Intellectuals and the Press in Republican Shanghai:
The Case of *Shenbao Free Talk*, 1926-1934

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THESIS

Submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

Comparative Literature

in the

OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

of the

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

DAVIS

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2021

ABSTRACT

As a result of the encounter between the prosperity of the printing culture and the transformation of intellectuals in Shanghai at the beginning of the 20th century, the interactions between intellectuals and the press show a complex form. Based on the case of Shenbao Free Talk, this thesis will examine the new relationship between intellectuals and the press in the 1920s and 1930s. Structurally, the thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter is an introduction to the research object and the research method. The second chapter is a general introduction to the historical background and cultural ecology of Republican Shanghai. In the third chapter, the focus is on Shenbao Free Talk, studying the relations between intellectuals and newspapers. The discussion consists of three parts: the way intellectuals engage with the press and their purpose, the images of intellectuals shown by the press, and the organic bond between intellectuals and the press in Republican Shanghai. Overall, the interactions between intellectuals and the press led to the establishment of a public sphere in Shanghai, which also cultivated the nascent public opinion of modern society in the shadow of political power. During this period, the media engagement and press discourse of two different author groups will also be further compared and examined.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The practice of publishing criticism of the government in newspapers does not originate from the West, as it is an ancient Chinese tradition for leaders to seek opinions from the people. The purpose of *Shenbao* is to conform to the approach already in place in China, stating as much as possible what is good for the country without any fear.

—*Shenbao*, Aug 10th, 1886

Modern press, first brought to China by missionaries in the 19th century, has developed into an important social institution to Chinese intellectuals. Over one hundred years ago when China experienced profound historical changes, the imperial examination system was abolished in 1905, indicating the final collapse of the traditional channel through which Confucian literati could engage in politics. Meanwhile, as western commodities swept through the Chinese market, the conventional livelihood of the literati had become more difficult to maintain. As a result, a great portion of them chose to pursue a viable career in newspapers, magazines, and western-style schools, which provided them with new career opportunities. Therefore, the literati faded out gradually in the late 19th century as the modern intellectual class emerged. A significant cause for their transition was the prosperity of the publishing industry in modern China as a result of social and political changes. In the 1930s, Shanghai gradually became China's publishing center and attracted professional publishers, editors, journalists, bookstore owners, and writers. This prosperity, however, should be attributed, at least partially, to the support and protection of the publishing industry by the colonial authority that enjoyed extraterritoriality in the concessions (*zujie* 租界). In other words, the by-product of colonialism in an ironic way gave Chinese civilians the possibility of a modern life. The introduction of western civilization and the

booming of business and commerce in the last one hundred years promoted urban culture in Shanghai and laid the foundation for civil society to emerge.

Research Objectives

As a result of the encounter between the prosperity of the printing culture and the transformation of intellectuals, the interactions between intellectuals and the press show a complex relationship. Based on the case of *Shenbao Free Talk* 申報自由談, this thesis will examine the new relationship between intellectuals and the press in the 1920s and 1930s. In light of the political, economic, and cultural context at that time, research on intellectuals requires an in-depth exploration of a series of questions, such as the shift of intellectual's understanding of newspapers as media, the possibilities of dialogue or debate concerning public issues between different groups, and the influence that the organic bond between intellectual and the media exerted upon politics and culture.

In fact, the concept of "intellectual" (*zhishifenzi* 知識分子) introduced into China from the Europe has grown popular since the period of the Republic of China. At the time when the concept "intellectual" was first coined in Europe, it mainly referred to individuals who had received a certain degree of education, had outstanding intelligence and were adept at critical thinking. The concept of intellectual has two origins: In Russia in the 1860s, it tended to refer to members of the upper class who had received an education in the West and remained rebellious towards and critical of social phenomena. In 1898 in France, the title of intellectual was related to the critical spirit and the courage of speaking out for justice that Zola, Hugo and others showed in the Dreyfus affair.[1] However, after the term "intellectual" (*zhishifenzi*) entered the

[1] See Xu, *Zhishifenzi Shilun* (Ten Treatises on Intellectuals), 2-4.

Chinese context, its connotations shifted and mainly referred to the "educated population" in the 1920s and early 1930s. Existing studies on the etymology of *zhishifenzi* have shown that, the concept *zhishifenzi* was first introduced to China as a translation of the term "intellectual class" (*zhishijieji* 智識階級) in Japanese, and then it was gradually switched to the term *zhishifenzi* by CCP elites and widely used in the press and official documents.[2] Combined with its western origin and Chinese local context, "intellectual" in this thesis has a relatively general sense and refers to those who participate in public life as independent individuals through the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Differentiated by careers, intellectuals include scholars that serve educational or research institutes, publishers, writers, editors, freelancers, and social activists.

