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BUSINESSMAN OR LITERATUS? HU ZHENGHI AND DAGONG BAO, 1916–20

✍ Qiliang He

This article focuses on Hu Zhengzhi's 胡政之 (1889–1949) reform of *Dagong bao* 大公報, the most prestigious newspaper in Republican China, but also the mouthpiece of Anhui Clique (*Wanxi* 皖系) warlords in the years between 1916 and 1920. As its editor-in-chief, and a member of the Anhui Clique coterie, Hu altered the paper's layouts, reassembled the newsgathering and reporting team, connected to a trans-regional news network, updated its printing technology, and introduced a new punctuation system, among other things. Although the newspaper received investments and subsidies from Anhui Clique politicians and warlords throughout the late 1910s, Hu established a clear agenda to make this partisan newspaper a profitable business. My exploration of Hu Zhengzhi's reforms between 1916 and 1920 is intended to fulfil a number of goals. First of all, the history of China's warlord era has long been dismissed as a 'dark age', during which anti-intellectualist militarism trampled on progressivism and reformism. As Edward McCord puts it, historians find it difficult to find 'meaning in the constant civil wars and complicated political maneuvers'.¹ Lucian Pye contends that the dismissal of the significance of the warlord period stemmed from 'the shame of having to admit that the arbiters of Chinese society were the military — the very element the Chinese always liked to treat as insignificant'.² Thus, Pye is willing to view this period as 'an aspect of the Chinese process of modernization'.³ Following Pye's line of thought, this study turns attention to the mechanism of reform and modernisation in the warlord period by focusing on a warlord-controlled newspaper's capacity to effect changes and improve itself. In fact, the first two decades of the twentieth century have been viewed as a 'golden age' of Chinese newspapers,⁴ largely because of the 'stupidity, inefficiency, and transiency of the warlord regimes' that afforded the press 'more freedom than ever before'.⁵ To say that all warlords were stupid and inefficient certainly does an injustice to history.

1 Edward A. McCord, *The Power of the Gun: The Emergence of Modern Chinese Warlordism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p.2.

2 Lucian W. Pye, *Warlord Politics: Conflict and Coalition in the Modernization of Republican China* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971), p.3.

3 *Ibid.*, p.6.

4 Lin Yutang, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China* (New York: Greenwood Press, Publishers, 1968), p.114.

5 Lee-hsia Hsu Ting, *Government Control of the Press in Modern China, 1900–1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p.57.

- 6 Chen Jiyong 陳紀濤, *Hu Zhengzhi yu Dagong bao* 胡政之與大公報 (Hong Kong: Zhongguo yuekanshe, 1974), p.103.
- 7 'Paoqi qian Tianjin Dagong bao chou zhaopai, gaibao tongren gaichuang Jinbu ribao' 拋棄前天津《大公報》臭招牌, 該報同人改創《進步日報》, *Renmin ribao* 人民日報, 4 March 1949.
- 8 Lin, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China*, p.131.
- 9 Li Jinquan 李金銓 (Chin-chuan Lee), 'Daolun jindai Zhongguo de wenren lunzheng' 導論 近代中國的文人論政, in ed. Li Jinquan (Chin-chuan Lee), *Wenren lunzheng: Minguo zhishi fenzi yu baokan* 文人論政: 民國知識份子與報刊 (Taipei: Zhengda chubanshe, 2008), p.6.
- 10 Li Jinquan (Chin-chuan Lee), ed. *Wenren lunzheng*, back cover.

Actually, a number of warlords showed an avid interest in patronising various periodicals for purposes ranging from advancing their own political agendas to promoting a new visual culture in China. For example, Yuan Shikai 袁世凱 (1859–1916) invested in English- and Chinese-language papers, while *Beiyang huabao* 北洋畫報 was founded under Zhang Xueliang's 張學良 (1901–2001) auspices. By comparison, *Dagong bao*'s patrons, the Anhui Clique warlords, adopted a laissez-faire approach and permitted Hu Zhengzhi the liberty to implement numerous changes in the newspaper.

Secondly, this study is an attempt to fill a scholarly void in studying *Dagong bao* — a Chinese newspaper with an international reputation in the first half of the twentieth century. In virtually all works about *Dagong bao*, English and Chinese alike, the period between 1916 and 1920 has received little, if any, attention. Zhou Yu's 周雨 448-page long history of *Dagong bao*, for example, devotes only one page to Hu Zhengzhi's tenure at the newspaper in the late 1910s. Even Hu himself was reluctant to look back on this period. In a conversation between Hu and Chen Jiyong 陳紀濤 (1908–97), a long-time correspondent for *Dagong bao*, for example, Hu highlighted two periods (1902–16 and after 1926) as key to the development of this newspaper, thereby markedly leaving out his four-year stint with *Dagong bao* in the late 1910s.⁶ Such a glaring omission, wittingly or unwittingly, attests to a pervasive tendency to denigrate the warlord times as barbaric and chaotic in both Guomindang (the Nationalist Party or GMD) and Communist historiographies. At the tail end of the Chinese civil war in 1949, when *Dagong bao* was under the Communist Party's critical scrutiny, for example, the newspaper's status as the organ of Anhui Clique warlords was emphatically cited as evidence of its 'reactionary nature' (*fandong shizhi* 反動實質).⁷

This study of *Dagong bao* between 1916 and 1920 reveals a missing piece of history and argues that even partisan newspapers controlled by warlords possessed a dynamism for reform and progress. It also stresses that while *Dagong bao* was an organ of warlords, it also had a reputation for being 'the most progressive and best edited paper in Chinese in this country' after 1926, to borrow Lin Yutang's 林語堂 (1895–1976) phrase.⁸ In fact, Lin's compliment, as well as his scorn for some of the commercial newspapers of the day, exposed Chinese intellectuals' ingrained bias for a specific style of newspaper content. This content allowed intellectuals and scholars to use the new media of newspapers to disseminate political commentary as if they continued to play a vital role in national and regional politics, like the literati in imperial times. After 1926, *Dagong bao* won widespread acclaim, in no small part because of its highly incisive and inspiring editorials on the ongoing political situation in China. Thus, *Dagong bao* in the 1930s and 1940s was viewed as an exemplary newspaper that carried forward a unique Chinese journalistic practice, *wenren lunzheng* 文人論政 or 'political commentary by the literati'. Blending American progressive journalism and the time-honoured Confucian tradition for scholar-officials to instruct and admonish their rulers, 'political commentary by the literati' helped politically and culturally marginalised Chinese intellectuals recast their identities as enlighteners of the masses and advisers to political leaders.⁹ This has long been touted as a distinctive practice that sets Chinese journalism apart from its counterparts in the rest of the world. On the dustjacket of Chin-chuan Lee's book, for example, a reader considers 'political commentary by the literati' as the defining characteristic of Chinese journalism.¹⁰

By studying the evolution of *Dagong bao*, this article questions the assumption about the universality of the practice of ‘political commentary by the literati’. Instead, I call attention to its temporal and geographical specificities by arguing that such a practice took shape at a particular time (the early twentieth century following the collapse of China’s dynastic system) and in a specific region (the Beijing/Beiping and Tianjin areas, where journalists had easy access to varieties of educational and political resources, but were usually unsupported by local businesses). Moreover, it resulted from a self-delusion suffered by modern Chinese intellectuals who wanted to enshrine the press as the institution to empower themselves politically and ideologically.

Hu Zhengzhi and Warlord Politics in the Late 1910s

After completing his course in law in Japan, Hu Zhengzhi (Figure 1) returned to China and briefly took office as a judge and lawyer in the early 1910s.¹¹ In 1912, he began work as an editor of a newspaper in Shanghai, where he stood out as he parlayed his proficiency in Japanese into his journalism. However, Hu realised, to his disappointment, that many newspapers of the day tended to fabricate news to compensate for the lack of a well-organised newsgathering service. By comparison, he found the journalist’s career somewhat easier in Tianjin, where he took office as *Dagong bao*’s editor-in-chief in October 1916, given its short distance from Beijing, the capital city and the epicentre of all political events of the day.¹² While Duan Qirui 段祺瑞 (1865–1936), the leader of the Anhui Clique, and other high-ranking officials in Beijing were always willing to keep on good terms with newspapers by giving gifts to both Chinese¹³ and foreign journalists,¹⁴ Hu enjoyed the unparalleled support of the Anhui Clique. Hu’s connection with Anhui Clique warlords and politicians dated back to his father’s tenure as a county magistrate in northern Anhui. Moreover, Hu had briefly served as a secretary to Wang Yitang 王揖唐 (1877–1948), an Anhui Clique politician, in 1915.¹⁵ Evidently, the Anhui Clique elected to treat Hu more like a comrade than an ordinary newspaperman. Li Sihao 李思浩 (1882?–1968), former minister of finance and Duan Qirui’s protégé, recollected that the Ministry of Finance paid three or four hundred *yuan* per month to newspapers run by Hu Zhengzhi in Beijing and Tianjin in the late 1910s and early 1920s.¹⁶ For a while, Hu became a de facto secretary of the Anhui Clique warlords. He later recalled that he was always summoned to take notes whenever Anhui Clique military officers convened before 1919.¹⁷ Four years after Hu Zhengzhi quit *Dagong bao* in 1920, Duan Qirui and his allied warlords and politicians continued to finance Hu’s news agency and journal.¹⁸

Despite the warlords’ patronage, Hu commanded utmost respect from Wang Zhilong 王郅隆 (1868–1923), the owner of the newspaper and a key member of the Anhui Clique. Wang never meddled with *Dagong bao* or dampened Hu’s ambition to reform the newspaper.¹⁹ The rapport between Hu and Anhui Clique military men and politicians was a telling example of the attitude adopted by a lot of warlords of the day to cope with the press. As Lin Yutang pointed out, a stronger government made a weaker press and vice versa. Therefore, Lin contended that the decade between 1915 and 1925 was better for freedom of the press compared with other years in the Republican era.²⁰ Among leaders of the relatively weak warlord regimes, Duan Qirui was well known for bribing journalists in northern China rather than launching an outright crackdown on newspapers. The veteran journalist Wang Xinming



Figure 1

Hu Zhengzhi.
Wikimedia Commons.

