The Press Should be United:

The relationship between the state and the press in early 20th century China

Submitted by Chris Wiedemann to Professors Paul Smith and Yonglin Jiang, in partial satisfaction of the requirements for History 400
The Chinese press is often the subject of foreign criticism: it is centrally controlled, offers no scope for dissenting opinion, and its monitors are quick to stamp out extra-governmental flows of information. My thesis is an attempt to answer the question of how, exactly, the press in China took on the shape that it did. I argue that, while propaganda and censorship have both been features of PRC press from its inception, the roots of China's particular press model lie in the late Qing and early Republican periods, when the world's longest surviving empire dissolved in less than a century. In many areas of society, the response to the fall of the Qing was an adaptation, whether intentional or subconscious, of traditional Chinese cultural mores and theories of statecraft – the imperial orthodox ideology of the court. I contend that the Chinese press was both representative of that adaptation and fundamentally shaped by it. The press became the educative tool of a powerful central state.

Part one of my thesis deals with two intellectuals who deeply influenced Chinese press theory: Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen. It argues that these two men were, in many ways, representative of the transitional period between empire and republic. They were also influential in shaping the new state, and their ideologies informed their theories on the role of the press.

Part two deals with those theories, attempting to draw a link between imperial orthodoxy and theories on the relationship between the press and society. I argue that the press was created to aid the state in educating the people, one of the duties ascribed to the ruler by orthodox ideology.

Part three examines the press in the late Qing until the foundation of the Republic, in particular the commercial press as exemplified by Shenbao, a Shanghai-based newspaper. The Shenbao and other newspapers enforced the continuity between pre- and post-imperial China through style, format and editorial content.

Part four moves to the press after the 1911 revolution, first under Yuan Shikai and subsequently Sun Yat-sen. It was in this period that Mao Zedong was appointed director of the Nationalist Propaganda Bureau, which he radically reorganized, creating a highly disciplined and centralized propaganda system. Here, I attempt to draw a parallel between the Bureau and imperial instances of bureaucractized censorship.
Contents

Introduction 1

Agents of reform: Liang and Sun 6
   i. Liang Qichao 7
   ii. Sun Yat-sen 11

Continuity of thought: Imperial orthodoxy and Chinese press theory 17

Early press: Late Qing to 1911 31

From press to propaganda: journalism after the 1911 revolution 42

Conclusion 48
Introduction

The first imaginings of a Chinese press model took place during the fall of the Qing Dynasty, a time of intellectual turmoil and political unrest. Since the establishment of imperial rule under the Qin Dynasty (221-206 BCE), China's bureaucratic empire had survived dynastic change, domestic unrest and foreign invasions largely intact. A foreign dynasty, the Qing, had assimilated their cultural and political values into the orthodox imperial system, so well suited was it for controlling what had always been one of the world's most populous countries. When the Xuantong Emperor abdicated in 1912, therefore, it marked a breach with centuries of history and left China, for the first time in almost 2,000 years, without a clear source of ultimate authority. It was a profoundly unsettling condition for a society that valued social harmony and order above all else. However, it was also a time of breathless fervor and reformist vigor, as a small group of vanguard intellectuals attempted to answer the question of China's new direction.

Clamor for reform was hardly unique to the waning days of the Qing — Chinese literati had a long history of attempting to affect imperial policy, often at great personal risk — but the reality of a failing governmental system, coupled with the sudden influx of Western technology and ideas, gradually shifted political momentum away from the gentry reformers who sought to operate within the imperial framework and towards men like Sun Yat-sen, who sought to transform China's common people (pingmin) into "new citizens" (xinmin) of a modern nation-state. These intellectuals acknowledged that China, far from being the center of the civilized world, was merely an ineffectual competitor among many on the global stage; it was their hope to diagnose the problems facing the country and to create a truly modern China.

To many reform-minded intellectuals, the West served both as a catalyst for self-realization (on a personal and national scale) and an instructive model for China's future. For
much of the Qing, Western contact with China had been limited to relatively limited commercial interactions. After the Treaty of Nanjing and subsequent opening of the country to the West, the imperial government gave its blessing to the “Self-Strengthening Movement” (ziqiang yundong), an attempt to mimic Western military technology in order to safeguard against future disgrace. However, the movement made no attempt to challenge China’s deeply-held cultural and social values, opting instead to superimpose Western technology on a society that was poorly equipped to use it. The failings of the movement became evident after a series of military defeats, including a second Opium War and (most embarrassing of all) a comprehensive defeat to the Japanese in the Sino-Japanese War of 1894-95. This war served both to demonstrate the extent of China’s decline and the possible success for countries that chose a path of “complete Westernization” (quanpan xihua) over China’s hesitant attempts at technological reform. To an increasing number of reformers, the West’s ability to inflict humiliation on China virtually at will made it, paradoxically, the best model for China’s own reform. Liang Qichao, himself a low-level degree holder and therefore a member of the imperial system, was one of the first to call for an overhaul of Chinese culture to accompany the more practical aspects of the Self-Strengthening Movement. Others, like Sun Yat-sen, admired the West and its science (Sun was a Western-trained doctor) but were hesitant to agitate for complete Westernization, settling instead on amalgamations of Western philosophy and classical Chinese values in an attempt to forge a uniquely Chinese system of statecraft.

By the time of Sun’s successful 1911 revolution, the absence of the imperial system had become reality. Sun’s ideology of the Three People’s Principles (Sanmin zhuyi) and the corporatist nationalism of his Nationalist Party (Guomindang or GMD) were manifestations of his attempt to reshape China, and to guide its society to the next stage of its development.
However, it is important to note that Sun’s ideology, which eventually came to dominate reformist discourse, contained many elements of the imperial orthodox ideology; in other words, his ideas can be viewed as the continuation of centuries of intellectual development. The continuous nature of imperial orthodoxy, and its adaptation to a post-imperial state, is well documented. Andrew Nathan’s *Chinese Democracy* and Fu Zhengyuan’s *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* establish the link between old and new China by tracing, among other things, the intellectual development of reformist ideas and the motivations of leading reformers. Their contention – one that I ascribe to and one that has informed my thesis – is that, while the nomenclature and organization of and mass participation in Chinese politics underwent drastic changes during the period of imperial decline, the intellectual and ideological understanding of the role of the state remained largely the same, notwithstanding those few (such as Liang Qichao) who advocated for more wholesale reform. Indeed, more recent scholarship has traced the development of Chinese nationalism – and, therefore, the basis of the 1911 revolution – to a process of territorial reimagining that began under the Qing.\(^1\) The orthodox state had been pedagogical and absolute; its role had been both the maintenance of social harmony and the establishment (ideally through example) and continuation of proper morals. Laozi wrote that the best leaders are those who rule from afar and silently, creating the impression among the ruled that they are acting autonomously when their actions are, in fact, being guided by the unseen hand of the state.\(^2\) This conception of the state as educator, as a body charged with simultaneously leading the people and raising their moral education such that they could be

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\(^1\) According to Gang Zhao, Chinese nationalism and the conception of China as a multiethnic country had its roots in a Qing phenomenon that transformed the concept of China (*Zhongguo*) from a Han state to a multiethnic empire. See Gang Zhao, “Reinventing China: Imperial Qing Ideology and the Rise of Modern Chinese Nationalism,” *Modern China* Vol. 32 No. 1 (Jan 2006)

\(^2\) Laozi: “A leader is best when people barely know he exists, not so good when people obey and acclaim him, worse when they despise him. But of a good leader who talks little when his work is done, his aim fulfilled, they will say: we did it ourselves.”
effectively led, was central to Sun’s vision of the Chinese Republic. This conception was also a key component of Chinese press theory.

Newspapers were not a new phenomenon in China – the court had been publishing a bulletin (the jingbao, or capitol report) since the Tang, and foreign missionaries and merchants each had their own (usually English) newspapers and periodicals. However, a truly Chinese press, in the sense of authorship, language and intended audience, did not appear until the late 19th century with commercial papers like Shanghai’s Shenbao and reformist periodicals like Liang Qichao’s Shiwu bao. It should be noted that Liang’s version of the press was remarkably similar to the Western conception of a “free” press; for, despite advocating constitutional monarchy as the preferred government for new China, Liang felt strongly that government officials should be held accountable to the people, a role he ascribed to journalists. More lasting, however, were Liang’s observations of the power of the press to shape public opinion. It was precisely this power that Sun Yat-sen sought to harness when he created the Nationalist Propaganda Bureau, a body whose membership eventually included none other than Mao Zedong. Under Sun, the Nationalist press would become a unified body, providing its readers with both information and a moral and ideological lens through which to view it. Indeed, I intend to argue that Liang and Sun were supremely influential in the creation of Chinese press theory. Later, Mao would build an organized propaganda corps based on the press theory he inherited from Sun, both continuing an older tradition of bureaucratized censorship and establishing the blueprint for further propaganda work in the PRC.

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The press theory started by Liang, further articulated by Sun and codified by Mao seeks to bridge the gap between ruler and ruled, so that the state can continue its educative role in an increasingly complex world and in the face of an increasingly literate and educated public. Its role was not to act as a watchdog over government; on the contrary, the Chinese press was designed to bring public opinion in line with that of the state, allowing it to act without fear of unrest and guaranteeing a docile populace. This press model was instrumental to the success of Sun’s 1911 revolution and subsequent establishment of the Republic of China. It was equally vital to the survival and eventual success of Mao’s Chinese Communist Party (CCP). In other words, an understanding of the press, the role it played in Chinese society, and the shaping of that role is critical to any understanding of the course of post-imperial Chinese history.