To narrow down the subject, my research focuses mainly on events from 1926 to 1934 when *Shenbao*'s influence reached its peak.[3] Important authors and their published articles in *Shenbao*'s supplement (*fukan* 副刊)[4] *Free Talk* (*ziyoutan* 自由談) will be used as primary texts. Structurally, the thesis is divided into three chapters. The first chapter of the thesis is an introduction to the research object and the research method. The second chapter is a general introduction to the historical background and cultural ecology of Republican Shanghai. In the third chapter, the focus is on *Shenbao Free Talk*, studying the relations between intellectuals and newspapers. The discussion consists of three parts. The first part is about the way intellectuals engage with the press and their purpose. Intellectuals engaged with *Free Talk* often worked simultaneously as editors, writers, and translators, while the majority came from undesirable

[2] See U, *Creating the Intellectual*, 22-28.
[3] *Shenbao* was first founded in Shanghai on April 30, 1872 by the British businessman Emest Major. From 1872 to 1889, *Shenbao* was operated by Major. From 1889 to 1912, *Shenbao* gradually changed from wholly foreign-owned to Sino-foreign joint venture, and finally was completely owned by Chinese. From 1912 to 1934, *Shenbao* was run by Shi Liangcai. After 1935, *Shenbo* suffered several ups and downs, and finally ended in 1949.
[4] Supplement is a special section of newspaper wherein publishes non-news genres, including alternative news, essays, comments, editorials, serialized novels, film reviews, travel notes, and etc.

backgrounds and stayed in the lower reaches of the social ladder with no fixed income. Some of them were making a living and fulfilling professional goals, while others appeared more enthusiastic about advocating for ideologies and shaping public opinion. The second part will discuss the images of Shanghai intellectuals shown by the press. It is obvious that different media discourses reflected certain images of intellectuals in the eyes of the public, an example of which is that *Free Talk* shaped two unique images of intellectuals in the 1920s and 1930s. The third part will analyze the organic bond between intellectuals and the press in Republican Shanghai. The bond with newspapers helped Shanghai intellectuals establish a deep tie with the city and the society. At the same time, the newspaper as a type of mass media also exerted potential influence on intellectuals with respect to their new writing styles and ways of expression. The result of this interaction was the establishment of a public sphere in Shanghai, which also cultivated the nascent public opinion of modern society in the shadow of political power.

Research Status and Methodology

As a well-preserved newspaper with a long publishing span, *Shenbao* has attracted the attention of many researchers over the past few decades. Among the research related to the topic of this thesis, Rudolf Wagner's article "The *Shenbao* in Crisis: The International Environment and the Conflict between Guo Songtao and the *Shenbao*" (1999) analyzes how *Shenbao* maintains its own operation and publishing stability between Chinese and foreign officials in the unique extraterritorial environment of Shanghai. Leo Ou-fan Lee, Chen Jianhua, and Tang Xiaobing further discuss *Shenbao* and the public sphere that it helped create through their research on *Shenbao Free Talk*. They explore the new cultural and political criticism that intellectuals have pioneered since the late Qing Dynasty with newspapers, showing their concern

for social issues and public opinion of the time. Barbara Mittler's *A Newspaper for China? Power, Identity, and Change in Shanghai's News Media, 1872–1912* (2004) examines *Shenbao*'s texts, style, and diverse readership in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and explores its potential impact on the readers as modern Chinese press.

Notably, "public sphere" is an important concept that has been widely employed in the studies of modern Chinese press. The concept of "public sphere" introduced by Jürgen Habermas in his book *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962) initially referred to the bourgeois public sphere in the 18th century. It means a middle ground between the state and society, the political and private spheres, and also a space for public participation in political activities and for discussion and criticism of public affairs. In fact, the bourgeois public sphere is a special historical form based on the civil society that gradually formed in the late Middle Ages in Europe. It developed from the literary public sphere with cafes, salons, and banquets as the main places of activity. In his 1992 book *Between Facts and Norms*, Habermas further dissociates the public sphere from its historical context by defining it as a "social space" formed by individuals gathering together to discuss public issues. In this sense, the public sphere can be understood as a network of interactions where content and opinions can be shared. Within this network, people's discussions are filtered and synthesized in a particular way, thus becoming a public opinion clustered according to specific issues. Since the end of the 20th century, Habermas's theory of the public sphere has been increasingly applied to study the political changes and the development of public institutions in modern Chinese society, such as Keith Schoppa's *Chinese Elites and Political Change: Zhejiang Province in the Early Twentieth Century* (1982) and William Rowe's *Hankow: Commerce and Society in a Chinese City, 1796-1889* (1984). Scholars such as Frederic Wakeman and Philip Huang, on the other hand, focus

more on the differences between the historical situations in China and the West when discussing the public sphere, pointing out the limitations of the concept as applied to the Chinese context.[5] In recent years, some Chinese scholars, such as Fang Ping and Yang Nianqun, also make important explorations on the complexity of public sphere, and emphasized the need to examine its scope of application in China.[6]