11 Ye Dezhen 葉得真, ‘Zhengzhi xiansheng de yisheng’ 胡政之的一生, *Dagong bao* 大公報 (Chongqing edition), 15 April 1945.

12 Xu Ying 徐盈, ‘Hu Zhengzhi tan Minyuan baoye’ 胡政之談民元報業, *Renwu zazhi* 人物雜誌, 2.11 (1947): 6–8, at p.8.

13 Xu Zhucheng 徐鑄成, ‘Li Sihao shengqian tan Beiyang caizheng he jin falang an’ 李思浩談北洋財政和金法郎案, in eds Du Chunhe 杜春和, Lin Binsheng 林斌生 and Qiu Quanzheng 丘權政, *Beiyang junfa shiliao xuanji (xiace)* 北洋軍閥史料選輯 (下冊), (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe 中國社會科學出版社, 1981), p.236.

14 Mordechai Rozanski, ‘The Role of American Journalists in Chinese-American Relations’ (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1974), p.365.

15 Cao Shiyong 曹世瑛, ‘Dagong bao yu Hu Zhengzhi’ 大公報與胡政之, *Zhonghua wenshi ziliao wenku* 中華文史資料文庫 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1996), Vol.16, p.278.

16 Xu Zhucheng, ‘Li Sihao shengqian tan Beiyang caizheng he jin falang an,’ p.236.

17 Xu Ying, ‘Hu Zhengzhi tan Minyuan baoye,’ p.8.

18 Deng Hanxiang 鄧漢祥, ‘Wo suo liaojie de Duan Qirui’ 我所瞭解的段祺瑞, in *Beiyang junfa shiliao xuanji (xiace)*, p.291.

19 Xu Ying, ‘Hu Zhengzhi tan Minyuan baoye,’ p.8; Fu Yang 付陽 and Wang Jin 王瑾, ‘Shihai gouchen: Hu Zhengzhi 1916nian kaishi dui *Dagong bao* de gexin’ 史海鉤沉: 胡政之1916年開始對《大公報》的革新, in eds. Hu Mei 胡玫 and Wang Jin 王瑾, *Huiyi Hu Zhengzhi – dakai zhuyi de menfei* 回憶胡政之 — 打開追憶的門扉 (Tianjin: renmin chubanshe, 2009), p.199.

20 Lin, *A History of the Press and Public Opinion in China*, p.114.

- 21 Wang Xinming 王新命, *Xinwen quan li sishi nian* 新聞圈裏四十年 (Taipei: Longwen chubanshe gufen youxian gongsi, 1993), pp.316–20.
- 22 Lengguan 冷觀, 'Da touhan zhujun' 答投函諸君, *Dagong bao*, 12 June 1917.
- 23 Fang Hanqi 方漢奇, *Dagong bao bainian shi* (1902-06-17–2002-06-17) 《大公報》百年 1902-06-17–2002-06-17 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2004), p.119.
- 24 Chen Zhiqiang 陳志強, *Hu Zhengzhi xinwen zhiye guan jiqi shijian yanjiu* 胡政之新聞職業觀及其實踐研究 (Nanchang: Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2011), p.99.
- 25 Lengguan, 'Da touhan zhujun,' *Dagong bao*, 12 June 1917.
- 26 Wang Yongmei 王詠梅, 'Hu Zhengzhi dui Wang Zhilong shiqi *dagong bao* de gaige' 胡政之對王鄧隆時期《大公報》的改革, *Guoji xinwen jie* 國際新聞界, 2 (2007): 76–80, at p.77.
- 27 *Ibid.*
- 28 'Yinli xinnian benbao da gailiang guang-gao' 陰曆新年本報大改良廣告, *Dagong bao*, 5 January 1917.
- 29 Bao Ji 鮑霽, *Xiao Qian yanjiu ziliao* 蕭乾研究資料 (Beijing: Beijing shiyue wenyi chubanshe, 1988), p.64.
- 30 Timothy B. Weston, 'China, Professional Journalism, and Liberal Internationalism in the Era of the First World War,' *Pacific Affairs* 83.2 (June 2010): 327–47, at p.346.
- 31 Hu Zhengzhi 胡政之, 'Sheqing ri zhuinian Zhang Jiluan xiansheng' 社慶日追念張季鸞先生, in ed. Zhou Yu 周雨, *Dagong baoren yijiu* 大公報人憶舊 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1991), p.254.

王新命 (1892–1961) recalled that warlord governments in Beijing usually held intellectuals, including journalists, in high respect. Therefore, warlords such as Duan Qirui were reluctant to bring lawsuits against newspapers even when they felt that their reputations were sullied in the press. Hence, Wang considered Beijing in the 1910s and early 1920s as a 'haven' for the press.²¹ It is, therefore, no surprise that the patrons of the newspaper gave Hu free rein. In return, Hu usually paid Duan, *Dagong bao*'s political patron, compliments in his essays and editorials. For example, in an open letter to readers dated 12 June 1917, Hu publicly hailed Duan as an 'incorruptible, upright, and honest' (*qingzheng gangjie* 清正剛介) person, despite his weaknesses. Hu concluded that Duan was the right person to lead the country.²² By contrast, the name of Li Yuanhong 黎元洪 (1864–1928), then president of the Republic of China and Duan's arch-enemy in the government, was rarely mentioned in *Dagong bao*.²³ A recent study reveals that editorials published in *Dagong bao* in the late 1910s usually adopted the same standpoints as Duan Qirui did.²⁴

Reforming *Dagong bao*, 1916–20

Despite the unreserved support of the Anhui Clique warlords, *Dagong bao*, in Hu Zhengzhi's view, needed to be an independent newspaper. He thus stressed that *Dagong bao* was a shareholding company where no-one could dictate what stance it should take.²⁵ Thus, Hu vowed to effect major changes in the newspaper shortly after he took office. First and foremost, he improved its layout. Since its founding in 1902, each page of *Dagong bao* featured two vertical columns divided by a blank space, but on 10 November 1916, it introduced a new look, with four vertical columns separated by thin lines. On 28 January, 1917, Hu increased the number of columns by two. Hu also attempted to liven up the rigid and awkward-looking pages. Previously, *Dagong bao*'s printers used fonts of only two sizes to differentiate titles from body texts. Hu introduced more fonts so that important news could be highlighted with larger sized characters, while smaller fonts were reserved for less significant information. For the first few months, Hu worked in the typesetting room with typesetters and printers, who were disgruntled at their increased workload after the reform and were resistant to change.²⁶

Aside from the format, Hu Zhengzhi endeavoured to enrich the newspaper's contents by creating various columns such as 'Local Records' (*Benbu jishi* 本埠記事), 'Beijing Dispatch' (*Beijing kuaixin* 北京快信), 'Important News' (*Jinyao xinwen* 緊要新聞), 'Miscellany on Current Affairs' (*Shishi zazhi* 時事雜誌), 'Remarks on Theatre' (*Jutan* 劇談), 'Travel Notes' (*Youji* 遊記), and 'Special Dispatches from Reuters' (*Teyue Lutou dian* 特約路透電).²⁷ Starting with the Chinese New Year of 1917, Hu ushered in a variety of articles about industry, business, education, social sensations, and book reviews, to complement political news.²⁸ The diversification of the newspaper's contents sprang from Hu's intention to emulate *Asahi shimbun*, a newspaper he loved when he studied in Japan. Hu stated in the 1930s that *Asahi shimbun* inspired him to produce a newspaper that catered to the tastes of a whole spectrum of readers, to exert maximum impact on society.²⁹ Hu's indebtedness to Japanese journalism aligns with Timothy Weston's observation that Chinese journalists participated in a US-dominated 'transnational movement for journalism reform' through Japanese mediation.³⁰ Hu's undisguised admiration for *Asahi shimbun* prompted him to befriend the *Asahi* staff and other newspapermen from Japan.³¹ Kanda Masao 神田正雄 (1879–1961), an *Asahi* reporter, for exam-

ple, was invited to write an essay for another newly created column, ‘Special Accounts’ (*Tebie jizai* 特別記載), on 31 January 1917. Kanda’s complaint that newspapers did a disservice to society principally because of newspapermen’s lack of self-cultivation and indolence struck a chord with Hu.³² On several occasions, Hu revealed the fabrication of news by irresponsible reporters and accused some reporters of fraud and rumour-mongering, which was, he said, a disgrace to all newspapermen.³³

Under these circumstances, it was unsurprising that soon after Hu took over *Dagong bao*, he fired six out of seven reporters for their habitual fabrication of news. The one who retained his job did so because his father worked as a messenger for the Office of the President, with access to the most up-to-date political news. To gain information from China’s capital more promptly, Hu hired three Beijing-based correspondents to relay information by telephone.³⁴ Hu also harboured an ambition to build up the news network of *Dagong bao* in other parts of the country. On 5 January 1917, *Dagong bao* announced it would either employ newsgatherers or invite specialists in various provinces to work for the newspaper.³⁵ Ten days later, an advertisement was published for newsgatherers in Baoding, Jinan, and Qingdao.³⁶ By March 1920, *Dagong bao* had set up a local office in Shanghai for distributing the paper and seeking out advertisers.³⁷ This reform of reporting methods initiated by Hu pre-dated the efforts by a majority of his counterparts in Shanghai, who did not hire professional reporters until the late 1920s, when the GMD took over the Yangzi Delta.³⁸ In all likelihood, only *Shen bao* employed professional correspondents earlier than Hu did.

