incident was the result of mistrust and misunderstanding.

current world historical circumstances when genuine unity remained a remote dream and national competition an unavoidable reality. Such intellectual hybridity was typical of his time, but as a Republican leader his persuasions had lasting impacts on Chinese modern history. His sympathy to the labor movement would nudge him to the KMT leftwing after Sun Yat-Sen's death. But, unlike a worker-student, his experience of France was of the middle-class, which likely helped to reinforce his centrist disposition. He would eventually be unsettled by their radical land reform proposals and part ways with the Chinese Communists. Finally, his humanist tendency was an important factor that led to his seeking an alternative solution to the Second Sino-Japanese War—not through mutual destruction, which also entails enormous human sacrifices, but through peaceful negotiations and compromises.

Wang Jingwei's poems provide precious records of a Chinese intellectual and political leader's conflicted inner life in wartime France. They tell of a constant tug of war between his desire for a private life among books and nature and that for a public life of actions, of doing something, of finding significance in the world of man. In this, his striving was almost that of an existentialist. As he writes in a poem on watching the famous waterfall on the Bridge of Spain, Hautes-Pyrénées, in the summer of 1919:

由來泉水在山清 莽莽人間盡不平 風雷萬古無停歇 和我中宵悲嘯聲	Waters of the stream are always pure in the mountain; But this vast world of man is full of unevenness. Through history the wind and thunder on the waterfall never cease; In their echo I sing a song of pathos in the stillness of night. ⁹¹
--	--

As in a typical landscape poem, Wang first describes the scenery in detail and its purifying effect on him, a tired traveler. The ten couplets on the various movements of the water, full of imaginative associations, show the poet's long and focused gaze in enchanted rapture. He reveals his intention and identity only toward the very end, in the four lines translated above. Just like the stream must discard its purity in the mountain (proverbial place of reclusion in Chinese poetry) and become turbulent in this world of unevenness (pun for injustice), he must abandon his quiet studio in France, to respond to the Fatherland's thunderous call. He would not, after all, become the Reclining Buddha that he saw on his trip to France, 1912.

91 Wang Jingwei, "Xibanyaqiao shang guan pu" 西班牙橋上觀瀑, in: *SZL*, p. 75.