Another research focus of this thesis is the intellectuals of Republican Shanghai. Since the 20th century, various research on intellectuals started in Europe and the U.S. The French scholar Julien Benda in his *The Treason of the Intellectuals* (1928) defines intellectuals as a small group of people that possess great intellect and moral superiority, and they are expected to shoulder metaphysical responsibilities and defend eternal values. Similarly, Karl Mannheim proposed a rather ideal concept of free-floating intellectuals that are independent from any class or hierarchy in *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* (1940). He holds that the freedom enjoyed by intellectuals enables them to pursue truth and criticize society. In the 1930s, Antonio Gramsci proposed the classic classification of traditional and organic intellectuals. In his view, organic intellectuals represent the future of history and the direction of social development; they are people who are linked to specific classes or groups and who participate in political life. After the 1960s, reflection and critique of the role of intellectuals also increased. In his *The Last Intellectuals* (1987), Russell Jacoby reflects on the current state of American intellectuals and argues that the gradual institutionalization led to the decline of public intellectuals, and he thus suggests that the essence of intellectuals' role lies in its public nature. At the end of the 20th

[5] See Wakeman, "The civil society and public sphere debate: Western reflections on Chinese political culture." Huang, "'Public Sphere'/'Civil Society' in China? The Third Realm between State and Society."
[6] See Fang Ping's book *Wanqing shanghai de gonggonglingyu* (The Public Sphere in Shanghai in the Late Qing Dynasty) and Yang Nianqun's article "Jindai Zhongguo yanjiu zhong de shimingshehui" ("Civil Society" in Modern Chinese Studies: Methods and Limits).

century, Edward Said is aware that the intellectual tradition was threatened by the commercialization of knowledge. Intellectuals, as he argues in his *Representations of the Intellectual* (1994), are destined to be exiles and marginalized people in society who are not attached to any authority or organization, and they should be always critical of the status quo and maintain a state of alertness.

The interpretation of intellectuals, both in Western and Chinese contexts, has always been a historical and dynamic process that has no universally recognized definition or criterion. Rather than struggling to define intellectuals, we can focus on their role in particular historical situations. As an important group in modern history, intellectuals are imprinted with the characteristics of the times. In light of the origins of the intellectuals, they have been burdened with social responsibility and possessed a spirit of reflection and criticism during the early 20th century, a spirit of which we can also find traces in Chinese intellectuals since the late Qing Dynasty. Though originated from the west, the Chinese cultural context has also given the concept of the "intellectual" rich connotations, and Chinese scholars are no less intrigued by research on intellectuals.

The study of modern Chinese intellectuals has undergone three areas since its inception in the 1980s: intellectual history, political history, and sociocultural history. The study of intellectual history focuses on the ideological conflicts and cultural choices inherent in the transition of intellectuals, and the study of political history focuses on the social role and political fate of intellectuals. For example, in Yu Ying-shih's *The Marginalization of Chinese Intellectuals* (1998) and Wang Fansen's *The Changing Self-Image of Modern Intellectuals* (2002), they analyze how scholar-bureaucrats gradually transformed into intellectuals beginning in the late Qing Dynasty, and how intellectuals became marginalized in their political status and

social identity in this transition. In recent years, scholars have begun to use sociological theories to examine modern intellectuals. For example, Xu Jilin examines the inner spirit and self-consciousness of modern intellectuals, and makes a generational division of Chinese intellectuals since the late Qing Dynasty.[7] Wang Xiaoyu studies intellectuals from the perspective of urban space, and his research investigates how intellectuals interact with each other to construct communities and networks in a certain historical period.[8]

At present, there are few studies that have focused on the relationship between the modern intellectuals and the press during the 1920s and 1930s. Therefore, there is still considerable room for further research on the interactions between modern intellectuals and newspapers. As to research methods, firstly, the thesis will adopt several analytical frameworks including the media theory, language ideology theory, and public sphere theory to conduct interdisciplinary research. Secondly, through textual analysis and case studies, the thesis will select different author groups to examine the dynamic interactions between intellectuals and newspapers in a specific historical period. Also, two comparative threads will be covered in some sections of this thesis. One is to compare the images of different intellectuals and their influence through the development of *Free Talk* between 1926 and 1934; the second is to use the relationship between intellectuals and newspapers a century ago to illuminate the present and reflect on contemporary intellectuals and the media.

[7] See Xu's *Zhishifenzi shilun* (Ten Treatises on Intellectuals) and *Gonggong kongjian zhong de zhishifenzi* (Intellectuals in Public Space).
[8] See Wang's *Zhishifenzi de neizhan: xiandai Shanghai de wenhua changyu* (1927-1930) (The Civil War of Intellectuals – Cultural Field of Modern Shanghai, 1927-1930).

Chapter 2

Republican Shanghai and Its Cultural Ecology

It is a lively city, a semi-colony, a place where many imperialist countries and races share jurisdiction and live together, so when the sea in the east just spit out the first ray of daylight, under a bluish white sky, all kinds of different colors are radiated in Shanghai.