For all that a vibrant press corps was a new phenomenon, the Chinese press nevertheless depended upon traditional Chinese mores for its initial survival and later flourishing. In my thesis, I will argue that Chinese press theory arose from an older set of intellectual and cultural traditions, and that print journalism became a small part of the larger adaptation of orthodoxy to modern society. Through an examination of the writings and speeches of Liang, Sun and Mao, a brief look at translated Chinese newspaper articles and editorials, and a wide range of secondary literature, I will attempt to prove the link between the press and the larger continuities identified by Nathan and others.
Agents of reform: Liang and Sun

The rapid expansion of the public sphere towards the end of the Qing essentially marked the death of traditional channels of communication. For centuries, the Chinese court had been able to control the flow of information to and from the capital. The advent of printed news media, however, wrested that control from official auspices, placing it instead in the hands of editors and literati-journalists. The dissemination of national and international news among intellectuals and, perhaps more significantly, those Chinese who had received a Western education in lieu of a classical one (and were therefore excluded from official positions) created an unprecedented venue for debate over issues that would have historically been limited to the Emperor and his advisors. As such, it is impossible to ascribe the role of the press in Chinese society to individuals. Without the dedicated work of low-level journalists, editorialists and editors (and, no less important, the literati who deemed their work worthy of attention), the press could never have attained the position of central importance ascribed to it by men like Sun Yat-sen. Nevertheless, Chinese press theory – that is to say, an intellectual or ideological understanding of the role the press played (and should play) in society writ large – owes its development to the work of a handful of intellectuals and revolutionaries. Of that handful, I contend that the two most influential were Liang Qichao and Sun Yat-sen. These two men were responsible for envisioning, ascribing and regulating the power of the press, and by the establishment of the Chinese Republic, Chinese conceptions of print journalism and its proper societal position were essentially fixed. Moreover, the personal backgrounds of the two men render their lives an appropriate allegory for the trend of continuity so prevalent in the late Qing
and Republican periods. As such, a brief examination of their lives and ideologies should provide some context for a later discussion of their impact on Chinese press theory.

i. Liang Qichao

Liang Qichao is one of the most paradoxical figures of the late Qing. A passionate reformer and unapologetic Confucian, Liang was also an active educator journalist, founding both an important reformist school and the Shiwu bao. Born in the village of Xinhui, outside of Guangzhou (Canton), Liang was exposed from an early age to Western influence. He did not come from a particularly robust intellectual background; nevertheless, his family could afford to send him to school, and Liang began training for the civil service examinations from a young age. He was, therefore, a classically-trained Confucian scholar, well-versed in imperial orthodoxy. However, Liang never attained a particularly high official position: his only attempt to pass the jinshi examination (before his official academic career was cut short by exile) met with failure in 1895.

The challenge facing new China, as he perceived it, was how to make sense of a rapidly changing political situation within a Confucian framework. Liang’s writings on national revival were hugely influential, and his eventual solution to the problem of adapting Confucianism to post-imperial China – namely, the postulation of a system in which the state (defined as the collective will of its citizens in Liang’s formulation) retained the sovereignty previously enjoyed by the emperor – would profoundly shape Sun Yat-sen’s own perception of the state. Central to Liang’s collective state was the concept of a “state mind” (guonao) that “functioned as the

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5 Before the Treaty of Nanjing forced China to open a number of “treaty ports” to Western trade, Guangzhou was the only legal point of entry for Western merchants into the Celestial Empire; as such, residents of Guangdong province were exposed to the West before their compatriots further north.
6 Fitzgerald
collective brain of the citizenry (guomin);7 in other words, Liang’s theories of statecraft placed prime importance on public opinion (lunyu). Indeed, he described constitutional government – his favored system for reform – as “government by public opinion.”8 The central importance of guonao – and the accompanying need for a state to properly shape its outlook – would come to inform Liang’s theories on the press.

Despite his lack of official position, Liang’s writings and theories would become immensely influential to Chinese reformers, both within the country and without. Part of this influence was due to the innate appeal of Liang’s written style, which was lively and vibrant. However, no amount of written flair can explain the central role ascribed to Liang by scholars of the Chinese press and the Nationalist revolution.9 Some credit for his influence must therefore lie in his ideas for saving China, which emphasized “the marshalling of her total citizenry around the concept of a rejuvenated nation-state.”10 Borrowing from Rousseau, Liang described the Chinese people as possessing a “slavish mentality,”11 an “illness”12 that could only be cured through the “medicine of liberty.”13 It must be remembered that Liang was always a Confucian, and for most of his political life sought to reform the imperial system rather than replace it. Nevertheless, Liang’s suggested reforms became increasingly radical over the course of his life, eventually turning to revolutionary republicanism. This gradual move away from “Protecting the

7 Fitzgerald, 118
8 Fitzgerald, 78
9 See esp. The Political Thought of Liang Qichao
11 Spence, 42
12 Spence, 42
13 Spence, 42
"Emperor" and towards republicanism often led to disagreements between Liang and his fellow Confucian reformers.  

Without doubt, the most influential figure in Liang’s life was Kang Youwei, another Confucian reformer whose personal ideology sought the creation of a “Universal Commonwealth” (datong), an idea that he traced to the *Spring and Autumn Annals*, a classic Confucian text. Liang met Kang in 1895, when the latter had been punished for submitting a memorial “when a mere commoner.” Liang was immediately taken with Kang, and formally became his student; from then on, he “ardently proclaimed what he had learned [from Kang]...and severely attacked the old learning; not a day went by that [he] did not argue with [his] elders and contemporaries” about the implications of Kang’s *datong* theory. The essence of that ideology, as expounded by Liang, contained a number of truly radical proposals, including the abolition of nations, democratic elections for both central and regional government, and the complete eradication of the family. Significantly, it was also an ideology that placed enormous emphasis on education. Kang, and subsequently Liang and his fellow students, believed that “pregnant women should go to an institution for pre-natal education, and babies after birth should go to nurseries,” and that “children should enter kindergarten and respective schools according to age.” After their education was complete, members of the *datong* community should “be assigned by the government to various duties in agricultural, industrial, and other types of productive enterprise.” This tenet of Liang’s early ideology reveals two

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15 Liang, 96
16 Liang, 99
17 Liang, 99
18 Liang, 96
19 Liang, 96
20 Liang, 97
21 Liang, 97
important aspects of his political thought, which would come to shape his press theory. The first is the importance of universal education. Socioeconomic boundaries do not make an appearance in Liang’s interpretation of *datong* — instead, there is simply an assertion that all members of society should be educated (presumably through a state-run educational system). This belief in the importance of education would become crucial to Liang’s understanding of the role of the press. The second is Liang’s belief that members of society should be assigned work after their education. In this, Liang reveals his belief in the necessity of a powerful government to guide the actions of its citizens. It also reveals the presence of orthodox thought in Liang’s theories of statecraft. Although he eventually came to embrace the idea of a republic, he never abandoned the concept of an authoritative ruler who should educate the people.

As his academic career wore on, Liang began to involve himself more in politics, and to take a more active role in agitating for reform. One of the most concrete examples of that agitation was the 1904 foundation of the *Shiwu bao* (variously translated as *Chinese Progress* or *Current Affairs*), a reformist newspaper that served as the “mouthpiece for the constitutionalist movement.” Liang’s own description of the periodical presents it as quite radical and himself as a leading agitator for reform: he describes his writings as “criticiz[ing] the worthless government and propos[ing] to abolish the old examination system and establish modern schools as ways of remedying the crisis.” Indeed, according to Liang, the early years of the 20th century marked a decidedly anti-imperial turn in his ideology. He describes himself as “daily espous[ing] the revolutionary and republican cause against the Manchus, [while] his teacher K’ang Yu-wei

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22 For a further discussion of the relationship between the press and education according to Liang and others, see section 2 of this paper.


24 Liang, 100
strongly disapproved of it.”25 The veracity of Liang’s claims to rabid anti-Manchu status is somewhat doubtful – after all, he had been strongly involved in Kang’s Protect the Emperor Society, whose fundraising activities had actively hampered anti-Manchu revolutionary groups in the past.26 Regardless of his revolutionary fervor, however, it is clear that Liang saw education as critical to China’s future success, and often presented that view in the pages of the *Shiwu bao*. His newspaper was significant in one other respect: it was staffed almost entirely by journalists who “strove to place themselves within the orthodox order of Confucian statecraft.”27 In other words, the men who wrote for the paper, like Liang himself, were reformers who nevertheless sought to operate within the framework of imperial orthodoxy. The agents of change in China – and, more importantly, the members of the press agitating for that change – were conscious of the old order even as they sought to create a new one.

ii. Sun Yat-sen

Sun, like Liang, was a Guangdong native. Born in the village of Xiangshan (later renamed Zhongshan in his honor) in 1866, he came from a family of farmers with little scholarly background. Unlike Liang, however, Sun never entered the traditional Confucian education system. Instead, he attended school in Hawaii with his older brother from the age of 12, thereby receiving the Western learning so coveted by Liang directly from the source.28 Although Sun had been exposed to those aspects of orthodoxy that had become commonly-held social values – for example, ancestor worship and a keen sense of lineage – he had very little exposure to Confucian

25 Liang, 102
26 One such group was the Society for China’s Revival, Sun Yat-sen’s first attempt to organize a coup from outside China itself. 27 Seungjoo Yoon, *Literati-Journalists of the Chinese Progress (Shiwu bao) in Discord, 1896-1898* in Rebecca Karl & Peter Zarrow eds. *Rethinking the 1898 Reform Period: Political and Cultural Change in Late Qing China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002) 49
education (and may even have been illiterate before leaving the country).\(^{29}\) In other words, Sun was both willing and equipped to look beyond China’s past for a solution to her problems of the late 19\(^{th}\) and early 20\(^{th}\) centuries.

While in Hawaii, Sun founded the Revive China Society, his first attempt at revolutionary organization.\(^{30}\) It was a small group that charged new members a five dollar fee for entry, offered to sell “revolutionary bonds” to be redeemed at ten times face value after the Manchus’ ouster,\(^{31}\) and generally sought to win support among overseas Chinese populations for an anti-Manchu revolution. Although it was a very small organization, particularly in its first incarnation – Jonathan Spence calls it “an absurdly tiny base from which to launch a rebellion”\(^{32}\) – its foundation was significant, if only because it reveals Sun’s virtually lifelong commitment to revolutionary ideals.

