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## 4b. Report on OYCF Teaching Fellowship Program

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(Di WANG)

I received an OYCF Teaching Fellowship in September 2003, which supported me to teach a course in Sichuan University during October and November 2003. The course I taught was called "Social Movements in Modern China," with both history and political science perspectives. Originally, this course was scheduled to take place between October 6 and 27, but because of a change of my schedule, after a discussion with the History Department of Sichuan University, I changed the teaching schedule to between October 13 and November 5.

### **Teaching**

During the course, students read, contemplated, and discussed some of the best new scholarship on social movements in China. The course also stressed students' own research -- each student chose a research topic, prepared a bibliography and a research proposal complete with an outline, and drafted, revised and produced a paper between 10 and 15 pages. We devoted some class sessions to research methods and strategies, and the use of library and other resources. Towards the end of the course, students presented drafts of their research papers to the class. To encourage reflective reading, I also invited students to comment on what others in the class wrote and to find out what others thought of his writing before class sessions. All the preparatory work helped make class discussions more productive. For those sessions, students went to class prepared to contribute to a discussion that helped other students learn about the subject matter of the papers. Students also helped shape each other's research by providing helpful suggestions.

The purpose of this course was to help students build a firm foundation in understanding the processes of China's history and to help students understand the present China better. Teaching the course "Social Movements in Modern China" in Sichuan University was a challenging work. I had to keep a balance of "academic freedom" and "political correctness." On the one hand, I tried to make students think how the social movements in modern China affected today's Chinese political system. On the other hand, I had to avoid some sensitive issues in China and put class discussion within the sphere allowed by the authority. Generally speaking, my teaching was based on historical facts, and the readings required in the course allowed students to understand how the Western scholars study and what they think about these major movements. The course format was lectures interspersed with occasional brief in-class discussions.

The course had requirements as follows: first, timely, thorough and careful reading of the assigned materials, regular attendance and active participation in class discussions, including preparing questions and reporting readings. Second, students were asked to report on their research projects, which usually ran from 10-15 minutes while tying the report as closely as possible to the general topic under consideration in that session. Students were asked to answer any questions arising from their reports. Third, students were required to complete a research paper (typed, double spaced and each

approximately 8-10 pages in length). Students were evaluated on class participation and contributions and on written assignments. Final grades were calculated on the following formula: participation in class counts for 50%, and research paper for the other 50%.

### **Course Materials**

This course was designed for students majored in history, mostly for graduate students, but seniors were allowed to attend after my permission. Students were required to read important studies conducted by Western scholars: Joseph Esherick, *The Origins of the Boxer Uprising* (Chinese translation); Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Chinese translation); Elizabeth Perry and Li Xun, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution*; Roxann Prazniak, *Of Camel Kings and Other Things: Rural Rebels against Modernity in Late Imperial China*; Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action, and Politics*; and Jeffrey Wasserstrom, *Student Protests in Twentieth-Century China: The View from Shanghai*. The course concentrated on the following topics for discussion: theoretical approaches to social movements, the rebellion and popular culture, rural rebel, workers' movements, student movements, and Cultural Revolution and after.

This course focused on social movements and collective action in modern China and explored theoretical and empirical issues concerning the history of social movements in modern China: relationship between economy and politics and that between politics and law. The course revealed organizational and behavioral repertoires, and their impacts on various social groups and the state. It combined the methods and approaches associated with the disciplines of history and political science. The course also examined important social, political, economic, and cultural events from late Qing emperors to that of the current Chinese communist government.

Chinese society has experienced a revolutionary change since the nineteenth century. Beginning from the Opium War in the middle of the nineteenth century, China experienced rapid social, economic, and cultural development, as well as urbanization and population expansion. This was followed by the challenge of the Western powers, reforms and revolutions, communist victory, the construction of socialist society, and more recent reforms in the post-Mao era. All these events entailed new elements and revolutionary changes in Chinese social movements. The course also tried to encourage students to think broadly – to take into consideration elements of politics, economy, society, and culture of China, including the structure of Chinese government, economic development, philosophies and religions, women's lives, assimilation and acculturation, and so forth, that influenced social movements.

While paying primary attention to English language scholarship, I on occasions made reference to research conducted in China, Taiwan, or Japan. Coverage was, of course, not intended to be exhaustive. Important areas of research, like religion or cultural history, were also skipped. The principle objective of this course was to familiarize students with changing scholarly interpretations of the events of modern China, and the types of materials and methodologies used in constructing these interpretations. It was

also intended to help students practice the skills needed by research scholars: critical reading, writing, and oral presentation.