—Ding Ling, *The Sun*, 223[9]

The story of *Midnight* by Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981), published in 1932, starts with a local gentry's first visit to Shanghai. With the Treatise on Response and Retribution (*taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇) in hand, he is in a Citroen car heading to the *shili yangchang* (*a ten-mile-long foreign zone* 十裏洋場) to see his son. However, shocked both visually and psychologically by flashing neon lights, weird skyscrapers, and fashionable women on the way, the old man finally dies with dizziness and tinnitus. With its dramatic plot, the novel shows its readers a panoramic picture of Shanghai in the 1930s. Known as the "Oriental Paris", Shanghai on the one hand was the most modernized city in China, while on the other hand experienced the simultaneous collapse of the traditional system and growth of modern civilization. To better examine the media practices of intellectuals in Republican Shanghai, we should first look at its historical background and cultural ecology. In fact, Shanghai in the 1920s and 1930s was exposed to colonialism, imperialism, urbanization, and the commercial printing culture, all of which led to the cognitive paradox of "evil colonialism" and "prosperous metropolis" confronted by intellectuals at such a historical stage.

The Rise of the Printing Culture

[9] Ding, *Ding ling wenji* (Selected Works of Ding Ling), 223.

To expand trade in China, British businessmen sought opening up new ports in 1832, and thus drafted a report about China's coastal areas, in which Shanghai was described as another excellent site after Guangzhou. Their failure in negotiating a profitable commercial exchange with the Qing government led to the First Opium War, and the defeated Qing government was forced to sign a series of treaties that changed the fate of Shanghai—having it opened up in 1843 and hereby turning the seaside town into a modern metropolis.[10]

A few years after the opening up of Shanghai, the United Kingdom, France, and the United States successively established concessions in Shanghai to exercise their power on Chinese soil,[11] introducing western modes of production, management systems and values into Shanghai. As tap water, fire trucks, the telegraph and telephone entered Shanghai, the setting up of factories in the concessions started to draw foreign investments starting in 1843, and the prosperity of foreign-funded industries hence contributed directly to the development of the commercial industry. Meanwhile, the flourishing of industry and commerce also drove the development of education, culture, entertainment, and other public utilities in Shanghai, encouraging the construction of more western architecture such as factories, banks, schools, hospitals, racetracks, cinemas, dance halls, and cafes. Similarly, Shanghai *huajie* (Chinese controlled districts 華界) was governed by local gentries under the local autonomy policy introduced by Qing government in 1905 in building municipal and hygiene facilities. As a result, the transformation of production modes and lifestyle gave rise to new civil classes, including compradors, capitalists, employees, coolies, and workers, who then became the majority of Shanghai citizenry. In 1927, the Nanjing National Government

[10] According to the treaty of Nanjing and Five Trade Rules, Shanghai officially opened its port on November 17, 1843.

[11] On July 11, 1854, the British, American, and French consuls jointly laid down the Land Regulations in Shanghai, which included the area of the settlement, the rent, the management of the Chinese, and the establishment of the Ministry of Industry.

was set up, putting an end to decades of warlord regime, and Shanghai experienced the most prosperity in the next ten years.

During Shanghai's transformation, tension existed between the concessions and Chinese controlled districts. The Bund where gorgeous flagships moored and ten-mile long magnificent foreign buildings stood, is the world of compradors and capitalists, while filthy stores and alley courtyards across the streets in *huajie* gathered starving coolies and peddlers. When gentlemen and ladies were killing time in the department stores and enjoying performances in Great World (*dashijie* 大世界) on Nanjing Street, ordinary employees and impoverished writers were struggling to make a living in cubicles and pavilion rooms (*tingzijian* 亭子間). To put it another way, wealth and poverty, metropolis and the rural area, modern civilization and traditional customs were mutually exclusive but dependent on each other in Shanghai's everyday life. Thereafter, the rise of nationalism and the downward traditional ethics challenged the legitimacy of the Shanghai concessions, for which some intellectuals felt disappointed about the intrusion of western culture: "our sadness was half due to the national emotion, and half due to our awareness of the great difference between western and eastern civilization."[12]

While the concession was on Chinese territory, it was beyond the jurisdiction of the Chinese government. One advantage of the concession was that Chinese could run publications privately, which contributed to the prosperity of the printing culture in Shanghai.[13] More importantly, the economic development as well as the modernization of the society gave birth to a

[12] See Zheng, "Yingxiyuan yu wutai" (Cinema Theater and 'Stage'), 373.