With a reworked layout and a reorganised newsgathering service, Hu expressed his desires for the newspaper in an announcement entitled ‘The New Hope of This Newspaper’ (*Benbao zhi xin xiwang* 本報之新希望) on 3 January 1917. Hu proposed two duties for a newspaper: to report ‘truthful, accurate, and impartial’ (*zhenque gongzheng* 真確公正) news, and then to build up a public opinion. For Hu, it was the former that set the stage for the latter. He rejected the creation of news through imagination or speculation. In his opinion, telling lies in the press might not be punishable by law, but it was poisonous to journalism as a vocation. Hu maintained the news was never the property of individual newspapermen or political parties, but was a ‘public instrument’ (*gongqi* 公器).³⁹ Indeed, his focus on ‘truthful, accurate, and impartial’ news was akin to ‘fact-centred discursive practices’, which stemmed from ‘regularities of the journalistic field emerging during the second half of the nineteenth century in England and America’.⁴⁰ Undoubtedly, Hu was heavily influenced by Anglo-American journalistic practices through newspapers in Japan, where he had lived in the opening decade of the twentieth century. Hu witnessed a dramatic shift in Japanese newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century, moving from political commentary to news reporting.⁴¹ Accordingly, Hu highlighted *Dagong bao*’s strategy of prioritising news reporting over commentary.

Hu Zhengzhi would reiterate the necessity of reforming *Dagong bao* in particular and journalist circles in general in the summer of 1920, shortly after his overseas tour, during which he immersed himself in journalism in the US and Britain. In an essay published in *Dagong bao* on 1 July 1920, Hu put an emphasis on the transformation (*gaizao* 改造) of individuals, newspapers, and the Chinese nation. Hu was convinced that the newspaper could become a catalyst for the transformation of individual citizens, which would eventu-

32 Shentian Zhengxiong (Kanda Masao 神田正雄), ‘Yu youbang tongye zhuyan shu’ 與友邦同業諸彥書, *Dagong bao*, 31 January 1917.

33 ‘Waijiao xinwen ke zaojia ye’ 外交新聞可造假耶, *Dagong bao*, 25 February 1917.

34 Xu Ying, ‘Hu Zhengzhi tan Minyuan baoye,’ p.8.

35 ‘Yinli xinnian benbao da gailiang guang-gao,’ *Dagong bao*, 5 January 1917.

36 ‘Benbao tebie guanggao’ 本報特別廣告, *Dagong bao*, 15 January 1917.

37 *Shen bao* 申報, 21 March 1920.

38 Jin Xiongbai 金雄白, *Jizhe shengya wushinian* 記者生涯五十年 (Taipei: Yuesheng wenhua youxian gongsi, 1988), p.92.

39 Lengguan, ‘Benbao zhi xin xiwang’ 本報之新希望, *Dagong bao*, 3 January, 1917.

40 Jean K. Chalaby, ‘Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention: A Comparison of the Development of French and Anglo-American Journalism, 1830s–1920s,’ *European Journal of Communication* 11.3 (1996): 303–26, at p.309.

41 James L. Huffman, *Creating a Public: People and Press in Meiji Japan* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1997), p.234.

42 'Benbao gaizao zhi zhiqu' 本報改造之旨趣, *Dagong bao*, 1 July 1920.

43 *Ibid.*

44 Fang Hanqi, *Dagong bao bainian shi (1902-06-17 - 2002-06-17)*, p.168.

45 Hu Zhengzhi, 'Huishou yishi qi nian' 回首一十七年, in eds Wang Jin 王瑾 and Hu Mei 胡玫, *Hu Zhengzhi wenji* 胡政之文集, (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2007), p.1148.

46 'Gonghe guo congci gaozhong hu 共和果從此告終乎, *Dagong bao*, 2 July 1917.

ally lead to the transformation of the whole nation. To illustrate the newspaper's role in mediating between national politics and average readers, Hu presented an idealised vision of British newspaper readers:

In my view, among the peoples of the world, those of England are most superior in their political abilities. This is the case because English newspapers record all the details of the great events of state, so the political general knowledge of its citizenry is nourished to fruition. The way they put it to use is better than in other countries.⁴²

By comparison, Hu bemoaned, Chinese citizens were in dire need of 'knowledge of the world' (*shijie zhishi* 世界知識), and newspapers in China should be held accountable for their readers' deplorable ignorance. In Hu's opinion, information about world politics, which was obtained either from the dispatches of local governmental institutions or foreign newspapers, was unsystematic, fragmented, and inaccurate. Therefore, Hu vowed that *Dagong bao* would impart a 'political common sense' (*zhengzhi changshi* 政治常識) to its readers from then on.⁴³ To cultivate new citizens in China, Hu also answered the call of proponents of New Culture in the May Fourth Movement by adopting a new punctuation system in 1920 and adding columns for their writings.⁴⁴

Dagong bao's Coverage of Zhang Xun's Restoration of Manchu Rule

In July 1917, shortly after his takeover of the newspaper, the reform-minded Hu Zhengzhi and his refashioned *Dagong bao* met with unexpected success as General Zhang Xun 張勳 (1854–1923) launched a shortlived campaign to restore the defunct Qing Dynasty. In the early 1940s, Hu, who was usually reluctant to mention his tenure with *Dagong bao* during the late 1910s and early 1920s, spoke with a kind of contained exaltation of the unprecedented success that *Dagong bao* accomplished in covering this failed Restoration. He recalled that during the period of a dozen days, *Dagong bao's* reporting and commentary struck a chord among its readers and enjoyed a dramatic surge in circulation. He even proudly likened the *Dagong bao* of those days to the Shanghai *Minli bao* 民立報 (1910–13) during the 1911 Revolution.⁴⁵ Edited by Yu Youren 于右任 (1879–1964), a veteran GMD member, *Minli bao's* reputation as a radical anti-Manchu newspaper peaked soon after the outbreak of the 1911 Revolution. It was widely acknowledged as the leader of the revolutionary press nationwide. Hu's comparison of *Dagong bao* in 1917 with *Minli bao* in 1911 thus reminded readers that he had displayed a commitment to leading public opinion since the warlord period.

The 1917 Restoration, from which Hu Zhengzhi and his *Dagong bao* benefited enormously, was unheralded and stunned the whole country. In fact, *Dagong bao* managed to induce a panic among its readers. After two days, Hu and other editors asked with a twinge of fear, 'Does this Really Herald the End of the Republic?' (*Gonghe guo congci gaozhong hu* 共和果從此告終乎)⁴⁶ In spite of the panic generated and spread by *Dagong bao*, the 1917 Restoration, for historians, was nothing more than a political hoax. It started with a rift between Li Yuanhong, President of the Republic, and Prime Minister Duan Qirui. The tension between the two escalated on 23 May 1917, when President Li dismissed Duan. General Zhang Xun, who then took a leading role among local military governors, was drawn into the political maelstrom as Li requested him to lead troops to Beijing and stabilise the situation. On 1 July, 1917, General Zhang

succeeded in occupying Beijing before he reinstated Emperor Puyi 溥儀 (1906–67). As soon as the Restoration occurred, an angry outcry about defending the Republic raged in the media. Duan then gathered his troops and set out for Beijing on 5 July 1917. The war lasted only a few days. By 14 June, Duan had complete control over the capital city.⁴⁷

Chaotic as the Restoration and the anti-Restoration war seemed, this fortnight-long political event was more an interlude than a turning point for the Republic. As Hsi-sheng Ch'i comments, the campaign appeared to 'have been a comic opera'. The battle was more jest than joust as General Zhang Xun's soldiers surrendered immediately the fighting began. The casualties amounted to only one hundred, most of whom were civilians.⁴⁸ In contrast to the relative blandness in the battlefield, Duan Qirui ran a more dramatic show in Tianjin, portraying himself as the saviour of the Republic. Lucian Pye argues that Duan stayed in Tianjin for an extended period in order to 'build up the impression that the Restoration had been a serious threat to China and that it might have succeeded'.⁴⁹ Without doubt, *Dagong bao*, the mouthpiece of Duan and his Anhui Clique warlords, played a vital role in creating a particular version of post-Restoration Beijing and delivering the promise of Duan's final triumph over the pro-Qing force.