The impact of Western learning on Sun’s early life was immediately apparent. After returning to his native village at the age of 17,\(^{33}\) he displayed his newfound contempt for local tradition by defacing the statue of a village god.\(^{34}\) After angering the villagers thus, he was forced to leave again, this time for Hong Kong. He continued his Western education in the British colony, attending a Church of England school before moving on to Government Central School, which offered education in both Chinese and English.\(^{35}\) It was also in Hong Kong that Sun would receive his first instruction in classical Chinese learning. As Harold Schiffrin notes,

\(^{29}\) Martin, 6  
\(^{30}\) Spence, 16  
\(^{31}\) Spence, 16  
\(^{32}\) Spence, 16  
\(^{33}\) Sun’s return may have been precipitated by his older brother, who acted as his benefactor in Hawaii, taking issue with his younger brother’s decision to be baptized; in other words, while Sun’s family were more progressive than most in sending their son abroad to be educated, they were not completely supportive of his Westernization.  
\(^{35}\) Schiffrin, 26
his decision to pursue classical studies likely arose from his “growing interest in politics, [because of which] it is not surprising that he wanted to become better acquainted with classical Chinese thought and history.”\(^{36}\) At a young age Sun realized that, even in the waning years of Confucian orthodoxy’s dominance of intellectual and cultural life, some familiarity with the language of the literati was necessary for anyone wishing to influence the debate over China’s future.\(^{37}\) Finally, it was in Hong Kong that he came to understand “that a Chinese [person] with a modern education was competent to comment on public affairs and need not restrict his expertise to a particular professional field.”\(^{38}\) Sun had travelled to Hong Kong as a defacer of idols and possessing an incomplete education; he left it with a new sense of purpose and enough familiarity with classical orthodoxy to participate in the discussion over China’s future.

One of the most significant incidents of Sun’s Western tour, which he undertook after leaving Hong Kong, was his kidnapping by the Chinese Legation in London in October 1896.\(^{39}\) The kidnapping was an obvious manifestation of the Qing’s distaste for Sun – the fact that government officials were willing to risk diplomatic repercussions from Britain simply to secure Sun’s return to China reveals the extent to which they wanted to silence his dissenting voice. More importantly, however, it revealed the potential power of the press to Sun for the first time. Tellingly, the Foreign Office was somewhat half-hearted in its pursuit of Sun’s release until the publication of a special report on the incident in the *Globe*, a London tabloid.\(^{40}\) Sun was released

\(^{36}\) Schiffrin, 26
\(^{37}\) For a more in-depth discussion of the influence of classical education on the press, particularly the use of Confucian texts to legitimate change, see section 3 of this paper.
\(^{38}\) Schiffrin, 29
\(^{39}\) This kidnapping arose in response to an earlier visit by Sun to the legation, in which he attempted to garner support for his revolutionary aims among Cantonese working there. He was held for 12 days, during which time the legation attempted to secret him out of the country for execution, while Sun’s friends in London referred the case to the media and the Foreign Office in an attempt to pressure legation officials into Sun’s release. For a description of the events surrounding Sun’s kidnapping, see Martin, ibid.
\(^{40}\) Schiffrin, 56
within days of the article’s publication. After his release, he “saw a unique opportunity for bringing his case against the Manchu dynasty out into the open,” and willingly gave interviews to English journalists curious about his abduction. He even wrote a letter to the Times, in which he thanked the press for its role in his release. This exposure to the ability of the press to shape public opinion, and in so doing achieve concrete results, would influence Sun’s further thought on the role of journalism.

Sun’s life in the years between his London adventure and his eventual return to China in 1912 was marked by failed uprisings and attempts to wring funds from the overseas Chinese population that made up the main base of his support. It was during this time that he would come to refine his ideology from the vaguely republican anti-Manchu sentiments of the original Revive China Society’s constitution (which, in a nod to Confucian language, called for “men of determination” to lead the country to salvation). His ideology, and eventually the ideology of the Nationalist Party, came to be referred to as the “Three Principles of the People” (abbreviated in Chinese as Sanmin zhuyi): nationalism, democracy and “people’s livelihood” (minsheng). According to A. James Gregor, Sun’s reformism drew on Kang’s datong theory, which cast Confucius as a reformer whose support for revolution had been obscured by conservative literati. Despite his lack of systemic Confucian education, Sun was basing his revolutionary

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41 Schiffrin, 56
42 Schiffrin, 56
43 Schiffrin, 39
44 A. James Gregor, “Confucianism and the Political Thought of Sun Yat-sen,” Philosophy East and West, Vol. 31 No. 1 (1981), 58. The use of the term minsheng is itself an example of the continuity of language between orthodoxy and the ideologies vying to replace it. It is an ancient term, appearing in the Confucian canon as one of the primary responsibilities of the moral ruler.
45 Gregor, 58
ideology on a radical interpretation of Confucian teachings, thereby placing his work within the discourse of justifying change by drawing classical parallels.\textsuperscript{46}

In a collection of lectures on the subject of his ideology, delivered after the successful 1911 Revolution, Sun sought both to demonstrate the depths to which China had fallen and to describe the ideal method for restoring the country to its former position of global preeminence:

If we want to revive our national spirit, we must fulfill two conditions. First, we must understand that we occupy to-day a most perilous position; and second, knowing our danger, we must *utilize China's ancient social groups*, as the family and the clan, and consolidate them to form a great national body. When this is accomplished and we have the strength of four hundred millions united to fight, no matter how low our present position we should be able to lift it up.\textsuperscript{47}

The influence of orthodox social mores is clear in Sun's understanding of the best road to reform for China. He decries the decay of China's "national spirit" before making clear his belief that the best way to "awaken" that spirit is to consolidate the traditional units of social demarcation — family and clan — into a larger national body (the nation-state). Later in the same lecture, Sun refers to the assimilation of the founders of the Qing dynasty into Chinese culture:

Because the character of the Chinese race was higher than that of other races, the Mongols, although they conquered China during the Sung dynasty, were later absorbed by the Chinese; and the Manchus, although China of the Ming dynasty fell twice before them, were assimilated by the Chinese. Because of the high moral standards of our race, we have been able not only to survive in spite of the downfall of the state, but we have had power to assimilate these outside races. So, coming to the root of the matter, if we want to restore our race's standing, besides uniting into a great national body, *we must first recover our ancient morality*.\textsuperscript{48}

\textsuperscript{46} The use of classic Confucian texts to legitimate change was a long-favored tactic of reformers, and was present in the debate over reform in the late 19\textsuperscript{th} and early 20\textsuperscript{th} centuries, particularly among the classically-trained Confucian reformers. For a specific discussion of the use of classical allusion in the press, see section 3.

\textsuperscript{47} Sun Yat-sen in Frank Price trans., *San Min Chu I* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, Ltd., 1928), 124. Italics mine.

\textsuperscript{48} Sun 1928, 125. Italics mine.
Again, the influence of China’s past on Sun’s revolutionary ideology is clear. In order to return to the position of power that the country once occupied, it must first return to Confucian morals, of which the two most important (according to Sun) are loyalty and filial piety. Critically, however, the loyalty that Sun advocates is a loyalty to the state instead of to the family. This is a key example of the co-optation of traditional mores into modern ideology: by supplanting traditional loyalty onto the state, Sun is nevertheless advocating the same degree of fanatical loyalty required by imperial orthodoxy. In Sun’s formulation, the state occupies the same position of central authority as the Emperor did under orthodox statecraft, thereby arrogating the cultural legitimacy of the throne for an entirely new system of governance.

Liang and Sun did not operate in a vacuum. Both of their lives were profoundly affected by those around them and by external events over which they had no control. Nor were they the only intellectuals concerned with issues of reform. However, their personal backgrounds (Liang as a Confucian, Sun as a representative of the new generation of Western-trained intellectuals) made them ideal representatives of their respective generations and a larger pattern of continuity. In the preceding section I have sought to shed some light on their political thought and motivations for reform, both of which will be important in understanding their particular interpretations of the role of the press. The following section will examine those theories, seeking to establish a pattern of continuity between orthodox understandings of the relationship between the state and the people and the prescribed role of the press, both as a molder of public opinion and as a tool for the state.

49 Sun 1928, 126
50 Sun 1928, 126
Continuity of thought: imperial orthodoxy and Chinese press theory

In the previous section, I have identified two important contributors to the development of Chinese press theory. What started with Liang and was finalized by Sun was a model in which the press, far from acting as an independent monitor of government, instead served as a handmaiden of the state. It is a press model that survives to this day in the PRC. More importantly, at least in terms of this paper, it is a model that drew inspiration from China’s “autocratic tradition”\textsuperscript{51} of statecraft. In short, the press was conceived of as a tool for the benevolent ruler (the party-state that came to supplant the Emperor as the source of ultimate authority) to maintain social harmony and preemptively stifle dissent through education (of a kind deemed acceptable by the state). The influence of imperial orthodoxy on Chinese press theory serve to mark the Chinese press as a representation of a larger pattern of continuity.

The ideology that I am terming “imperial orthodoxy” began to take tentative shape under Qin Shihuang, a notoriously autocratic emperor of the early Qin dynasty (221-206 BCE). It is often casually referred to as Confucianism (or later as neo-Confucianism), creating the mistaken impression that Confucianism as a philosophy advocated the strict, centralized rule that came to characterize imperial statecraft. However, Confucian writings are often vague on the subject of proper governance, with rulers given the imprecise suggestion to “govern a state by means of ritual;”\textsuperscript{52} hardly a recommendation that carried specific instructions. Moreover, imperial history is riddled with examples of extremely harsh punishments meted out on dissenting scholars or officials by displeased emperors. While the nature of the relationship between a lord and his minister can be understood in a Confucian framework, the severity of the penal system for those

\textsuperscript{51} Fu, 1

\textsuperscript{52} Edward Slingerland trans., Confucius: Analects, with selections from traditional commentaries (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2003) 124
seen as overstepping the bounds of that relationship is a clear sign of ideological influence from elsewhere. Indeed, the code of laws that formalized the rigid nature of societal hierarchies is a clear sign of the influence of Legalism (a competing school of philosophy from the Warring States period) on imperial orthodoxy. The ideology of the imperial state was syncretic, deriving elements from differing schools of thought to form a philosophical and ideological basis for the central control of the Emperor. Or, as Fu Zhengyuan puts it, "official orthodox Confucianism was really in amalgam of Daoism, Legalism, and Confucianism, which served as an ideological justification for imperial autocracy."