This course explored how, as China was being politically transformed in the early twentieth century, the reformists and revolutionary movements drew ordinary people into their political orbit, how Chinese culture was transformed into politics, and how both elites and ordinary people redefined their public role mainly through addressing conflicts between the state and commoners and between the state and elites—in short, how commoners' activities in the social movements were exploited to further local political struggles.

Elite reformers regarded commoners as a volatile element, and believed social order would be stabilized if they themselves could gain control of political movements. In addition, reformers sought to manipulate ordinary people for political gains. The elite reformers also believed that the reform movement would benefit if the popular culture could be brought into the local and even national politics, that is, if the popular culture could develop an overtly political orientation. Since the late Qing, elites had tried to increase their influence on the masses through such measures as public readings and lectures, book lending, and reforms of local opera. While elites typically scorned the low classes, and instead preferred to frequent “the circles of gentry, merchants, and students,” they nonetheless wanted to insinuate themselves into that class by providing leadership. Commoners traditionally had little interest in local politics, but the sweeping social transformation underway forced their participation. On the one hand, elites attempted to exploit commoners to further their own political agenda and to mobilize against the central government for local rights. On the other hand, commoners also spoke on their own behalf and promoted their own economic interests, especially when their interests were threatened.

The 1911 Revolution and other political movements in the early Republic deepened people's involvement in national politics while simultaneously contributing to the destabilization of public order. The chaos of the early Republic and the new presence of various military and political powers seriously disrupted the familiar patterns of everyday life. At the same time, the public place became a more visible arena for political protest, which resulted in many sensational “social dramas.” Of course, people's experiences in the early Republic were similar with each other. In Chengdu, however, politics also adopted some highly local characteristics.

From late Qing to the 1920s, the relationship between the state, elites, and the masses changed constantly. Low-class people and elites had a complicated relationship under the influence of national and local politics: sometimes united and sometimes split. This relationship was often determined by the interaction between the state and elites. In other words, elites, as the agency between the state and ordinary people, shifted their positions between the two ends to suit their own interests. This pattern dictated that when the state were to strengthen its leadership in local communities, the elites would support the state and participate in the new programs against commoners; otherwise, they would oppose or remain neutral regarding new measures and policies. During the period of the New Policies, the state and local elites collaborated to conduct urban reform and to regulate

commoners, but when the state jeopardized local political and economic interests, elites and the masses united to protest, such as against the policy of nationalizing railroads, which triggered the 1911 Revolution. After the revolution, both the warlords and Nationalist government abolished the traditional reliance on local elites for social control, imposing their power directly into communities. Whereas in the late Qing, local elites led commoners, in the early Republic, this control fell to the government's hands. As a result, elites increasingly lost their role and influence in community life, and thus became less enthusiastic toward the government's new programs.

In the late Qing and Republican periods, various social groups played their active roles in national and local politics. In addition to the traditional organizations such as charitable establishments, native place associations, and guilds, many new organizations emerged in the late 1890s, when the wave of the national reform movement swept throughout China. In the early twentieth century, under the promotion of the New Policies, a much larger number of voluntary and professional organizations were established. While these elite organizations played an important role in influencing local politics through their participation in the reformist movements, the role of ordinary people were also very prominent.

In the field of Chinese history, the focus has been primarily on how elite thoughts influenced politics, but little work has been done about the relationship between popular culture and local politics, an exploration of which could give us an opportunity to observe social transformation from another angle. Political uncertainty deteriorated public order and gradually damaged the stability of the neighborhood and community; conflicts increased between sexes, classes, and ethnic groups throughout the city. However, we should also realize that political changes opened up the relatively isolated societies and brought new social, economic, and cultural elements as well. Post-revolutionary Chengdu provides an excellent example of how politics can influence everyday life and underscores the importance of including politics in the study of popular culture.

### **Conclusion**

From this course, students have had a better and deeper understanding of modern China's history, society, culture, and politics. Although because of time schedule and other technical problems, the course might not have satisfied everyone, most of students reflected that they had learned a lot from the new information, new teaching style, and new approach in my teaching. Also, it was a very good experience for me to teach a course in Sichuan University after I left its classroom over ten years' ago. This experience not only will help me build a closer tie for academic exchanges with Sichuan University in the future, but also has made me understand more recent development in China's higher education and campus life. I appreciate very much the OYCF's support for this mission.

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