Beijing in a Mess

Most of *Dagong bao*'s reports about the Restoration gave its readers an impression that Beijing was hopelessly in chaos. On 2 July 1917, one day after the Restoration was officially declared, readers were informed that all means of communication and transportation were under the full control of Zhang Xun's troops.⁵⁰ A man was reportedly arrested for his attempt to send a telegram without a permit on 5 July.⁵¹ A number of governmental or commercial institutions decided to temporarily close or relocate to Tianjin in response to the ongoing political turmoil in Beijing.⁵² Politicians and military men, who had no interest in serving the Manchu government, reportedly fled Beijing en masse to keep away from the political unrest. Li Yuanhong, whom *Dagong bao* attacked for his unstated intention to collaborate with Zhang Xun in favour of the Restoration,⁵³ sought asylum in the Japanese Embassy in Beijing.⁵⁴ Not only President Li, but also the Qing imperial family, the young emperor included, fell victim of the Restoration, according to *Dagong bao*'s reports. As early as 2 July, an unconfirmed report was published in the newspaper that all imperial family members lamented that the annual stipend of four million silver dollars paid by the Republican government would be recalled once Zhang Xun forcibly reinstated Puyi as the emperor.⁵⁵ In a telegram publicised by *Dagong bao* on 4 July 1917, Duan Qirui asserted that the emperor, who had barely reached puberty, was hijacked by the power-hungry Zhang Xun.⁵⁶ In reality, it was Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929), Duan's adviser and ally, who authored the telegram at Duan's behest. In a separate piece in *Dagong bao*, Liang warned that foreign powers would intervene in and conquer China if Zhang wound up restoring the Qing Dynasty, and China was thereby plunged into a civil war.⁵⁷



Figure 2

The cover of *Dagong bao* on 12 February 1946.

47 Li Jiannong 李劍農, *Wuxu yihou sanshi nian Zhongguo zhengzhi shi* 戊戌以後三十年中國政治史 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1965), pp.262–70.

48 Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Warlord Politics in China, 1916–1928* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976), 136–37.

49 Pye, *Warlord Politics*, p.18.

50 'Gonghe guo congci gaozhong hu,' *Dagong bao*, 2 July 1917.

51 'Taozei zhishi qiyi' 討賊之師起矣, *Dagong bao*, 5 July 1917.

52 'Dali yuan qishi' 大理院啟事, *ibid.*

53 Lengguan, 'Jinggao guoren' 敬告國人, *Dagong bao*, 4 July 1917.

54 'Taozei zhishi qiyi' 討賊之師起矣, *ibid.*

55 'Gonghe guo congci gaozhong hu,' *Dagong bao*, 2 July, 1917.

56 'Taozei zhishi qiyi,' *Dagong bao*, 4 July 1917.

57 'Gonghe guo congci gaozhong hu,' *Dagong bao*, 2 July 1917.

58 Joan Judge, *Print and Politics: 'Shibao' and the Culture of Reform in Late Qing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p.24.

59 Philip C. Huang, *Liang Ch'i-ch'ao and Modern Chinese Liberalism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1972), p.7.

60 *Ibid.*

61 'Du Liang Rengong dui Jingshi baojie yan-shuo ganyan' 讀梁任公對京師報界演說感言, in *Hu Zhengzhi wenji*, p.1031.

62 Taozei zhishi qiye, *Dagong bao*, 4 July 1917.

63 'Lusheng fandui fubi qingxing' 魯省反對復辟情形, *Dagong bao*, 6 July 1917.

64 *Ibid.*

65 'Wanzhuang dianhua' 萬莊電話, *Dagong bao*, 7 July 1917.

66 'Nizei wu sisuo yi' 逆賊無死所矣, *ibid.*

67 Lucian W. Pye, *Warlord Politics*, p.18.

Liang Qichao was, arguably, one of the earliest authors of 'political commentary by the literati' in modern China by creating 'political journalism' — using the newspaper as a tool of political struggle — at the turn of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ Generations of journalists, intellectuals, and politicians, such as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), and Mao Zedong 毛澤東 (1893–1976) were indebted to Liang for writing political commentary or editorials in the early twentieth century.⁵⁹ Although Hu Zhengzhi was among Liang's keen admirers, he differed from those who made newspapers the 'tool of a class' or 'of a power', following Liang's example.⁶⁰ In January 1917, for example, Hu, in a report about a public speech delivered by Liang Qichao, reiterated the importance of fact-centred journalism, but not Liang's political journalism, as the remedy for China's news industry.⁶¹ Hu's call for trustworthy news notwithstanding, he was willing to allow rumours and unverified stories in *Dagong bao* at this time, given that the newspaper was the organ of the Anhui Clique; they served a political agenda by portraying Beijing in chaos after the Restoration.

With Liang Qichao the first to articulate his opposition to the Restoration in *Dagong bao*, the newspaper quickly became a forum for dissenting voices. This sent readers a message that public wrath against Zhang Xun was mounting across the country. Each day, the newspaper listed anti-Restoration announcements by politicians, warlords, intellectuals, and others. Li Yuanhong released four telegrams in *Dagong bao* on 5 July to denounce the ongoing coup.⁶² Not only politicians and warlords in Beijing and Tianjin, but also those in Shandong, Zhang Xun's sphere of influence, voiced their opposition to the Restoration.⁶³ In other reports, even those who had previously advocated a reestablishment of the monarchy in China rallied to oppose the Restoration. Yang Du 楊度 (1875–1931), one of the most infamous activists to assist Yuan Shikai's bid for the throne just a few years before, openly blamed Zhang Xun and accused the Qing Dynasty of being 'archaic, decadent, and sordid'.⁶⁴

Duan Qirui's Triumphant Campaign against Zhang Xun

The war broke out shortly after warlords, politicians, and others exchanged messages in the press. One *Dagong bao* report said that the battle only lasted an hour and a half — between 5.30am and 7.00am on 6 July 1917 — during which Duan's army suffered five casualties, while the death toll among Zhang's troops remained unknown.⁶⁵ Within a day, rumours were flying that Zhang Xun had acknowledged his failure and was preparing to escape to Mongolia.⁶⁶ Reports about the instant collapse of the Restoration, and Duan's landslide victory on the battleground were in stark contrast to the initial statements in *Dagong bao* that Zhang's overwhelming power put the Republic in jeopardy. In hindsight, *Dagong bao's* overblown coverage of Zhang's attempt to restore the Qing Dynasty helped to create an impression that not only was the Republic in danger, but also that the whole Chinese nation would soon be destroyed.⁶⁷ The significance of Duan's otherwise uninspiring victory over Zhang Xun loomed particularly large in the press. As a consequence, Duan was lionised as the rescuer of the Republic, if not the whole Chinese nation.

Dagong bao's Unprecedented Commercial Success

Dagong bao's anti-Restoration stance not only glorified Duan Qirui as a national hero and vilified Zhang Xun, but also gave the newspaper remark-

able commercial success. *Dagong bao*'s circulation jumped dramatically from about three thousand to over ten thousand within a few days. With skyrocketing demand for newspapers, *Dagong bao*'s outmoded lithographic printers, which paled in comparison with the printing machinery of other Tianjin-based newspapers, proved a great liability.⁶⁸ In addition, as the newspaper was overflowing with reports, editorials, and public notices about the Restoration, Hu Zhengzhi and his colleagues had to adjust its layout temporarily. On 4 July 1917, *Dagong bao* added an extra page for news from other parts of China and overseas. All other pages were dedicated to information about the Restoration.⁶⁹ The next day, another public notice was released by *Dagong bao* announcing that the newspaper would reduce in size from three sheets to two for the time being because of the abrupt increase in circulation and the severe fatigue the pressmen were suffering.⁷⁰ The low efficiency of lithographic printing machines handicapped the expanded production of newspapers and eventually impelled Hu to acquire new equipment in 1920.