Confucianism, therefore, is not inclusive enough a term to describe the true nature of the imperial ideology. It is perhaps more accurate to describe that ideology as modified Legalism couched in Confucian language; the role of Confucianism, therefore, was to take those elements of Legalism that were fit for "the education of the rulers but certainly [not] for mass consumption" and make them more palatable for the emperor's subjects. The imperial ideology could therefore be described as Legalist in substance and Confucian in presentation. Its enduring presence in imperial politics is easily understandable from the perspective of the ruler – it was, after all, an ideology that stressed the importance of subjugating one's will to hierarchical superiors – and the use of Confucian language gave what was essentially a political ideology the weight of moral righteousness. The enduring presence of orthodox Confucianism in Chinese intellectual history is also understandable as a consequence of the imperial educational and bureaucratic systems, which used mastery of orthodox texts as a precondition for entry into literary society. However, the orthodox influence on press theory cannot be explained away by the ubiquitous nature of civil service examinations; Sun Yat-sen, after all, received only basic

54 Fu, 49
training in the Confucian classics. The presence of imperial orthodox thought in Chinese press theory, then, can only be explained by a more subtle process of assimilation, in which a set of ideas become so internalized that they begin to manifest themselves as “commonly assumed social and personal attitudes.” In other words, the social and political values of imperial orthodoxy had become so prevalent in Chinese thought that, by the fall of the Qing and the time of the reform movement, their influence would inevitably be felt in any new intellectual movement. Thus, even a recipient of modern education would have been affected by the intellectual traditions that preceded his own work. It is precisely this internalization that explains the enduring influence of imperial ideology on post-imperial China.

Imperial orthodoxy began as an amalgamation of different schools of philosophy, before being elevated and internalized by a series of political calculations and attempts to legitimate the authoritarian rule of the Emperor. It was equal parts practical statecraft and philosophical musings on the proper role of man; however, the syncretic nature of the system ensured that its practical applications were inseparable from its moral undertones. In other words, it provided moral certainty to the model of statecraft associated with imperial China. Its continued influence can be seen in the overarching tone of agitation for reform, which did not run towards parliamentary democracy (or even constitutional monarchy); instead, the most common plea was for a morally righteous state, in which social harmony and stability would be guaranteed by the power and authority of the ruler. The GMD (and later the CCP) both envisioned the party-state

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55 Hellmut Wilhelm, “The Reappraisal of Neo-Confucianism,” The China Quarterly 23 (Jul-Sep., 1965), 122
56 The internalization of orthodox cultural values began during the Ming and reached its highest point during the early Qing, when the relatively new dynasty sought to preempt dissent by positioning itself as the guardian of ancient Chinese morality. It was during this time that Confucian values, previously the domain of the elite, were made accessible to and popularized among the common people, so that Confucian familial hierarchies and values would become commonly-accepted social norms by the end of the Qing.
as such an entity — something that may have been expected from the Communists, but in the case of the GMD reveals the presence of orthodox thought in the post-imperial society.

Stripped down to essentials, imperial ideology stressed the creation of social harmony through absolute subservience to the Emperor, whose role was to guide and educate the people. This concentration of power was legitimated by the Confucian concept of the “Three Bonds,” the three interpersonal relationships that were held to define all of society: those between ruler and ruled, between father and son, and between husband and wife.\(^{57}\) By the Qing, each of these bonds was understood patriarchal and educative in nature, so that the role of the superior was to guide the inferior. The inferior was bound by ritual propriety to obey the desires of the superior, regardless of his own wishes. Moreover, Qing orthodoxy offered very little scope for dissent within hierarchies. If a superior in one of the Bonds demanded something contrary to the inferior’s understanding of propriety, it was required of the inferior to remonstrate with his superior; if, however, the superior chose not to heed that remonstration, the inferior was still required by orthodoxy (and by the Legalist penal codes legitimated by that orthodoxy) to obey. The ideal solution to such a problem, in the eyes of Confucians, was for the superior in each relationship to educate his inferiors, such that they would see no need to oppose his desires in the first place. Indeed, the *Classics of Filial Piety* stress the need for the Emperor to educate his people in matters of virtue “so that his moral influence reaches the common people and he becomes a model for the distant regions in all directions.”\(^ {58}\) It was just such an educative role that Liang and Sun postulated for the press. The authority of the ruling group, particularly in

\(^{57}\) These relationships are articulated in the *Analects*: “A sovereign should act like a sovereign, his ministers should act like ministers; a father should act like a father, his sons should act like sons.” (*Analects*, ch.12.11) This passage is one of the vaguest, and most widely interpreted, in the Analects; by the Qing, however, a conservative interpretation that viewed the passage as an endorsement of top-down hierarchies had become orthodoxy.

\(^{58}\) *Classics of Filial Piety*
Sun's vision of modern China, would remain unquestioned; it was the job of the press, therefore, to implant in the "collective mind" of the state (Liang's guonao) the views and principles of the rulers. Sun and Liang, when faced with a new phenomenon, viewed it through a previously established intellectual framework; namely, the values espoused by orthodoxy. Chinese understandings of the position of the ruler had always hinged on the virtue of that leader as a legitimating factor for his rule (the concept of the Mandate of Heaven); the press, particularly in Sun's mind, could ensure that common understandings of "virtue" were in line with the Party's understanding, thereby creating the ideal situation described above.

Any discussion of the relationship between imperial orthodoxy and dissent would not be complete without mention of the long-standing tradition of censure from within the bureaucracy. Many officials, especially those who might be termed "true Confucians" (i.e. those who held the moral tenets of Confucianism above the practical concerns of Legalist elements of imperial orthodoxy), were willing to forfeit their lives in their attempts to correct perceived moral failings on the part of the Emperor. Indeed, there are stories of officials coming to court with a coffin, fully aware that their defiance of the Emperor would most likely result in their deaths. It is simplistic, therefore, to assert that the Confucian tradition is one of unquestioning obedience to a divinely-appointed ruler. What is clear, however, is the extent to which orthodox hierarchies were supported by Legalist systems of punishment; in other words, the acknowledgement of the certainty of execution is just as instructive as the willingness to criticize the Emperor. The process of dissent and subsequent execution can, in some ways, be viewed as a precursor both to current attitudes towards dissent in China and to the current model of press and censorship, created by Sun and perfected by Mao. It is clear that China has little tradition of tolerating

59 Fitzgerald, 118
dissent. Nevertheless, there was a tradition of remonstrating with the ruler that Chinese reformers could draw upon. Moreover, critical officials usually couched their opposition in Confucian language, often intimating that the Emperor was in danger of losing his heavenly mandate on his current course. However, to a pragmatic ruler, the most efficient method of solving such a problem was educational; in other words, if the ruler convinces his people that "the Way" consists of his (or their) actions, there would be no need for dissent. When Sun called for a press that would "hold fast to a single truth," he was anticipating just such a system; and the press laws of Yuan Shikai's Republic and Mao's PRC both emphasize the need for the press to act as an educator, providing both information and a correct moral lens (as defined by the ruler) through which to understand that information. The press would serve as a tool, shaping public opinion however the ruler saw fit.

The tenets and structure of imperial orthodoxy guaranteed the continued survival of the imperial bureaucratic system, regardless of succession or dynastic change. Because it stated that the path to virtue lay in subjugation of individual will and the enshrinement of social harmony above all else, it was an ideology uniquely suited to the demands of imperial China. Its longstanding nature is also critical in order to understand any of the processes that shaped China after the fall of the Qing in 1911. It is tempting in light of such a seminal event to view any of the intellectual, political or ideological trends that arise as an entirely new response to a new set of circumstances. However, such a view ignores the longevity of imperial orthodoxy as an intellectual framework. As Schram and Wilhelm both argue, orthodoxy influenced policy long after the replacement of the imperial system; I contend that this influence is more subconscious than intended, with the shapers of new China influenced by the language and fundamental tenets

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of the orthodoxy that preceded them. It is only natural, therefore, that they would seize on the press as an ideal method of propagating information and opinion in a manner consistent with their own (or their party’s) ideological predilections.

When Liang Qichao founded *Chinese Progress* in 1904, he was seeking to “awaken” his countrymen to the dangers facing new China as he perceived them. He was also establishing precedent for one of the most important processes of modern China: the steady subjugation of the press to the political and ideological whims of a larger group. Although the Chinese press had already established a place for itself within educated society, particularly in treaty ports such as Shanghai, *Chinese Progress* was one of the first examples of a periodical with an unabashed ideological and educative bent. As such, it was one of the first examples of what I term the *third wave* of the Chinese press: the overtly political periodicals that served both as a venue for and shaper of the debate over China’s future. It was also the breeding ground for future interpretations of the role of the press in new society. In the years 1900-1949, the press (and accompanying propaganda work from the dominant political groups of the day) assumed a critical role in shaping Chinese perceptions of the world. Newspapers such as *Revolution Daily* and *Guangzhou Republican Daily* brought information and education to average Chinese, instructing them both in the goings-on of society writ large and the correct interpretation of those events. In this period, aspects of Liang’s press theory began to take hold. Liang’s work was continued by Sun Yat-sen, who took from him a keen understanding of the power of the press to shape public opinion, and sought to use that power to convert the Chinese people from a “loose sheet of sand” to citizens in a new, corporatist, Nationalist republic. In his role as director of GMD propaganda between 1925 and 1926, Mao Zedong implemented the broad policy ideas of Sun, creating an organized, centralized and bureaucratized system of censorship and propaganda
that would serve as the model for similar Communist undertakings, both during the Civil War and after 1949. These three men each contributed to create a discrete Chinese understanding of the proper role of the press in modern society; indeed, it was these three who guided the Chinese press from a source of information to an educative tool for the state.