[13] Wang Min's study of the relationship between the government and the media in Shanghai in the late Qing Dynasty found that there was no press censorship in the Shanghai Concessions. The management of publications in concessions was based on the system of punishment after the event, under which publications could be published freely. See Wang, "Zhengfu yu meiti—wanqing shanghai baozhi de zhengzhi kongjian" (Government and Media—The Political Space of Shanghai Newspapers of Late Qing Dynasty).

vast cultural market, and the publishing industry in Shanghai also enjoyed unprecedented prosperity as a result of printing technology. As Christopher Reed pointed out, "in the early 1930s…Shanghai was the recorded home of 456 Chinese-owned machine industry workshops. Altogether, these machine workshops employed 8,082 workers, about 18 persons per shop."[14] On the other hand, it is notable that the establishment of schools and publishing houses inside and outside the concessions promoted the cultural needs of those who were educated and desired to keep themselves updated about social changes, thus turning reading and commenting on news into an indispensable part of cultural consumption and social activities among Shanghai citizens. As Ge Gongzhen 戈公振 (1890-1935) commented, "in this transitional era when current affairs changed rapidly, everyone capable of reading should know the necessity of reading newspapers and magazines. Take Shanghai as an example, all the medium-sized or larger shops are selling newspapers."[15] In such circumstances, modern press for the first time established a wide readership, giving Shanghai intellectuals an opportunity to reach a large audience through the media, thus allowing them to build a nationwide knowledge dissemination network. It was by virtue of the mass media, represented by the newspaper, that intellectuals gained unimaginable public impact.

From Literatus to Intellectual

In fact, Chinese intellectuals have experienced a painful transformation from the late Qing Dynasty to the early Republic. According to Yu Ying-shih, it is reasonable to take Chinese intellectuals as deriving from the scholarly class (*shi* 士) in traditional China. From the late Western Zhou Dynasty to the Spring and Autumn period, the collapse of social hierarchy freed scholars from patriarchal families where members were connected by fixed hierarchy and kinship,

[14] Reed, *Gutenberg in Shanghai*, 135.
[15] Ge, "Zhongguo xinwen shiye zhi jianglai" (The Future of Journalism in China).

and scholars thus formed a relatively independent social class. Since the unification in Qin and Han Dynasties, roaming scholars (*youshi* 遊士) were recognized as scholar-officials (*shidafu* 士大夫) and were included in the political ruling class under the control of the government. Accordingly, scholar-officials started to pay close attention to other fields besides politics, thus they were freed from the role of a political vassal of the ruling class and became a bearer of cultural tradition. Given their great influence on politics and the society, scholar-officials were usually selected by institutionalized imperial examination, which guaranteed the stability of social order. After the Song and Ming Dynasties, scholar-officials gradually became gentry (*shishen* 士紳) and the gentry society[16] was founded somewhat independently from the local government. Sharing similar values, cultural interests, and social status, gentries as elites in the local society established an internal network by taking imperial examinations, and thus monopolized the cultural and knowledge resources in China.[17]

This situation continued until the late Qing. In the late 19th century, China's dynastic political system and the social structure that supported it collapsed amid western invasion, internal social movements, and political upheavals.[18] The defeats in a series of wars against the Westerners made the Chinese painfully to become aware of the widening gap between the Qing Empire and the Western powers. Chinese literati were distressed by the social foundation of the old institution and the traditional ethical system, they argued that the disease of Chinese society lies in the deep-rooted Confucian culture, as well as the spiritual lethargy and social inertia of the

[16] The concept of gentry society was first introduced by John King Fairbank to analyze the social structure of traditional Chinese society from the Song to the Qing dynasties, and in his book *The United States and China*, he elaborated on the origin, composition, lifestyle, and social role of Chinese gentry.
[17] See Xu, *Gonggong kongjian zhong de zhishifenzi* (Intellectuals in Public Space), 5.
[18] See Zarrow's description of China in the late 19th century in the preface for his book *China in War and Revolution.*

national character derived from it. Therefore, a psychological revolution and cultural purge led to the gradual replacement of the hierarchy with the core of Confucian etiquette by democracy and science, and the abolition of the imperial examination system was undoubtedly the fuse for the disintegration of the gentry class. The scholars-officials broke away from the cultural system and became free-moving groups among the common people, with some of them turning into new political or mercantile forces and others transformed into new intellectuals who devote themselves to different professions.

The literati of the late 19th century were similar to the free-floating intellectuals mentioned by Mannheim, who noted that, "the freedom of the intellectuals from 'high society' and their development into a section more or less detached from other sections, and recruited from all social classes, brought about a wonderful flowering of a free intellectual and cultural life."[19] Therefore, the late Qing literati were a special transitional group on the spectrum of Chinese intellectuals. In the process of their transformation, the press played a key role.[20] As an important basic structure and public network, the mass media exerted significant impact on intellectuals in two ways.