The unprecedentedly wide circulation of *Dagong bao* in early and mid-July 1917 resulted, in no small part, from a blockage of communication between Beijing and other parts of China. All post offices, telegraph bureaus, and railway stations were under the tight control of Zhang Xun's troops. When the anti-Restoration battle started, news about Beijing was even harder to obtain.⁷¹ Beijing-based newspapers were all silenced with censorship enforced by General Zhang. Some newspapers had to relocate from Beijing to Tianjin after being out of business for a few days. Both *Chenzhong bao* 晨鐘報⁷² and *Dazhong bao* 大中報,⁷³ for example, moved to Tianjin. The heavy toll that Zhang Xun and his troops took on newspapers in Beijing enabled *Dagong bao* to monopolise information about the Restoration. Evidently, *Dagong bao*'s special status as the Anhui Clique warlords' and politicians' mouthpiece allowed it to have exclusive access to the anti-Restoration movement orchestrated by Duan Qirui. In the 1930s, Hu Zhengzhi recalled that it was Liang Qichao, Duan's political ally, who personally attended Duan's rally in a suburb of Tianjin before the expedition against Zhang Xun, and then wrote letters to *Dagong bao* for publication.⁷⁴

Dagong bao's commercial success in the summer of 1917 boosted Hu Zhengzhi's confidence in the profitability of a highly politicised newspaper. His visit to a number of European newspapers in the late 1910s strengthened his conviction that it was possible to make the newspaper both an instrument of enhancing readers' political awareness and a money-making business. On his return to China, the ambitious Hu vowed to further reform the newspaper by following the British example, 'injecting political common sense' (*guanshu zhengzhi changshi* 灌輸政治常識) into his readers. To accomplish such a goal, the first step was to gain financial independence and balance the books by selling more newspapers. It was evident that *Dagong bao*'s equipment was too outdated to maximise production. Therefore, Hu decided to replace the lithographic printing machines with the latest rotary printer in preparation for a much larger circulation when he returned to his office.⁷⁵

The Legacy of the Late-1910s Dagong bao

Hu Zhengzhi's dream of making *Dagong bao* 'The Times in China' evaporated almost instantly. A fortnight after Hu made the announcement about further reforming the paper, the war between Anhui Clique and Zhili Clique (*Zhixi* 直系) warlords broke out. Ten days later, after losing the war, most Anhui

68 Fang Hanqi, *Dagong bao bainian shi (1902-06-17 - 2002-06-17)*, p.131.

69 'Yuezhe da zhuyi' 閱者大注意, *Dagong bao*, 4 July 1917.

70 'Benbao tebie qishi' 本報特別啟事, *Dagong bao*, 5 July 1917.

71 'Beijing weiji zhi suowen' 北京危機之瑣聞, *Dagong bao*, 7 July 1917.

72 'Chenzhong bao you Jing yi Jin xukan guang-gao' 晨鐘報由京津續刊廣告, *ibid.*

73 'Beijing Dazhong bao qishi' 北京大中報啟事, *ibid.*

74 Shuwu bianji bu 《書屋》編輯部, *Minguo zhishi fenzi huaxiang* 民國知識份子畫像 (Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu chubanshe, 2009), pp.170–71.

75 Wang Songnian 汪松年, 'Dagong bao zai Tianjin' 《大公報》在天津, *Wenshi ziliao. cunqao xuanbian-wenhua* 文史資料存稿選編—文化, in ed. Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi quanguo weiyuanhui wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 中國人民政治協商會議全國委員會文史資料委員會 (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2002), p.5.

- 76 Fang Hanqi, *Dagong bao bainian shi (1902-06-17 - 2002-06-17)*, p.167.
- 77 Hu Zhengzhi 'Sheqing ri zhuinian Zhang Jiluan xiansheng,' 252; Cao Shiyong, 'Dagong bao yu Hu Zhengzhi,' 280; Fang Hanqi, *Dagong bao bainian shi (1902-06-17 - 2002-06-17)*, p.137.
- 78 Li Xiawen 李俠文, 'Wosuo renshi de Zhang Jiluan, Hu Zhengzhi liang xiansheng' 我所認識的張季鸞, in *Dagong baoren yijiu*, p.268.
- 79 *Ibid.*
- 80 Zhou Yu 周雨, *Dagong bao shi 大公報史* (Nanjing: Jiangsu guji chubanshe, 1993), pp.365-66.
- 81 Kong Zhaokai 孔昭懔, *Jiu Dagong bao zuoke ji 舊大公報坐科記* (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 1991), p.21.
- 82 Wang Songnian, 'Dagong bao zai Tianjin,' p.5.
- 83 Cao Shiyong, 'Dagong bao yu Hu Zhengzhi,' p.283.

Clique military men and politicians, including all *Dagong bao*'s investors, owners, and patrons, absconded. Hence, Hu's first stint with *Dagong bao* ended anticlimactically and his reform agenda was stillborn. This unexpected debacle in 1920 taught Hu a bitter lesson — that a newspaper under the patronage of a political faction was unsustainable.⁷⁶ After a six-year hiatus, Hu Zhengzhi staged a comeback in 1926, purchasing the bankrupt *Dagong bao* with the help of his comrades, Wu Dingchang 吳鼎昌 (1884-1950), a banker and industrialist, and Zhang Jiluan 張季鸞 (1888-1941), a veteran newspaperman. It was during his second tenure with *Dagong bao* that Hu gained a nationwide (or even international) reputation as a first-rate journalist. By comparison, his editorship in the mid- and late 1910s has slipped into oblivion. However, there was a continuity between *Dagong bao* under Hu between 1916 and 1920 and the same paper after 1926. For example, most typesetting and printing workers Hu hired in 1926 were his ex-colleagues from *Dagong bao* in the mid- and late 1910s.⁷⁷ There was also continuity in Hu's emphasis on circulation leading to financial independence, the hiring and training of reporting staff, and, most importantly, the newspaper's connections with political figures. Thus, Hu Zhengzhi's management of *Dagong bao* between 1926 and the late 1940s can be viewed as an attempt to complete his unfinished business from the late 1910s and early 1920s.

Selling Newspapers

The initial four-year period at *Dagong bao* enabled Hu Zhengzhi to arrive at an understanding that political patronage never provided viable support for a newspaper. In hindsight, Hu concluded, 'In spite of their power and influence, they can only hold this position of renown for a time. Sooner or later they will fall from power, but my newspaper will last for much longer.'⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Hu remained unconvinced and unimpressed by the fact that some Shanghai-based newspapers in the early twentieth century gained profit through advertising. Hu was concerned, first of all, that such newspapers had a goal of making money, but were indifferent to the political situation.⁷⁹ Secondly, Hu noted that the rise of commercially successful newspapers was an outgrowth of Shanghai's unmatched industry, commerce, and finance — none of which existed in the rest of China.⁸⁰ Unwilling to enlist support from politicians or advertisers, Hu attempted to become self-sufficient by maximising sales. One of Hu's subordinates recalled that he once commented that he would rather earning less than one *fen* by selling a newspaper than relying on the support of businesses.⁸¹ The purchase of a rotary printer capable of producing over 50,000 newspapers per hour, shortly before Hu parted ways with *Dagong bao*, demonstrated his preference for selling newspapers over other sources of funds long before his takeover of *Dagong bao* in 1926.⁸² The huge demand for *Dagong bao* during the period of Zhang Xun's Restoration in 1917 inspired Hu make his newspapers profitable.

Recruiting New Personnel

To make a profit, Hu Zhengzhi had no intention of promoting prurient journalism, but tried to sell political news gathered by qualified reporters.⁸³ As noted above, the reform of *Dagong bao* in the mid- and late 1910s started with Hu firing newsgatherers who fabricated news. He repeatedly stressed

the importance of training reporters and editors himself to restore the much-tarnished reputation of journalists.⁸⁴ In 1928, he began to inject new blood into *Dagong bao*. He required new trainees to have a basic high-school education, excellent writing skills, a willingness to work between 2pm and 10pm seven days a week, and an ability to understand different dialects. With a monthly pay of five *yuan*, trainees had a one-month probation period before they could be officially employed.⁸⁵ Between 1926 and the late 1940s, Hu recruited and trained a large number of young students and professionals to work for the newspaper. As Sophia Wang has pointed out, Hu ‘hired reporters only on the basis of professional performance’ rather than educational or political backgrounds. To appeal to passionately patriotic students and sell more newspapers Hu was even willing to recruit radicals or Communists.⁸⁶

The Newspaper’s Connections with Politic Figures and Institutions

When Hu Zhengzhi dismissed existing reporters in 1916, as noted above, the sole newsgatherer who was allowed to stay had special connections with the Office of President. As an insider of the Anhui Clique, Hu had full access to the most up-to-date political news. Likewise, the rapport of *Dagong bao* staff with politicians, especially high-ranking GMD bureaucrats contributed to its success as an independent newspaper and the leader of Chinese public opinion after 1926. Hu Zhengzhi’s partner, Zhang Jiluan, was a member of the Political Studies Clique (*Zhengxue xi* 政學系), a right-leaning GMD faction. Some core members of the clique worked with Zhang to run newspapers in the 1910s and 1920s, and gained prominence after the GMD’s takeover of China.⁸⁷ In 1935, for example, the new cabinet featured a large number of members or friends of this faction. Among them, Wu Dingchang, a major shareholder in *Dagong bao* since 1926, served as industry minister (*Shiye bu buzhang* 實業部部長).⁸⁸

It was widely believed that Wu’s promotion could be attributed to a recommendation from Zhang Jiluan (Figure 3), Wu’s colleague at *Dagong bao*.⁸⁹ Zhang, who had earlier served as Sun Yat-sen’s (1866–1925) secretary and enjoyed a wide circle of acquaintance among GMD members, could provide enormous benefits to *Dagong bao*. Hu acknowledged that Zhang, as a GMD insider, enabled the newspaper to garner first-hand political news and thereby ‘enliven’ it.⁹⁰ In the late 1920s, the relationship between Zhang and Chiang Kai-shek (1887–1975) developed to the extent that Zhang once stayed with Chiang as an invited guest.⁹¹ The rapport between them prompted one of Zhang’s ex-colleagues in *Dagong bao* to identify Zhang as Chiang’s ‘counsellor’ (*moushi* 謀士).⁹² Another *Dagong bao* editor recalled that Zhang instructed his colleagues that the newspaper could criticise anyone and anything in China, except Chiang Kai-shek.⁹³ Sophia Wang posits that the ‘patron–client’ relationship between Zhang and Chiang fuelled suspicion among Chinese Communists, liberals, and radical students in the late 1920s.⁹⁴ Such suspicion was by no means unfounded. Tao Xisheng 陶希聖 (1899–1988), a GMD journalist and ideologue, remembered that Chiang often used *Dagong bao*’s non-partisan stance, revealing decisions and information indiscreetly to the newspaper for publication.⁹⁵ In effect, Zhang and *Dagong bao* assumed the role of mediator between Chiang and a Chinese society seething with rage, by publicising and defending the GMD’s controversial and unpopular decisions. For example, when many Chinese cried for revenge for Japan’s aggression in the Mukden Incident in September 1931, *Dagong bao* carried editorials over several days



Figure 3

Zhang Jiluan.
Source unknown.