Apart from his contributions to reformist thought, Liang Qichao was essentially China’s first modern journalist. Over the course of his life, he established several revolutionary periodicals, including the Shiwu bao for which he is remembered. The beginnings of his journalistic career were not marked by a particular insistence on propagandizing. According to Yong Zhang Volz, Liang’s initially thought of the press as a device to “facilitate communication and promote consensus among…gentry-literati.” Over time, however, he began to develop an understanding of the power of the press that would remain a key aspect of his writings on the subject. From a method of communication for the educated elite, Liang moved to a conception of the press as “an instrument of mass enlightenment.” Such a device, in Liang’s estimation, was essential to the project of national awakening that he perceived as a necessary precondition for true reform. Or, as John Fitzgerald notes, he “defined popular constitutional government as ‘government by public opinion,’ and then qualified his remark with the warning that public opinion should be shaped by newspapers…on the public’s behalf.”

Liang’s contribution to the formulation of Chinese press theory was not limited to an articulation of the power of the written word to shape public opinion. He was also one of the first to suggest the proper “shape” for that opinion -- namely, adulation of the state as a representative

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62 Volz, 24
63 Fitzgerald, 78
of the collective will of the people. To Liang's mind, a mass awakening in China would be meaningless without proper direction; as such, "when he proposed converting people into citizens through a program of ethical self-cultivation, Liang went out of his way to specify the Chinese state as the proper object of worship."\(^{64}\) It was through the press – or, perhaps more accurately according to Western perceptions, propaganda – that the uneducated people would be "awakened" to their true status of citizens of the Chinese nation.

Liang Qichao, despite his tireless work in pursuit of a new China, never held official position within any of the political groups that came to dominate reformist and revolutionary discourse. Thanks to his tireless work as a journalist and educator, however, his views profoundly impacted the intellectual leaders of post-imperial China. Although his preferred system of constitutional democracy did not long outlive Liang himself, his insistence on the need for mass awakening, and the elevation of the people to their proper place as citizens of a new Chinese nation, resonated with men like Sun Yat-sen. More specifically, the belief in the primary importance of a unified, ideologically motivated press to shape public opinion in favor of the state would come to be reflected in the highly organized, efficient propaganda bureaus of both the GMD and the CCP after Sun Yat-sen's death. His views on the press were also influential to Sun Yat-sen himself, which influence is clearly expressed in Sun's own writings on the press.

In many ways, Sun's Sanmin zhuyi was an evolution Liang's proposed reforms – at the very least, Sun also conceived of the state as an embodiment of the citizenry. The key difference was the addition of the party as a "middle ground" between the people and authority; to Sun's mind, the level of national awakening (not to mention economic development) was insufficient to allow for the kind of constitutional democracy called for by Liang and other like-minded

\(^{64}\) Fitzgerald, 78
reformers. Similarly, Sun’s views on the press can be viewed as an evolution of certain aspects of Liang’s press theory to meet the needs of the GMD (and, later, the nominal party state of the Republic). The most interesting aspect of this evolution is the increased power Sun ascribes to the printed word. While Liang was keenly aware of the ability of the press to shape public opinion, Sun went one step further, attributing the ability to create truth to newspapers. According to a speech given to Guangzhou journalists in 1912, “most people attach great importance to newspapers, regarding whatever appears in them as necessarily true.” In other words, newspapers had the weight of authority behind them; readers take their contents literally. While Liang conceived of a press that could “shape” public opinion through honest reportage, Sun conceived of a body that, essentially, had the power to alter what was seen as “true.” It was that power that appealed to men like Sun, who were seeking to convince the Chinese people that their version of reform was objectively superior: if a unified press proclaimed it so, most Chinese would perforce come to agree.

According to Sun, the power of the press to create truth was precisely why unity of opinion between newspapers was necessary. He holds the potential for a truly unified press in very high regard; indeed, according to Sun, the “overthrow of the Manchus in China was achieved by the military, but popular support for it was the result of endorsements it received from the press.” Tellingly, he believes that “the reason why the newspapers were able to accomplish this was that the press was united.” In other words, a unified press had the power to overthrow governments and unite the people on the road to reform. However, when certain

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65 Sun, 74
66 Sun, 73
67 Sun, 73
elements of the press “contradict objective reason [by] attacking the government,” the inevitable result is “people’s minds [becoming] unsettled, and unity [being] out of the question.” The speech makes it clear that the press under the new Republic was expected to be an arm of the party-state, subtly moving the people towards acceptance of Nationalist reform, instead of acting as the independent guardian of state power envisioned by Liang.

One line of Sun’s Guangzhou speech is representative both of his views on the press and the relationship between state and society. When discussing Yuan Shikai, the newly-established President of the Republic, Sun mentions his “eager[ness] to do great things...and to obey public opinion...once disorder arises, however, he will be compelled to achieve unification through armed force.” The mention of ruling by public opinion is clearly indicative of Liang’s influence on Sun’s theories of statecraft; if the state represents the collective will of its citizens, then public opinion must be the highest law. However, unlike Liang, who assumed that a government defiant of the will of the public would be ousted (with help from an independent press), Sun viewed such problems as a failure of the general public to realize the benefits of unity. Therefore, the correct response to a public opposed to certain government policies or officials was not modification of the policy or ouster of the official; rather, it was a reshaping of public opinion to meet the needs of the state. This reshaping, as is made implicit by the audience of Sun’s speech, could only be done through the press. More explicitly, Sun expounded these views to the writers of a Shanghai newspaper 10 days before his visit to Guangzhou: “precisely because newspapers have [the] capacity to mold political opinion, they should do their utmost to hold fast to a single truth. This

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68 Sun, 73
69 Sun, 74
70 Sun, 73
is what I expect from gentlemen of the press.” The message was clear. In Sun’s China, the press would be expected to hold true to the party line, lest “unification through armed force” become necessary – for Sun leaves little doubt that he would support such a course if sufficient unity could not be achieved through propaganda work.

If Sun’s addition to the Chinese press model can be seen as a modification or evolution of Liang’s, then Mao’s was a syncretic amalgamation of the two. Ideologically, there was a far larger divide between Mao and Liang: constitutional democracy, after all, was hardly the appropriate means of guaranteeing a “dictatorship of the proletariat” and limiting the power of the bourgeoisie. However, Mao shared Liang and Sun’s appreciation of the formative power of the press. He believed, perhaps more than Sun, that a unified press corps was a precondition to revolution. He also shared Sun’s understanding of the correct relationship between public opinion and state power: to his mind, it was the state that produced and protected citizens, not the other way around. Any divergence between state policy and public opinion, therefore, must be explained by insufficient molding of the public mindset in favor of that policy. Mao made this view explicit in a 1937 pamphlet, when he stressed the need for ideological unity within the party and without: “the broad masses of the proletariat, the peasantry and the urban petty bourgeoisie need our work of propaganda, agitation and organization...to make the policy of the Party the policy of the masses requires effort.” In other words, the policy of the Party (held as correct at all times) needed to become the will of the people, as opposed to the will of the people shaping party policy. The only way to do this was through a unified press, holding true to the CCP line.

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71 Sun, 71
72 Mao, Win the Masses in their Millions for the Anti-Japanese National United Front
In a speech to journalists for the *New China News* in 1940, Mao continues to reveal his understanding of the place of the press in society. He emphasizes that the role of the paper “will be to stress unity and progress and oppose all practices” detrimental to the Party.\(^73\) This is perhaps Mao’s most important contribution to Chinese press theory, and yet another evolution from Liang’s original conception of the Chinese press. While Sun stresses the need for unity to avoid chaos and the necessity of unification through force, Mao is the first to call on what had become his press corps to actively oppose opinions and policies contradictory to the will of the Party.\(^74\) Sun’s formulation was designed to remedy any break between public opinion and state policy through educative journalism; Mao, on the other hand, called both for positive reinforcement of Party policy and the deconstruction of arguments contrary to that policy. The shift is a subtle one, but nonetheless key to understanding the shape of the press in the PRC. Moreover, it was a trend that remained consistent throughout Mao’s long and somewhat paradoxical revolutionary career. In 1945, four years before the success of the Communist revolution, Mao further expounded the need for “revolutionary intellectuals” – including journalists – to participate in “re-educat[ing]” the nation by simultaneously increasing literacy and holding to a unified party line.\(^75\)

In the preceding section, I have attempted to trace the foundation and evolution of Chinese press theory, and to link that theory to the educative aspects of imperial orthodoxy. In simple terms, the press began in Liang Qichao’s mind as an independent body, capable of shaping public opinion and therefore the best possible check on an authoritarian government. To Liang, this press model (which closely resembled what is called a “free press” in the West)

\(^{73}\) Mao, *We Must Stress Unity and Progress*  
\(^{74}\) For more on Mao’s insistence on rigid discipline from his propagandists, see section 4 of this paper.  
\(^{75}\) Mao, *Questions of Culture, Education and the Intellectuals*
offered the ideal method of “awakening” the country while avoiding the kind of autocratic rule that had characterized her history. Sun Yat-sen took the theory in a different direction by reversing the flow of authority: where Liang had envisioned a state governed by the will of the people, Sun pictured a popular mindset shaped by the state. As such, he was one of the first (and perhaps the most important) major intellectual of the period to agitate for a press corps unified under the will of the party-state — in this case, the GMD-controlled Republic of China.