Firstly, the abolishment of imperial examination in late Qing necessitated the change of living pattern for most literati. The emergence and development of the publishing industry enabled the literati to choose among a wider range of careers, including editor, reporter, publisher, freelance writer, and bookstore owner, so that they could continue to engage in the production and dissemination of knowledge. From the late Qing to the Republican period,

[19] Mannheim, *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, 101.
[20] Zhang Hao also pointed out three systems that contributed to the emergence of intellectual class in the urban society since late Qing Dynasty, including schools, media, and associations, see his article "Zhongguo jindai sixiangshi de zhuanxing shidai" (The Transformation Era of Chinese Modern Ideological History), 134,

Shanghai was taken by western powers as the central place for missionary work, and the establishment of publishing institutions stimulated the development of the national publishing industry in China, during which the first industrialists began to run newspapers around 1860. Newspapers at that time were the main body of the cultural industry, while most of those engaging in the publishing industry were literati who failed in the imperial examination system and had to rely on the remuneration making a living. For example, almost all the *Shenbao*'s chief editors in the early period had taken the imperial examinations, among them, Jiang Zhixiang 蔣芷湘 was First-Degree Scholars (*juren* 舉人), Qian Xinbo 錢昕伯, He Guisheng 何桂笙, Cai Erkang 蔡爾康, Shen Zengli 沈增理, Han Bangqing 韓邦慶, and Zhu Fengjia 朱逢甲 were Certified Students (*xiucai* 秀才),[21] some of whom finally gave up pursuing an official career and became professional journalists.

Moreover, as an institutional product of modern society, newspapers were where literati expressed themselves. Although intellectuals lost their political legitimacy after the collapse of monarchy, what still existed was their political concern. As pointed out by Yu Ying-shih, "the extinction of *shi* tradition did not take away the spirit of *shi* from the modern structure, while the latter is still rooted in new intellectuals' minds in one way or another."[22] With the advent of newspapers, intellectuals at their transitional stage were allowed to "serve the country with articles" and fulfil their responsibility to the nation and society. A typical example is the emergence of political newspapers after the Sino-Japanese War in 1895 when Chinese faced the increasingly serious national crisis. In response, a group of intellectuals including Wang Tao 王韜 (1866-1937),

[21] See the statistics of *Shenbao* in Wang, *Wanqing xiaoshuo qikan shilunThe* (History of Novels and Periodicals in Late Qing), 69.
[22] Yu, *Shi yu Zhongguo wenhua* (Shi and Chinese Culture), 6.

Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873-1929), and Yu Youren 於右任 (1879-1964) raised public awareness by publicizing new thoughts, reporting significant events, and criticizing the corruptive ruling class in their newspapers.

Shenbao in the Nanjing Decade

As the publishing industry became more mature around 1930, the flourish of the cultural market in Shanghai attracted a multitude of intellectuals, which started the professionalization and commercialization of writers. The running of newspapers like *Shenbao* and *Xinwenbao* laid the foundation for the first group of intellectuals in Shanghai. At the end of Qing Dynasty and the early Republican period, graduates from new-style schools in Shanghai together with those studying abroad formed an emerging class of intellectuals who were cultivated by modern urban civilization. In 1927, the breakdown of the First United Front and the advent of the White Terror started another wave of intellectual migration to Shanghai, including writers who were devoted to the revolution like Guo Moruo 郭沫若 (1892-1978) and Jiang Guangci 蔣光慈 (1901-1931), as well as famous left-wing authors like Lu Xun 魯迅 (1881-1936) and Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白 (1899-1935). Hence, Shanghai had become home to different intellectuals engaged in publishing industry. By virtue of the diversified intelligentsia and the mature mass media, newspapers no longer only served as an accelerator of political revolution or the front for national enlightenment, but started to interact with intellectuals in multiple forms.

As one of the most popular newspapers of the time, *Shenbao* took the leadership in the civilian-run newspaper industry by its circulation of 150,000 copies.[23] As the political situation changed constantly, the running of *Shenbao* was adjusted accordingly with a rather independent

[23] See Song, *Shenbao de xingshuai* (The Rising and Fall of Shenbao), 130.

position before 1935, which means *Shenbao* showed no intention to be in a close relation with any political party. However, despite the shelter provided by the authority in the concessions, the KMT and the Nanjing Government made every effort to control the news and speeches, and *Shenbao* received the punishment of "no delivery" several times in the 1930s for releasing prohibited reports. Confronted with such intensive relations with the authorities, *Shenbao* never gave up the responsibilities of the press and advocated repeatedly in its editorials the freedom of speech and the expansion of space for public opinion. By means of the platform of *Shenbao* and the cultural network of which *Shenbao* formed a part, the floating intellectuals in modern Shanghai managed to set up communities and networks of different scales, and made great efforts to interact with readers in a constructive way. Political pressure and consideration of commercial profit stimulated the development of pluralistic public opinion, and *Shenbao* itself also grew into an important part of Shanghai's cultural market. As the most famous supplement to *Shenbao*, *Free Talk* was considered by the intelligentsia as a frontier for spreading and guiding public opinion. It was established in 1911 and folded in 1949 with the liberation of Shanghai, lasting for thirty-nine years under more than ten editors.[24] This thesis mainly focuses on the development of *Free Talk* from 1926 to 1934, during which Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵑 (1895-1968) and Li Liewen 黎烈文 (1904-1972) were the chief editors. The intellectuals and the press, as well as their interactions in this period will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter based on the case of *Free Talk*.