84 Zhou Yu, *Dagong bao shi*, p.221.

85 *Ibid.*, p.200.

86 Sophia L. Wang, ‘The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes: The Case of the *Dagong bao* in Republican China,’ *Pacific Affairs* 67.2 (Summer 1994): 216–41, at pp.230–31.

87 Cao Shiyong 曹世瑛, ‘Wosuo zhidao de *Dagong bao*’我所知道的《大公報》, in *Wenshi ziliao cunqao xuanbian: wenhua*, p.13.

88 Li Chunqing 李純清, ‘Wei pingjia *Dagong bao* tigong shishi’ 為評價大公報提供史實, in Zhou Yu, *Dagong bao shi*, pp.431–32.

89 Kong Zhaokai, *Jiu Dagong bao zuoke ji*, p.57.

90 Hu Zhengzhi, ‘Huishou yishiqi nian,’ p.1149.

91 Wang, ‘The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes,’ p.232.

92 Cao Shiyong, ‘Wosuo zhidao de *Dagong bao*,’ p.13.

93 Yuan Xinjie 袁新潔, *Jinxiandai baokan ‘wenren lunzheng’ chuantong yanjiu* 近現代報刊‘文人論政’傳統研究 (Nanchang, Jiangxi renmin chubanshe, 2009), p.193.

94 Wang, ‘The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes,’ p.217.

95 Tao Shengxi 陶希聖, ‘Nanwang de huiyi’ 難忘的回憶, in ed., Hu Yourui 胡有瑞, *Liushi nian lai de Zhongyang ribao* 六十年來的中央日報 (Taipei: Zhongyang ribao, 1988), p.50.

- 96 Kong Zhaokai, *Jiu Dagong bao zuoke ji*, p.25.
- 97 Cao Yongxian 曹用先, *Xinwen xue 新聞學* (Shanghai: Shangwu yinshu guan, 1933), p.121.
- 98 Chen Jiyong 陳紀滄, *Chen Jiyong wencun 陳紀滄文存* (Beijing: Hualing chubanshe, 2011), p.28.
- 99 Wang, 'The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes,' p.217.
- 100 Bao Ji, *Xiao Qian yanjiu ziliao*, p.64.
- 101 Wang, 'The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes,' p.216.
- 102 Li Chunqing, 'Wei pingjia *Dagong bao* tigong shishi,' p.434.
- 103 Yuan Xinjie, *Jinxindai baokan 'wenren lunzheng' chuantong yanjiu*, p.24.
- 104 Yong Z. Volz and Chin-Chuan Lee, 'American Pragmatism and Chinese Modernization: Importing the Missouri Model of Journalism Education to Modern China,' *Media, Culture & Society* 31.5 (2009), 711-30, at p.725.
- 105 Li Jinqian (Chin-chuan Lee), 'Daolun jindai Zhongguo de wenren lunzheng,' p.1.
- 106 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 107 Hu Zhengzhi, 'Guowen zhoubao fakan ci' 國聞週報發刊詞, in *Hu Zhengzhi wenji*, p.1036.

reiterating the newspaper's pacifist stance hoping to cool down a pervasive anti-government sentiment. One of *Dagong bao*'s staff testified that he saw a telegram from the GMD government in Nanjing to Zhang Jiluan, demanding he toe the government line of non-resistance in Manchuria.⁹⁶

Dagong bao's privileges in obtaining and publishing political news and Zhang's political commentary contributed to the newspaper's commercial success in a society faced with domestic unrest and external aggression. By the early 1930s, its circulation reached 35,000 — making it the largest non-Shanghai-based newspaper.⁹⁷ A few years later, it rose to 50,000.⁹⁸ The dependence on political patronage to achieve profitability was no different from the paper's success during its coverage of Zhang Xun's Restoration. Sophia Wang concludes that journalistic independence, if not totally in line with the Western liberal tradition, was attainable under an authoritarian regime, as exemplified by *Dagong bao* in the 1930s and 1940s.⁹⁹ *Dagong bao* was often critical of policies and practices of the GMD and angered bureaucrats and military men from time to time. As a consequence, the newspaper continually received stern admonitions and court subpoenas. However, these assisted in creating the impression that *Dagong bao* did not side with the government but spoke on behalf of the people.¹⁰⁰

'Political Commentary by the Literati' Revisited

The 'independence' that *Dagong bao* boasted of under Chiang Kai-shek was not everlasting. As Sophia Wang observes, without Zhang's connection with Chiang Kai-shek, the newspaper's 'independence' under the authoritarian regime was simply unsustainable.¹⁰¹ After Zhang Jiluan's untimely death in 1941, Hu Zhengzhi, who ran the newspaper solo until his own death in 1949, set out to address whether *Dagong bao* was an enterprise or an institution for producing opinions on national and local politics. Zhang Jiluan had pointed out on 5 May 1941 that Chinese newspapers were never a business, but were actually institutions where 'scholars were entitled to comment on politics'.¹⁰² Hence, Hu Zhengzhi has often been juxtaposed to Zhang Jiluan, the latter being a representative of *wenren lunzheng*, 'political commentary by the literati'. This practice was informed both by a long-held Confucian tradition of encouraging literati, or scholar-officials, to serve as the advisers and admonishers of their rulers,¹⁰³ and the Progressive Movement in the US that upheld 'a model of social responsibility'.¹⁰⁴ Chin-chuan Lee posits this tradition came into existence because Chinese newspapers assumed the role of pleading the case for national salvation. To accomplish the goals of enlightening the people, revolutionising society, and modernising the nation, Chinese intellectuals attempted to blend the time-honoured practice of instructing and admonishing rulers and the philosophies of Western liberalism by writing 'political commentary by the literati'.¹⁰⁵ The rise of this journalistic practice was a manifestation of the marginalisation of Chinese intellectuals in the post-imperial age, and, as a consequence, they held unrealistic expectations for the modern news industry.¹⁰⁶ Hu Zhengzhi, for example, cherished a delusion that newspapers were one of the 'three great forces' (*sanda shili* 三大勢力) of modern-day society, alongside science and industry. Citing *Dagong bao* as a well-respected newspaper run by intellectuals, Lee considers both Zhang Jiluan and Hu Zhengzhi as exemplary practitioners of such a journalistic tradition.¹⁰⁷ Both Zhang and Hu, in Lee's opinion, retained their identities as literati, despite their educations

in Japan, their shared admiration for Euro-American liberalism, and their modern careers as journalists.¹⁰⁸

While I take no issue with the assertion that ‘political commentary by the literati’ represented one of the most pervasive journalistic practices in modern China, it requires closer scrutiny. First, while Lee and other scholars tend to consider these patriotic and politically minded intellectuals and journalists as belonging to the same category, I argue that they did not constitute a single group. Their understanding of the role of the newspaper, for example, varied tremendously. Yuan Xinjie 袁新潔 differentiates two types of intellectual-journalists in his book-length study on the Chinese tradition of ‘political commentary by the literati’ — intellectuals who happened to run newspapers and newspapermen who identified as intellectuals.¹⁰⁹ Simply put, Zhang Jiluan was an intellectual who made use of the modern newspaper to advance his political agenda, whereas Hu was a bona fide professional journalist who viewed the newspaper as a commodity. In the next section I examine the category of ‘intellectual-journalists’, highlighting both the temporal (between the 1900s and the Sino-Japanese War of 1937–45) and spatial (mostly northern China) specificities of this journalistic practice.

The Socioeconomic Conditions in Northern China

Even though late-Qing intellectual-journalists such as Wang Tao 王韜 (1828–97) and Liang Qichao had initiated the practice of ‘political commentary by the literati’ in the late Qing period, it gained currency in northern China in the first half of the twentieth century. Hu Zhengzhi noted that journalists in Beijing and Tianjin nurtured a close relationship with political institutions and figures because of their geographic proximity to the political centre.¹¹⁰ Despite Hu’s assessment that the relationship between Beijing and Tianjin newspapers and politicians was so intimate that it could not last long, *Dagong bao* more or less perpetuated this tradition after 1926.