According to Sun’s theory, the role of the press was to guide public opinion towards GMD policies, so that the people could be made to realize the benefits of those policies. Any unrest or disagreement with policy must, perforce, be a result of insufficient education and effort on the part of the press. Mao was equally clear on the necessity of a unified press; unlike Sun, however, Mao had no qualms about attacking policies contrary to the will of his own party — first the GMD, then the CCP. With the final addition of a negative attitude towards dissent, Mao had finalized the press theory that has come to dominate China’s journalism.
Early press: Late Qing to 1911

The end of the Qing witnessed an explosion of written media. Cheap materials, readily available technology and a highly motivated group of scholar-journalists all combined to produce an astonishing number of commercial newspapers, reformist periodicals, and “flea papers” (cheap Chinese imitations of foreign newspapers – also known as the first instance of tabloid journalism in the country). Nor were these papers, for the most part, subjected to official control (until the establishment of the first Qing press laws in 1906).\(^7\) Even after the establishment of harsher publication laws, including mandatory registration of all printing houses and a special governmental bureau for press control, the press flourished at a rate the court considered alarming.\(^7\) Moreover, despite a ban on publishing “government policies and measures” or “information about diplomatic or domestic affairs” included in the Press Law of the Great Qing,\(^7\) print journalism assumed a role of greater societal importance with each passing year. It was in this time period that the press would assume (or be ascribed) the power to shape yulun and to topple empires.

The agitational, or even transformational, role of the press in China’s 20\(^{th}\) century reform movements and revolutions was observed in some of the earliest scholarship on Chinese journalism,\(^7\) and its impact has become a commonly-accepted trope of late Qing and Republican historians. When Sun Yat-sen observed “[the fact] that the revolution has finally succeeded…is

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\(^7\) Ting, 10

\(^7\) Ting, 11

\(^7\) Ting, 10-11. According to the author, this law would form the loose basis for all further press laws in China, including the guidelines adopted by the CCP after 1949.

\(^7\) See esp. Lin Yutang, who argues that “[revolutionary] periodicals…were the chief means of agitation for political reform in the country that eventually overthrew the Manchu regime,” 94
due to the power of the press in 1912, he was, in effect, anticipating future historical analysis of the events of the preceding year. Although more recent scholarship tends to downplay the assumed importance of the press in the tumultuous years in question – Barbara Mittler, for example, argues that commercial newspapers were often several days behind on their reportage of revolts and other revolutionary activities and therefore acted more as observers than orchestrators – the power of the press is still acknowledged, even if that power “exists [only] because people believe in the press.” In other words, the power of the press lay less in the content of its reportage, and more in its mere existence. The press afforded its readers purportedly authoritative accounts of national and international events and the more widespread its readership, the broader the net of inclusion. It therefore seems appropriate to view the power of the press in China in an Andersonian sense: that is, by providing reportage that was intended to be read by different members of society, and thereby uniting those disparate societal elements in the act of reading the newspaper, the Chinese press was aiding in the creation of a national consciousness.

At first glance, the actual importance of the press to Chinese reform (which, though perhaps somewhat less than its assumed importance, was still great) is somewhat paradoxical. Newspapers were essentially a foreign import – jingbao notwithstanding, the first real instances of a periodical press were the missionary journals of the 17th century – and the disparate reform movements and revolutionary parties that formed China’s politically engaged intellectual elite were, at least in part, anti-foreign (and sometimes even xenophobic) in character. It seems

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81 Mittler, 420
82 Anderson’s seminal *Imagined Communities* makes this argument while describing the role of the press in South-East Asian nationalist and anti-imperialist uprisings; however, his view of the press seems appropriate to the Chinese case as well.
incongruous, therefore, that a foreign medium would be seen to assume an even greater role than the force of arms in the eventual success of the Chinese Revolution. In the following section, I will attempt to explain the importance, assumed and actual, of the press within the larger context of continuity between imperial and post-imperial society. I contend that, much like the Manchu dynasty whose 400-year reign was coming to a painful close, the Chinese press was made palatable to reformers and intellectuals precisely because it adapted to older, commonly-held cultural norms. This was by no means true of every active newspaper in China at the time. Most notably, the foreign press intended for Westerners in the country (North China Herald chief among them) was not competing for a share of the Chinese market, and therefore made no effort to adopt Chinese literary or rhetorical tropes. The commercial press, however, was forced to adapt if it wanted to survive; and, in so adapting, it became part of a larger pattern of continuity.

Indeed, the similarity between the presentation of the Shenbao and China’s literary and intellectual past extended even to those areas where the new generation of Chinese journalists was actively seeking to distance itself from that past. According to many histories of the Chinese press, the explosion of print journalism during the late Qing was marked by a “new-style prose” (xin wenti), a clear, vernacular style of writing that rejected the stilted and highly formalized style reinforced by the civil examination system. It is commonly held that the new prose marked the true birth of the Chinese press, and many older histories ascribe its original use to the reformist periodicals so prevalent in the beginning of the 20th century. The creation of the style itself is often attributed to Liang Qichao, who himself had little doubt either about the

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84 See Ting, 49
85 The civil service examinations, a long-standing institution created to ensure a meritocratic bureaucracy, came to require participants to write “eight-legged essays” (baguwen), a rigidly-defined writing style that did not allow for deviation in length or organization.
86 For discussions of the importance of xin wenti to reformist press, see esp. Roswell Britton, The Periodical Press in China, Lin Yutang, ibid., and Andrew Nathan, ibid.
importance of the new prose, or of his own role in creating and popularizing it. In his landmark history of Qing intellectual development, *Intellectual Trends in the Ch'ing Period*, Liang describes *xin wenti* in opposition to older, more established forms of writing:

Liang never liked the ancient style writing of the T'ung-ch'eng school [the classical school of writing that prescribed *bagu*]. His own early writing had been modeled after that of Han, Wei and Chin... [eventually] he liberated himself from it [orthodox literary style], and made it a rule to be plain, easy, expressive, and fluent of communication... Scholars hastened to imitate his style and it became known as the New-Style Writing [*xin wenti*]; however, the older generation were bitterly resentful of it and condemned it as heretical.\(^87\)

Liang goes on to enumerate the differences between what he saw as his new prose and the literary styles that preceded it. He (and, by extension, those scholars who “hastened to imitate him”) took pains to “interlard his writings with colloquialisms, verses and foreign expressions fairly frequently, letting his pen flow freely and without restraint.”\(^88\) In other words, Liang was making a conscious effort to move beyond the rigidly-defined *bagu* format to create a written style that would be easily accessible even to those members of society who had not been exposed to the examination system.\(^89\) Barbara Mittler describes the style as fast-paced, emotional, and possessed of a rhythmic quality that draws the reader in.\(^90\) Formatting was not prescribed, allowing for a more dramatic, visceral accounting of events. For all the distinctions between the new prose and its precedent literary styles, however, similarities still existed. The first was, ironically, formatting: either out of convenience or reflex, many early examples of new prose

\(^{87}\) Liang, 102. Particularly interesting is Liang’s use of the word “heretical” to describe conservative opinion on his writing style; it is another demonstration of the degree to which orthodox culture had been internalized by educated society.

\(^{88}\) Liang, 102

\(^{89}\) Although in little doubt himself, recent scholarship has called Liang’s self-appointed role as creator of *xin wenti* into question. For example, Barbara Mittler argues that many of the features of the new prose were apparent in *Shenbao* editorials that predated the foundation of the *Shiwu bao* by more than a decade.

\(^{90}\) Mittler, 112
writing came packaged in an eight-legged format. While the language was largely new, the form took longer to truly move away from the internalized style of the Confucian education system. Yet again, the press was a vehicle for the transition between old and new facing every aspect of Chinese society after the fall of the Qing.

One of the leading newspapers in late Qing China, and therefore one of the newspapers most deserving of study, was the Shenbao, a commercial paper founded in Shanghai by the British merchant Earnest Major in 1872. By the fall of the Qing, the Shenbao was the most widely-read newspaper in China, and it was often copied in both form and content. It was also the leader in the process of Sinifying an essentially Western medium in order to make the foreign product commercially viable. Over the course of its existence, the Shenbao made several concessions to Chinese stylistic and literary norms. While the paper’s actions were presumably motivated by the demands of the market – it was, after all, a commercial paper and relied on Chinese readership for its survival – its success and subsequent imitation were instrumental in the trend of continuity that runs through Chinese press history. In other words, the Shenbao was a leading participant in the continuation of imperial mores, and the use of imperial orthodox standards, in post-imperial China.

The first aspect of that continuity, and the easiest to identify, was the format of the paper itself. Although the Shenbao was not the first commercial, Chinese-language newspaper in Shanghai – one of its main early competitors, the Shanghai xinbao, had been founded in 1866 – it was marked in its early years by innovative use of Chinese formatting and presentation. Before the Shenbao, Chinese-language newspapers were published in a Western-style broadsheet format, with print on both sides of the page. One of Major’s great early innovations was to

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91 Mittler
Wiedemann 36

present his newspaper in the form of a Chinese book – smaller than a broadsheet, printed on cheap paper with text on one side of the page. This was a move designed to cater to the Chinese propensity towards reading newspapers from cover to cover like a book, instead of skimming the contents and selecting articles to read. The success of the formatting choice was almost immediately evident: within seven months of the Shenbao’s establishment, its rival Shanghai xinbao was rendered bankrupt. The “offensively foreign” xinbao, with its unwieldy and alien presentation, could not hope to compete with the Shenbao, packaged as it was for Chinese taste.

The Sinification of the presentational aspects of China’s commercial media was almost certainly a response to market conditions. It was necessary for the survival of the paper that it be acceptable to local idioms or “taste” (kouqi). Regardless of motivation, however, the mere fact of adaptation was an important aspect of continuity between imperial and post-imperial society, and an obvious indication of print media’s ability to straddle the divide between tradition and modernity (an ability sadly lacking in statecraft and official education). By conforming to preexisting expectations about format and presentation while simultaneously dramatically expanding the scope of reportage, the Shenbao was effectively packaging the new as a continuation of the old – a tradition that had existed in Chinese intellectual history since the codification of the imperial orthodox ideology. It was also establishing itself as a continuation

92 Harrison
93 Mittler, 46
94 Mittler, 47
95 The repackaging of a Western format to make the newspaper more acceptable to a Chinese audience was by no means the only incident of market forces imposing adaptation on journalists and editors. For a discussion of the impact of the market on the development of the Chinese press, see Zhao Yuezhi’s Media & The Market in China (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1998)
96 “Imperial orthodoxy” here refers to the dominant ideology and school of political thought of the imperial court, an ideology that was largely Legalist in substance but Confucian in presentation. For more on the syncretic nature of imperial orthodoxy and its continuing influence in post-imperial society, see section 2 of this paper.
of a much older Chinese tradition. Indeed, it was in the pages of the Shenbao that Chinese literati-journalists would first attempt to describe newspapers as a Western manifestation of a much older Chinese tradition of informational dissemination: (find that quote from Mittler. It’s in there somewhere.) In other words, in its formative years the Shenbao actively attempted to characterize itself in its readers’ minds as an agent of Chinese tradition, reclaiming a long-held custom from the foreigners who had assumed that custom’s mantle. It attempted to (and was successful in) establishing itself as an icon of continuity as well as change.