[24] After the assassination of *Shenbao*'s manager in 1934, *Free Talk* ceased publication for three years between 1935 and 1938, and was unable to regain its former influence after its resumption.

Chapter 3

A New Relationship between Intellectuals and the Press

We were not simply interested in media, but in the ways in which the interaction between media and human beings give a culture its character and, one might say, help a culture to maintain symbolic balance.

– Neil Postman, "The Humanism of Media Ecology," 2000[25]

Shanghai's cultural industry in the 1920s was an arena for a diverse range of intellectuals to engage in media practice. The excellent commercial publishing institutions with their well-developed remuneration mechanism, coupled with a readership who emerged in the process of urbanization made it possible for intellectuals to utilize the new press in Shanghai to create a complex form of interaction between the media and individuals.

Editor-Writers Clusters: Intellectuals' Engagement with the Press

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the career options offered by the new media had a profound impact on the individual development of intellectuals and the formation of group-based social networks. In the 1920s, intellectuals in Shanghai were forced to leave their hometowns and become immersed in a metropolis full of strangers. At this time, constructing a new network of contacts was a necessary means of survival and professional development. To do so, they not only needed to look for personal connections such as hometown fellows, alumni, and colleagues to provide recommendations, but also actively cultivate their social circles through various public networks such as schools, associations, and the press. For intellectuals who made their living in writing, translation and publishing, the many types of modern newspapers and

[25] See his keynote address, "The Humanism of Media Ecology," delivered at the first convention of the Media Ecology Association on June 16, 2000.

magazines provided a natural platform for expressing themselves and showing their ambitions. Relying on their own social networks, they frequently flowed to or gathered in these virtual cultural spaces. In other words, they could be free-lancers, reporters, and chief editors of several press at the same time. Given the situation, intellectuals' media practice in Republican Shanghai took on a rich mixture of forms depending on different newspaper platforms and the author groups formed around them.

1.*Two Editor-Writers Clusters around Free Talk*

In 1950, the American scholar David White introduced the concept of the journalistic "gatekeeper." He found that in news reporting, editors of media organizations often act as the "gatekeepers" of the news, ultimately deciding what news is made available to readers and what is not.[26] In fact, what he calls gate-keeping is a metaphor for editorial power, wherein newspaper editors have the power to select and process the work they receive before sending it to print. The exercise of this power is often focalized through the lens of the editors' personal interests and preferences. Similarly, in the cultural arena of Republican Shanghai, where economic capital was the core of power, editors were the gatekeepers of successful publishers such as the Commercial Press (*shangwu yinshuguan* 商務印書館) and the China Bookstore (*zhonghua shuju* 中華書局).[27] Chief editors of press in Shanghai played a key role, and their importance lay in the fact that intellectuals could network in the publishing industry by editing various newspapers and magazines, and through those roles, they could establish various contacts in the cultural industry, and thus expand their influence. They usually had the power to choose to publish a certain work

[26] See White, "The 'gatekeeper': a case study in the selection of news."
[27] The Commercial Press is the oldest publishing institution in China's publishing industry. It was founded in Shanghai in 1897 and moved to Beijing in 1954. China Bookstore is a publishing organization that integrates editing, printing, publishing and distribution, it was founded by Lu Feikui in Shanghai on January 1, 1912.

or promote a new writer, and then often maintained a close relationship with authors who went on to achieve fame.

For the *Shenbao*'s supplement, *Free Talk*, the chief editor also played a central role in the gathering of regular authors. From 1920 to 1932, the chief editor of *Free Talk* was Zhou Shoujuan, a popular novelist in Shanghai, famous for his tragic love stories. He was also an excellent media person and translator, having worked for a dozen newspapers and magazines, through which he met many kindred spirits and newspapermen similar to himself. When he started writing as a profession, his work was appreciated by established writers such as Bao Tianxiao 包天笑 (1876-1973) and Chen Diexian 陳蝶仙 (1879-1940). Accordingly, he was given the opportunity to be published in the newspapers they edited, subsequently becoming famous himself and later promoting Zhang Shewo 張舍我, Cheng Xiaoqing 程小青(1893-1976) and many other young writers. When becoming the chief editor of *Free Talk* in 1920, the bulk of *Free Talk*'s contributing writers came from his circle of friends in the publishing industry. Although their works differed in style and subject matter, they took up the main task of writing serialized stories as well as other essays and articles for *Free Talk*. Broadly, they focused on leisure themes and readers' interests, including romantic love and marital life, adventures and detective cases, social ills and darkness, and various social conditions. This group of authors came to be known as the Saturday School.[28]

[28] The name of "Saturday" comes from *Saturday* magazine that Zhou has edited. As its literal meaning suggests, Saturdays are a time for relaxation outside of the workday, and members of the Saturday School were generally concerned with the fun and amusement of literature, writing popular fiction for the public. In literary history, it is believed that the Saturday School should be regarded as the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly (*yuanyanghudie*) in a broad sense. However, this thesis adopts the research of scholars such as Fan Boqun and Chen Jianhua, and holds that the Saturday School should be distinguished from the Mandarin Duck and Butterfly as their mind is more open than the latter.