While newspapermen in these areas were dedicated to circulating political news and commentary, readers in the north, especially in Beijing, appeared indifferent to political mobilisation. Chen Jiying noted that in the Beijing area, only those with high political standing would be interested in political news such as personnel changes in the central government, while semi-literate readers paid more attention to amusements.¹¹¹ In a similar vein, according to a Comintern report filed in the early 1920s to explain why Beijing citizens could not be mobilised, people there had long presumed that political affairs were handled by emperors, bureaucrats, or warlords and did not raise their eyebrows when facing political change. As a consequence, lower-class readers tended to purchase only cheap, small-format tabloids for entertainments and serialised novels. For mainstream dailies, the goal of economic independence was, therefore, unattainable.¹¹² Certainly, there were exceptional periods such as Zhang Xun’s coup in 1917 when the lives of millions were disrupted. By and large, however, the circulations of even the most successful high-budget dailies paled in comparison with tabloids. *Qunqiang bao* 群強報, a Beijing-based tabloid whose target market was semi-literate, lower-class readers, such as rickshaw pullers, boasted a circulation of 50,000 in 1927, as opposed to *Dagong bao*’s 35,000.¹¹³ This strengthened the conviction of intellectual journalists that the Chinese were in dire need of tutelage and newspapermen could serve as their enlighteners. As Hu Zhengzhi repeatedly pointed out, Chinese readers lacked ‘political common

108 Li Jinquan (Chin-chuan Lee), ‘Daolun jindai Zhongguo de wenren lunzheng,’ pp.6–23.

109 Yuan Xinjie, *Jinxiandai baokan ‘wenren lunzheng’ chuantong yanjiu*, p.1.

110 Hu Zhengzhi, ‘Zhongguo xinwen shiye’ 中國新聞事業, *Xinwen xuekan* 新聞月刊, 5.2 (1928), p.31.

111 Chen Jiying, *Hu Zhengzhi yu Dagong bao*, p.18.

112 Wang Runze, *Beiyang zhengfu shiqi de xinwenye jiqi xiandaihua, 1916–1928* 北洋政府時期的新聞業及其現代化 (Beijing: Renmin daxue chubanshe, 2010), 136–37.

113 Wang Wenbin 王文彬, *Zhongguo xiandai baoshi ziliao huji* 中國現代報史資料匯輯 (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1996), p.135.

- 114 For example, 'Benbao gaizao zhi zhiqu,' *Dagong bao*, 1 July 1920.
- 115 Liu Shuling, *Dagong bao yu Zhongguo xian-dai wenxue* 《大公報》與中國現代文學 (Shijiazhuang: Hebei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2004), p.199.
- 116 'Dagong bao yiwan hao jinian ci' 大公報一萬號紀念辭, in eds Zhang Jiluan 張季鸞 and Hu Zhengzhi 胡政之, *Jiluan wencun shang* 季鸞文存上, (Chongqing: Dagong baoshe, 1944), p.31.
- 117 Fang Hanqi, *Dagong bao baimian shi (1902-06-17 - 2002-06-17)*, p.134.
- 118 Zhengzhi 政之, 'Zuobao yu kanbao' 作報與看報, in *Dagong bao shi*, pp.365-66.
- 119 Lengguan, 'Benbao zhi xin xiwang,' *Dagong bao*, 3 January 1917.
- 120 Yuan Xinjie, *Jinxiandai baokan 'wenren lun-zheng' chuantong yanjiu*, p.193.
- 121 Bao Ji, *Xiao Qian yanjiu ziliao*, p.64.
- 122 Lu Keng 陸鏗, 'Nanjing Zhongyang ribao de huiyi' 南京中央日報的回憶, in ed. Quanguo zhengxie wenshi ziliao weiyuanhui 全國政協文史資料委員會, *Wenshi ziliao cunqao xuanbian jingxuan 9 xianian wenjiao zhuiyi* (文史資料存稿選編精選9昔年文教追憶), (Beijing: Zhongguo wenshi chubanshe, 2006), p.46.
- 123 Zhengzhi, 'Zuobao yu kanbao,' p.364.
- 124 Hu Jianzhong 胡健中, 'Dongnan ribao xiaoshi' 東南日報小史, *Xinwen zazhi* 新聞雜誌, 1.19 (1937): 2.

sense'.¹¹⁴ A recent study also finds that *Dagong bao* used Tianjin as its base and Beijing as its main market to benefit from Tianjin's booming economy and Beijing's numerous educational institutions. *Dagong bao* thus offered a publication not only for political news and commentary, but also for scholars, writers, and professionals to popularise knowledge or 'common sense'.¹¹⁵

Despite its location in Tianjin, one of the most prosperous port cities in the north, *Dagong bao* suffered from the persistent lack of advertising. In 1931, Zhang Jiluan complained that the underdeveloped economy of Northern China played havoc with *Dagong bao*'s plan to make money from advertising and thus its development.¹¹⁶ Fang Hanqi 方漢奇 concludes in his study of the history of *Dagong bao* that meagre revenue from advertising precluded newspapers in the north from achieving commercial success.¹¹⁷ By contrast, newspapers published in Shanghai, the economic and financial centre of China, could appeal to advertisers not merely in Shanghai, but across the Yangzi Delta. Hu Zhengzhi noted that Shanghai newspapers were more similar to those published in the US and Britain as they all depended on advertisements, rather than the sale of newspapers.¹¹⁸ In this sense, Hu's emphasis on political news served two agendas. It helped to achieve Hu's lifelong goal of producing high-quality political news to lay a foundation for fostering a 'sure-footed and genuine public opinion' (*wenjian qieshi zhi yulun* 穩健切實之輿論).¹¹⁹ At a more mundane level, Hu believed that reliable political news was the best commodity for him to sell.

After the GMD Takeover

Dagong bao's enthusiasm for publishing political news and commentary did not wane with the shift of China's political centre from Beijing/Beiping to Nanjing with the GMD's military victory in the Northern Expedition (1926-1928). In fact, the newspaper grew more inclined to write about political events than ever before, partly because of Zhang Jiluan's success in winning Chiang Kai-shek's favour. In 1931, Chiang made a prediction that *Dagong bao* would surely develop into a 'first-rate newspaper in China' (*Zhongguo diyiliu zhi xinwenzhi* 中國第一流之新聞紙).¹²⁰ Chiang hoped that by heaping high praise upon *Dagong bao* he would benefit from the newspaper's status as a non-governmental institution to speak in his favour.¹²¹ In the 1930s and 1940s Chiang Kai-shek invariably read *Dagong bao* first every morning rather than any party newspaper.¹²²

The GMD's organs of the day, as Hu Zhengzhi noted, were fighting on two-fronts in post-Northern Expedition times. On the one hand, they were under pressure from the party and the government to self-censor their reporting and commentary. On the other hand, many were under increasing financial stress and 'de-politicised' themselves in the name of economic independence. As a result, the GMD's newspapers were reluctant to include political content except for publishing certain required information.¹²³ In 1934, when *Hangzhou minguo ribao* 杭州民國日報 was officially renamed *Dongnan ribao* 東南日報, for example, its director, Hu Jianzhong 胡健中 (1906-93) announced that it had evolved from being a mouthpiece of the Zhejiang branch of the GMD into a shareholding profit-making enterprise.¹²⁴ Therefore, *Dongnan ribao* prioritised sensational, entertainment, business, and sports news. Zhang Jiluan observed in 1931 that the journalistic practice of the late Qing, namely outspoken criticism of national and regional political authorities, simply

vanished at this time.¹²⁵ Therefore, *Dagong bao*'s resumption of 'political commentary by the literati' filled a journalistic lacuna.

Zhang Jiluan and Hu Zhengzhi: Different Approaches and Perspectives

Zhang Jiluan boasted that *Dagong bao*, rather than being a profit-making enterprise, was an institution for intellectuals to comment on contemporary politics.¹²⁶ Hu did not agree but occasionally acquiesced; thus, they held markedly different views of 'political commentary by the literati'. Zhang's simultaneous dependence on Chiang Kai-shek and criticism of the regime was, according to Sophia Wang, 'within a Chinese cultural tradition in which Confucian officials often had to deal with the same dilemma when they criticized their rulers'.¹²⁷ In fact, Zhang was recognised as a reincarnation of a Confucian literatus who happened to embark on a career of modern journalism. One of his eulogies, for example, hailed him as an exemplary scholar who had accomplished the 'three eternal' of a Confucian life, namely, the establishment of meritorious service, great virtue, and wise speech (*ligong, lide, liyan* 立功、立德、立言).¹²⁸ In recent studies and memoirs, Zhang has been remembered as a Confucian literatus of the twentieth century.¹²⁹ By comparison, Hu Zhengzhi, was a business-minded professional journalist, who was variously influenced by Japanese, British, and American models. While Zhang lamented the disappearance of the late-Qing journalistic tradition of making political commentary, Hu repeatedly reminded his colleagues of the failure of late-Qing 'men of letters' to sustain their newspapers despite their highly provocative and popular commentary.¹³⁰ The difference between Hu and Zhang in their understanding of the role of newspapers was similar to that between the Anglo-American and French journalists prior to the early twentieth century. While journalists in Britain and the US put emphasis on 'more complete, more objective and more neutral' information, their French counterparts had the 'habit of interpreting and reprocessing the information according to the political doctrine'.¹³¹ As a consequence, French journalists, like some of China's literati who wrote political commentary, were more like polemicists and publicists.¹³² However, Hu Zhengzhi's pursuit of the style of Anglo-American journalism was always conditioned by the cultural and political realities of the day. Political commentary was indispensable not just because newspapers, especially those in the north, consistently suffered from inadequate supplies of news, but also because of the lack of well-organised newsgathering services and paying advertisers. More significantly, it proved to be a bestselling commodity in the highly politicised Chinese society of pre-war period and during the war.