The adaptation of commercial media to Chinese standards was not limited to physical presentation. In written format, the paper’s reportage and editorials in its early years hewed closely to the “eight-legged essay” (baguwen) style, a format that enjoyed prime status and universal recognition among the Chinese intelligentsia owing to its position as the “backbone” of the examination system. Early Shenbao editorials, while not completely strict in their application of the bagu format, nevertheless presented their arguments in a similar fashion to the traditional essays – a tendency most likely explained by the fact that “bagu was simply a habit of all educated writers in China, [and] was a cultural form written by all classically literate men.” Motives aside, however, the adaptation of the eight-legged format to print journalism is another manifestation of the press’ position as described above. Indeed, the prevalence of bagu-style writing in all (successful) commercial papers simply by virtue of that style’s ubiquitous position in literary society is a strong example of commonly-held cultural values crossing into post-imperial society simply by virtue of their social internalization.

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97 Mittler, 56
98 Mittler, 58
99 Some examples of continuity between imperial orthodoxy and post-imperial China have been explained by the internalization of orthodox values and the codification and popularization of some aspects of the ideology. For
A second example of continuity between *xin wenti* and orthodox writing, one that proved more tenacious than adherence to the eight-legged format, is the use of classical quotations to support an argument (either in an essay or an editorial). A striking example occurs on the first of January 1912, when the *Shenbao*'s customary front-page editorial was replaced by a letter of congratulation to Sun Yat-sen upon his assumption of the Presidency of the new Republic. Although the true date of *xin wenti*’s adoption is still the subject of debate, it is clear that, by 1912, the *Shenbao*, *Shiwu bao* and other leading newspapers were publishing new prose articles to the exclusion of any other written style (save poetry). If *xin wenti* marked a break from past literary forms, as Liang himself had asserted, one might reasonably expect an article celebrating such a seminal event to be free of orthodox trappings. On the contrary, however, the article is replete with classical allusions; for example, it describes the state of the populace after Sun’s successful revolution as “wild with contentment and happiness, free from all our worries” (*xixi hu, haohao hu*)\(^{101}\), a line that borrows terms from both the *Laozi* (*xixi*) and *Mengzi* (*haohao*).\(^{102}\) The editorial goes on to contrast Sun’s new rule with that of the “Northern Caitiffs,”\(^{103}\) who are characterized in stinging terms as “perverse” (*hengxing*).\(^{104}\) This term was not lightly used: in classic Confucian texts such as the *Xunzi* and the *Book of Records* (*Shiji*), “only those rulers who lacked any sense of virtue and were unable to attain the trust of their people are considered

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more, see Andrew Nathan, *Chinese Democracy* (bib stuff), Fu Zhengyuan, *Autocratic Tradition and Chinese Politics* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1993), and section 2 of this paper.\(^{100}\)

As noted above, historians such as Andrew Nathan ascribe the role of inventor to Liang, while Barbara Mittler contends that new prose was born in Shanghai’s commercial newspaper industry.\(^{101}\)

“*Gongheminguo dazongtong lüren zhuci*” (Congratulatory wishes on the president of the Republic’s assumption of office), *Shenbao* 1.1.1912

Mittler, 119

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“*Gongheminguo dazongtong lüren zhuci*” (Congratulatory wishes on the president of the Republic’s assumption of office), *Shenbao* 1.1.1912
By comparing the Manchus with the worst rulers of China’s antiquity, the author of the congratulatory letter is seeking to create excitement for the new government through classical quotations, essentially a system of shorthand for literati. Just as significant as his motivations, however, is the mere fact that an article in a newspaper founded by foreigners, commemorating the birth of the Chinese Republic, nevertheless sought to legitimate its sentiments through the use of classical language. Even as the Chinese press was assuming its most powerful position in Chinese society, as the GMD sought to co-opt what it saw as the power of the written word through bureaucratized propaganda, the commercial press was couching the new in the language of the (very) old. In so doing, it lent both itself and the events it was describing an indelible cultural caché, and continued the trend of legitimating new events by drawing parallels with China’s past.

One final aspect of the early Chinese press that served to position the medium as an agent of continuity, particularly among commercial newspapers, was the reprinting of the jingbao (often in a clearer and more timely format, thanks to the technological advantages of Western-funded publishing houses in Shanghai). Again, the reasons for the jingbao’s inclusion in new newspapers was likely economic; Chinese intellectuals were used to the gazette, and its inclusion was an easy way to relay the activities of the court at minimal cost to newspaper publishers. However, it also lent a certain Sinified aspect to the new media. For example, when the Shenbao was struggling to attract readers in its early years, the co-option of the jingbao helped to present the paper as (at least in part) a Chinese product, preferable to the other foreign-run Shanghai newspapers (none of which had made much effort to conform to Chinese kouqi before the Shenbao’s establishment). In a way, the presence of the jingbao next to editorials directly

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105 Mittler, 119
criticizing imperial policy (and even – in a manner unheard of at the time – personally criticizing the Emperor or Empress Dowager) provides a fitting visual representation of the strange relationship between present and antiquity that existed throughout the early Chinese press.

Newspapers such as the Shenbao had no qualms about publishing material that would have been offensive, perhaps even illegal, in the eyes of the bureaucracy; at the same time, however, they were actively co-opting that same bureaucracy’s cultural legitimacy by appropriating the official mouthpiece of the court. Again, the tension between old and new and the use of orthodox mores to legitimate decidedly unorthodox practices are revealed in the late Qing press.

The evolution of the Chinese press from jingbao to Shenbao, Shiwu bao and others was a process marked by slow deviations in style, format and content; however, it was equally marked by attempts (either conscious or the result of internalized learning) to link the new medium with Chinese tradition. As such, it mirrored both the development of Chinese press theory (discussed later) and the larger historiographical continuities between imperial orthodoxy and the post-imperial state. Much like the first generation of late Qing reformers, who sought change within a Confucian framework, the first Chinese-language newspapers were cautious in their innovation, sticking largely to the format and usual tropes of the baguwen. As newspapers became a more accepted part of educated society, a renovation of style began to reveal itself – Liang Qichao’s (self-appointed) xin wenti. For all its pretensions to modernity and novelty, however, the New-Style Prose was still interlarded with classical allusions and direct quotations. As such, it can be viewed less as a decisive break from previous literary forms, and more as an evolution – or
continuation – of those forms. The process of adapting aspects of orthodoxy to the new China played itself out on the pages of the *Shenbao* and other newspapers.\(^{106}\)

\(^{106}\) It is important to note that what was true of the commercial papers was, almost perforce, true of the revolutionary periodicals that gained popularity and acceptance in their wake. For a discussion of the similarities in style between *Shiwu bao* and commercial newspapers (in this case the *Wanguo gongbao*), see Karen Tao Zhang, "The Birth of the Modern Chinese Press: The Influence of Protestant Missionary Publishing in Late Qing China," talk delivered to IAPS Ningbo Seminar Series, November 2006.
After the success of the 1911 revolution and subsequent installation of Sun Yat-sen as the provisional President of the Republic of China on 1 January 1912, Chinese journalists would have been forgiven for expecting a relaxation of control over the press. Initially, however, the opposite was true. Yuan Shikai, a powerful member of the former court and the *de facto* leader of much of northern and central China, was installed as the Republic’s first official president – a move designed to avoid further bloodshed and to realize Sun’s dream of an easy revolution. Yuan has been described as “an autocrat at heart,” a description borne out by his attempt to install himself as the first Emperor of a new dynasty. Accordingly, he attempted to bring the burgeoning newspaper industry under stricter control, establishing publication laws similar to those of the Qing and violently suppressing dissident publications (including those belonging to the now-outlawed GMD). Sun himself began to expound his views on the necessity of a unified press soon after the establishment of the Republic. The continuity between the pre- and post-revolutionary press is therefore apparent: for all that they had contributed to the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty, journalists were once again required to limit the extent of their criticisms or face official repercussions.

107 Ting, 49
108 Ting, 13. Most significant in the press laws established under Yuan was Article 11, which proscribed “any writing, drawing or picture...[that] aims at a change in the form of government, is harmful to the public peace, tends to impair public morals, or reveals [the secrets of] a military, diplomatic or any other official organ.” Article 11 was used to justify the censorship of dozens of newspapers and periodicals during Yuan’s reign.
109 Ting, 50. Yuan’s campaign against print journalism was briefly successful; during his reign as President, the number of newspapers published in Beijing alone fell from over 100 to just over 20.
Under Yuan, Tokyo would become the center of publication for reformist periodicals, a trend that would continue until his death in 1916. At that time, when Sun was finally made official President of the Republic, the press in China underwent a change that remains with it to this day: the shift from commercial news to state- or party-sponsored propaganda. While propaganda had always been an important aspect of the Chinese press, the final establishment of GMD control over the Republic, and subsequent reorganization of the party and state along Leninist lines, created the strong central government required to subsidize propaganda on a large scale.

The death of Sun Yat-sen in 1925 was a seminal moment in the history of the fledgling Republic of China. Sun, through a mix of ideological fervor, personal charisma and political acumen had held Nationalist party members roughly in line during his lifetime; his death, therefore, was accompanied by the problem of ensuring unity without any of Sun’s unique traits. The Central Committee of the GMD, in its first meeting after Sun’s funeral, demonstrated a clear understanding of the magnitude of their loss: “[w]hile the president was with us, his character offered protection for all principles, political platforms, and policies. But with the president dead, *party discipline* is the only thing that can protect the teachings he has bequeathed us.”