When he was in Japan in the 1900s, Hu Zhengzhi had noticed Japanese journalists prioritising news reporting over political commentary and newspapers hiring 'people with college degrees and some particular expertise'.¹³³ While the transformation of Japanese newspapers taught Hu one lesson of journalism, his journey, between 1918 and 1919, to Japan, the US, and Britain before arriving in Paris, familiarised him with newspapers in the US and Europe. He was particularly impressed by the newspaper magnate Lord Northcliffe (1865–1922) and *The Times*. On various occasions, Hu voiced his admiration for *The Times* as a model for Chinese newspapers. In a speech in 1948, for example, Hu asserted that a country as big as China ought to have ten major dailies of the calibre of *The Times*.¹³⁴ His commitment to learning from Northcliffe deepened his conviction that a newspaper was, above any-

125 'Dagong bao yiwan hao jinian ci,' p.30.

126 Li Chungqing, 'Wei pingjia Dagong bao tigong shishi,' p.434; 'Liangdian shuoming' 兩點說明, *Dagong bao*, 1 January 1948.

127 Wang, 'The Independent Press and Authoritarian Regimes,' p.217.

128 Li Xiawen, 'Jiluan xiansheng de jingshen — Jingdao ci yidai baoren zhi changwang' 季鸞先生的精神—敬悼此一代報人之長往, in eds Zhongguo renmin zhengzhi xieshang huiyi, Shanxi sheng Yulin shi weiyuanhui 中國人民政治協商會議, 陝西省榆林市委員會, *Zhang Jiluan xiansheng jinian wenji* 張季鸞先生紀念文集 (Xi'an: Shanxi renmin jiaoyu chubanshe, 1991), pp.39–41.

129 For example, Tang Xiaobing 唐小兵, *Xiandai Zhongguo de gonggong yulun — yi Dagong bao 'Xingqi lunwen' he Shen bao 'Ziyou tan' weili* 現代中國的公共輿論 — 以《大公報》'星期論文'和《申報》'自由談'為例 (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2012), p.90.

130 Li Xiawen, 'Wosuo renshi de Zhang Jiluan, Hu Zhengzhi liang xiansheng,' pp.267–68.

131 Chalaby, 'Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention,' p.305.

132 *Ibid.*, pp.314–15.

133 Huffman, *Creating a Public*, p.234.

134 'Gangban diyici bianji huiyi shang de jianghua' 港版第一次編輯會議上的講話, in *Hu Zhengzhi wenji*, p.1121.

- 135 Paul Manning, *News and News Sources: A Critical Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 2001), pp.83–84.
- 136 Hu Zhengzhi, 'Zhongguo xinwen shiye,' p.32.
- 137 Volz and Lee, 'American Pragmatism and Chinese Modernization,' p.725.
- 138 G.A. Cranfield, *The Press and Society: From Caxton to Northcliffe* (London: Longman, 1978), p.220.

thing else, an enterprise to sell news and other information. Northcliffe and his contemporary press barons were more 'commercial newspaper men' than 'brilliant writer[s]'. The success of most of Northcliffe's newspapers in the early twentieth century resulted from a novel marketing strategy, 'a low retail price subsidized by a high volume of advertising revenue, combined with plenty of competitions, prizes and promotional gimmicks', but not necessarily widely read editorials.¹³⁵ Thus, while Zhang Jiluan gained a national and international reputation because of his 'widely read editorials', Hu emphasised diversifying the content of a newspaper, and thereby preventing its readership from becoming the audience for the self-delusion of a small group of intellectuals. Hu was usually against 'a high volume of advertising revenue' for fear that the newspaper might be hijacked by big business, he was willing to co-operate with advertisers, both at home and abroad. At the height of the xenophobic nationalism in the wake of the Northern Expedition, for example, Hu pointed out that while the masses were easily mobilised to boycott foreign goods, the cold reality was that virtually every Chinese newspaper was reliant on the revenue from advertising foreign-made commodities.¹³⁶

In reality, Hu Zhengzhi was addressing a dilemma that he, alongside most Chinese newspapermen, faced. On the one hand, the American progressivism and liberalism embraced by early Chinese newspapermen such as Liang Qichao, Zhang Jiluan, and Hu himself, and which constituted a vital element of 'political commentary by the literati', pursued 'a model of of social responsibility to combat sensationalism and excessive commercialism in the media'.¹³⁷ On the other hand, Lord Northcliffe and other media tycoons in Britain that Chinese newspapermen emulated had a ravenous appetite for profits. To resolve this dilemma, Hu purposely highlighted Northcliffe as a leader of public opinion and simultaneously downplayed the fact that he was also the founder and owner of several highly commercial and widely circulated papers including the middle-market *Daily Mail* and the tabloid *Daily Mirror*.¹³⁸ In a sense, Hu attempted to reconcile different journalistic conceptions, promoting the separation of news from opinion, a pervasive norm in the post-WWI American press — while also viewing political commentary as a key component in developing public opinion in China, with *Dagong bao* the indisputable leader.

Conclusion

The distinction between Zhang Jiluan and Hu Zhengzhi challenges the assumption that the 'political commentary by the literati' was a defining characteristic of Chinese journalism. As a journalistic practice, it resulted from Chinese intellectuals' anxiety over their disempowerment in modern times, and the specific economic, cultural, and political conditions in northern China in the first half of the twentieth century. In the wake of the collapse of China's imperial system and the end of the millennium-long civil service examination system, the press became a key arena for intellectuals to trumpet their importance as enlighteners of the masses, and reformers of Chinese society and politics. Thus, newspapers were touted as the driving force of social and cultural change in China. The Beijing and Tianjin area — the educational and political centres of China in the first three decades of the twentieth century — provided a location in which intellectuals and journalists could play their part as the moulders of public opinion (*yulun jia* 輿論家). Hu Shi proposed that intellectuals could adopt this role to change China's political

status quo.¹³⁹ This view demonstrates a failure to differentiate two distinct practices. Writing as a moulder of public opinion ‘to propagate political doctrines and defend the interests of a particular political group’ was, according to Jean Chalaby, a French practice. In French newspapers, ‘opinions and comments still prevailed over news and information’ late into the nineteenth century, just like *Dagong bao* and other newspapers in the North.¹⁴⁰ The Beijing area, despite its status as the heartland of Chinese education and politics, was commercially and financially dwarfed by Shanghai and its adjacent regions. Therefore, it was unrealistic for newspapers in the North to rely on advertisers to balance the books. Under these circumstances, Hu Zhengzhi reiterated the importance of offering quality political news and selling newspapers to gain financial independence. In the late 1910s, Hu was able to get access to political news thanks to his connections with Anhui Clique warlords. After the capital was relocated to Nanjing, the patron–client relationship between Chiang Kai-shek and Zhang Jiluan not only granted *Dagong bao* special privileges, but also afforded the newspaper a high degree of political protection.

Zhang Jiluan’s death in 1941 had lesser impact on *Dagong bao* than the fall of the Anhui Clique in 1920. In the former case, Hu Zhengzhi ended his tenure with *Dagong bao* prematurely, while in the latter, he managed to adjust swiftly, despite a soured relationship with Chiang Kai-shek and the GMD. A comparison between Hu’s two tenures with *Dagong bao*, in the late 1910s and between 1926 and 1949 respectively, shows continuity between the two periods. The comparative lack of attention to this tenure between 1916 and 1920 reinforces the view of warlord China as a barbaric world, where no attempt to effect societal and cultural changes was made. In a similar fashion, Hu’s reformism during his tenure also deviated from a widely accepted historical narrative of the Chinese press, namely that the movement to professionalise journalism only started in the 1920s and 1930s. Historians of Chinese journalism such as Lin Yutang trumpeted the novelty of progress in Chinese newspapers in the 1930s by denigrating their predecessors in preceding decades, just as Liang Qichao had promoted a ‘new journalism’ at the turn of the twentieth century at the expense of Chinese newspapers in the late nineteenth century.¹⁴¹ By contrast, this article shows that during both his tenures with the newspaper, Hu Zhengzhi attempted to build *Dagong bao* into an independent newspaper and a business by focusing on reporting political news with a trans-regional or national newsgathering network, maintaining a rapport with politicians, improving printing technology to mass-produce newspapers, and replacing teams of reporters and editors. In other words, Hu Zhengzhi’s effort to professionalise *Dagong bao* in the late 1910s foreshadowed the newspaper’s spectacular success in the 1930s and 1940s.

139 Hu Shi 胡適, *Ding Wenjiang de zhuanji* 丁文江的傳記 (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 1999), p.65. Hu Shi did use the English term ‘publicists’ as the equivalent to the Chinese term, ‘yulun jia’ (specialists of public opinions).

140 Chalaby, ‘Journalism as an Anglo-American Invention,’ p.311.

141 See Natascha Vittinghoff, ‘Unity vs. Uniformity: Liang Qichao and the Invention of a ‘New Journalism’ for China,’ *Late Imperial China* 23.1 (June 2002): 91–143.

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