In other words, the party could no longer rely on a larger-than-life leader to maintain harmony and prevent intra-party struggles from becoming too venomous. The solution instead was to tighten control over the party, in order to maintain the “revolutionary discipline” promoted by Sun.

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110 Nathan, 144. It was at this time that Tokyo assumed the former mantle of the Foreign Concessions, where anti-Qing newspapers had been allowed to publish with relative impunity due to the laws of extraterritoriality.

111 Fitzgerald, 217

112 It was this tightening of control that would eventually lead to the GMD-CCP split and subsequent civil war. For a discussion of the Nationalist attempt to “purify” the party of Communists, see Edmund S.K Fung, “Anti-Imperialism and the Guomindang Left,” *Modern China* Vol. 11 No. 1 (Jan 1985), 39
The aftereffects of Sun's death were keenly felt by the still-novel Nationalist Propaganda Bureau, which had only been established in 1919, and had done very little of note before the Nationalist Revolution.\textsuperscript{113} When Sun was alive, the department was largely superfluous; "[t]he general run of newspapers carried his comments along with generous reports of his activities and party branches circulated his books and pamphlets" simply because "he was a figure of national importance."\textsuperscript{114} After his death, however, the Bureau was subjected to the same new discipline as the rest of the Party. The man responsible for imposing that discipline was Mao Zedong, who was established as director of the Central Propaganda Bureau in 1925.\textsuperscript{115} Under Mao, the Bureau would take on a new shape, becoming far more bureaucratized and disciplinarily rigid. As John Fitzgerald notes, "Mao had become chief inspection of Nationalist propaganda at the very moment revolutionary discipline came to be mooted as a condition for attaining the freedom of the nation," and his newly-reorganized Bureau witnessed policing on a scale never before witnessed by the GMD.\textsuperscript{116}

Mao's assumption of power in the Propaganda Bureau came almost immediately after Sun Yat-sen's death. He was, therefore, uniquely positioned to ensure that Sun's "revolutionary discipline" was not only maintained within the party, but was broadcast for all to see. He did this through a number of bureaucratic reforms aimed at facilitating tighter control and discipline within the party. The first of these was the introduction of propaganda outlines (\textit{xuanchuan dagang}), which "offered ready-made analyses and prescribed slogans for adoption by all party, military and government agencies."\textsuperscript{117} These guidelines were actually the first instance of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{113} Fitzgerald, 215
\textsuperscript{114} Fitzgerald, 215
\textsuperscript{115} Fitzgerald, 214
\textsuperscript{116} Fitzgerald, 214
\textsuperscript{117} Fitzgerald, 240
\end{footnotesize}
regulated, centrally-dictated propaganda in Chinese history, although the concept of centralized control over knowledge dated back to the compilation of dynastic histories and historic annals, particularly the *Siku quanshu*. Within the propaganda department, discipline was also tightened — journalists and editors who refused to toe the party line (or were overly critical of Communists) were removed from their positions, and in some cases expelled from the party entirely. These practices marked a radical shift from the behavior of the Propaganda Bureau during Sun’s lifetime. While the *guofu* was still alive, Bureau officials were often given concurrent appointments in the disciplinary bodies intended to oversee their activities; as such, their adherence to propaganda guidelines (or lack thereof) was not tightly policed. After Sun’s death, however, discipline became far more necessary to the effective operation of the party. This is seen in the methods of monitoring and control established by the Bureau after 1925. While Sun was alive, the party often “favor[ed] the demonstration effect of exemplary punishment rather than routine inspection and discipline.” Under Mao, however, the Bureau “assumed responsibility for directing and disciplining all newspapers, magazines, leaflets and posters...set up by the party or by any of its members around the country.” It was a bureaucratic shift that would make the Propaganda Bureau one of the most powerful GMD bodies in the country. It was also a continuation of imperial attempts at bureaucratized control of knowledge, and the first time that a ruling group in China could reasonably claim to have full control over what it was presenting to the people and how it was presenting it. In his reform of the Bureau, Mao had come close to creating the system of control necessary for the ruling group to fulfill its parochial duties in the 20th century.

118 Fitzgerald, 241
119 Fitzgerald, 241
120 Fitzgerald, 245
121 Fitzgerald, 245
122 Fitzgerald, 245
The parochial duties of the state extended to the press by Liang had their roots in a longer-standing tradition of institutional education for the benefit of the state – a trend that began in the Ming and reached its zenith in the Qing, where “learning [particularly] at the academy level was indisputably part of the more general defense of orthodoxy.”\(^\text{123}\) The justification for control of learning was drawn from Mencius, who claimed that all people were fundamentally good but had to be taught “the relative importance of things” in order to reach their full potential.\(^\text{124}\) Although the educational system cannot be held fully accountable for the political regimentation and harsh punishment for dissent that marked the imperial state, particularly the early Qing,\(^\text{125}\) attempts by the court to control the curriculum – which, by the Qing, was essentially an amalgam of conservative Neo-Confucian thought – reveal that governmental control over knowledge was not unique to post-imperial China. Indeed, the Qing court issued an edict controlling what was permissible in academies as early as 1685.\(^\text{126}\) Although the extent of Qing control over academic learning is in some doubt,\(^\text{127}\) what is clear is that the state had a tradition of attempting to prescribe certain views while proscribing others. When Mao instituted the organizational reforms that turned the Nationalist Propaganda Bureau from a largely anonymous extension of Sun’s personal control of the party, he was reviving an older tradition of centrally-organized attempts to control the flow of knowledge.

\(^{123}\) Alexander Woodside, “State, Scholars, and Orthodoxy: The Ch’ing Academies, 1736-1839) in KC Liu ed. *Orthodoxy in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 159

\(^{124}\) Woodside, 159. By the Qing, this line had been interpreted as a justification for governmental control of education – it was the duty of the ruler to help his subjects reach their inner goodness.

\(^{125}\) Woodside, 160. According to Woodside, the real reasons behind incidents of imperial censorship such as the Qianlong Emperor’s book burning were politically motivated, and that “genuine Confucian orthodoxy greatly transcended the day-to-day techniques by which political despots tried to ensure stability.”

\(^{126}\) Woodside, 166. Most importantly, the edict stipulated that students should free themselves from “alien principles” in order to properly appreciate “orthodox studies” (*zhengxue*).

\(^{127}\) See Woodside, ibid.
Nor was the Propaganda Bureau the first instance of a bureaucratic department established for the purpose of censoring knowledge. That distinction belongs to the censorial boards created during the reign of the Qianlong Emperor, for the purpose of assembling the Siku Quanshu (Complete Books of the Four Repositories), a compilation of all writings under the Ming and Qing to be preserved for posterity. In an edict dating to 1776, Qianlong specified that good books should be preserved in order to “flow down the river of time,” but those “books by Ming authors which opposed our house...are to be set aside for destruction by fire.” Aside from books critical of the Manchu dynasty, the compilation of the Siku quanshu marked the final acceptance of Zhu Xi’s Neo-Confucianism as the defining ideology of the imperial court. Included in the proscribed materials were any books that questioned Confucianism or the teachings of Neo-Confucian scholars. The Siku quanshu is widely acknowledged as one of the most widespread examples of early censorship. It was also a concrete instance of bureaucratized, centralized control of knowledge in China’s past. When Mao reorganized the GMD Propaganda Bureau, he both established the blueprint for further organized propaganda efforts and continued the trend of continuity between China’s imperial past and Republican present.

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129 Goodrich, 34
130 Goodrich, 50
Conclusion

The press in China is a problematic phenomenon. On the one hand, it was initially imported to the country from abroad, and served (at first) as another technique of conversion for Western missionaries. However, it soon evolved into a medium capable of arousing public opinion against the longest-surviving imperial system in the world. For the Qing, the effects of widespread dissemination of knowledge were disastrous: for the first time, failings like the defeat to the Japanese in the Sino-Japanese war and the embarrassment of the Versailles Treaty in 1919\textsuperscript{131} were presented to the educated public, who began to conceive of China as a nation and themselves as active participants in that nation's salvation. Although Sun's bold proclamation that the Qing had been overthrown because of the press is probably an exaggeration, it is certainly true that the power of the written word to shape public opinion had made itself felt in China. That it was able to do so is thanks to a process of adaptation, whereby the essentially foreign medium Sinified itself, and in so doing became an integral part of intellectual society.

That process of Sinification was marked by the distinct presence of classical Chinese cultural mores in a modern setting. Virtually every aspect of the press – the journalists and editors who created it, the intellectuals who conceived of its role in society and the physical formatting of newspapers – was marked by distinct nods to China's long intellectual history. As such, the press in China was a visual and intellectual representation of the pattern of continuity between the imperial and post-imperial state, and between orthodox imperial ideology and the revolutionary ideologies that would replace it. Moreover, the adaptive nature of the press was

\textsuperscript{131}Although best known as the concluding treaty of the First World War, the Treaty of Versailles also ceded Shandong province in its entirety to Germany, marking the first outright loss of Qing sovereignty over a part of its empire.
precisely what allowed it to establish a niche in China’s remarkably resistant internal economy, and later to survive under fierce scrutiny from the Qing court and Yuan Shikai.

The problem of knowledge control continues in China to this day. In the People’s Republic, all news is controlled by the government’s Xinhua news agency, and dissident opinions are stamped out, often at great personal expense to those expressing them. However, an interesting parallel between the late Qing and modern China is evident to students of the Chinese press: namely, the increasing prevalence of blogging and use of the Internet to circumvent governmental controls on knowledge distribution. Much like the revolutionary periodicals that preceded them, reformist and radical blogs are cheap, easy to produce, and technologically more advanced than the laws designed to control them. It will be interesting to see whether online reformism can have the same impact on Chinese society in the 21st century as revolutionary periodicals and printed news did in the 20th.
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