In the competitive publishing industry, chief editors, acting as gatekeepers, needed to procure famous authors and quality works to ensure that their newspapers would attract more readers. As most members of the Saturday School were established popular writers, which guaranteed the basic quality of their articles. They not only submitted articles to *Free Talk*, but also to the publications edited by others in the group. Writing articles for each other was a kind of reciprocity, which could ensure support from a regular circle of writers in the cultural industry. This two-way demand between editors and authors also contributed to the formation of an intellectual community clustered around a few central figures.

Table 1 Main authors in the early stage of *Free Talk*

Name	Year of Birth	Native Place	Educational Background	Media Engagement
Zhou Shoujuan 周瘦鵑	1895	Jiangsu, Suzhou	Shanghai Minli Middle School	*Libailiu* 禮拜六, *Youxi shijie* 遊戲世界, *Banyue* 半月, *Ziluolan* 紫羅蘭, *Xinjiating* 新家庭, *Liangyou* 良友
Chen Diexian 陳蝶仙	1879	Zhejiang, Qiantang	Local old-style private school	*Daguanbao* 大觀報, *Zhuzuolin* 著作林, *Youxi shijie* 遊戲世界, *Nüzi shijie* 女子世界
Xu Zhuodai 徐卓呆	1880	Jiangsu, Suzhou	Local old-style private school, then study abroad in Japan	*Shishi xinbao* 時事新報, *Chenbao* 晨報, *Xiaohua* 笑畫, *Xin Shanghai* 新上海
Zhang Biwu 張碧梧	1897	Jiangsu, Yangzhou	Yangzhou Lianghuai Higher Primary School	*Shangwu shibao* 商務時報, *Xunxi ribao* 潯溪日報 *Leyuan ribao* 乐园日报
Bao Tianxiao 包天笑	1876	Jiangsu, Suzhou	Local old-style private school	*Suzhou baihuabao* 蘇州白話報, *Shibao* 時報, *Xiaoshuo shibao* 小說時報, *Funü shibao* 婦女時報
Cheng Zhanlu 程瞻廬	1879	Jiangsu, Suzhou	Jiangsu Academy of Higher Education	*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報, *Funv zazhi* 婦女雜誌, *Guoxue zazhi* 國學雜誌, etc.
Zhang Zhenlü 張枕綠	Unknown	Jiangsu	Family school	*Hujiangyue* 滬江月, *Zuixiaobao* 最小報, *Liangchen* 良晨

Jiang Hongjiao 江紅蕉	1898	Jiangsu, Suzhou	Suzhou Caoqiao Middle School	*Jiating zazhi* 家庭雜誌, *Yindeng* 銀燈
Fan Yanqiao 范烟桥	1894	Jiangsu, Wujiang	Nanjing Republic of China University	*Xiaoshuo xinbao* 小說新報, *Shidaibao* 時代報
Hu Jichen 胡寄塵	1886	Anhui, Jingxian	Shanghai Yucai School	*Wujiang zhoukan 吴江周刊, Xiaoxian zhoukan 消闲周刊, Wenhuihuabao 文汇画报*

As can be seen from the above, the early writers of *Free Talk*, namely members of the Saturday School, had been rooted in Shanghai's cultural market for a long time, participating in the editing and writings of several newspapers or magazines before they were invited to write for *Free Talk*. For most of them, the imperial examination system had been abolished during their school years. By the time they entered the literary field, the 1911 Revolution had also overthrown the monarchy. At this point, working in the publishing industry had undoubtedly become a career with legitimacy, and with their dual identity as writers and editors, they had earned enough to become self-supporting. They also had some common characteristics: most of them were born in the late 19th century, mainly from Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces. Also, they all had a basic understanding of traditional culture due to the experience of being educated in private schools (*sishu* 私塾) when they were young. Most of them had also received a new type of higher education after leaving private school.

In the minds of traditional literati, literary creation was an elegant affair that should be kept away from the lure of profit. However, intellectuals who were absorbed into the commercial-based publishing industry generally accepted the reality of "selling writing for a living." In the early media engagement of the Saturday School members, financial gain certainly remained their primary objective. Almost all of the authors in Table 1 worked for multiple newspapers and were prolific writers and translators. As serialized novels in newspapers based

on commercial operations were popular among readers, the Saturday School members gained their audience through their popular fiction, and most of the publications they were responsible for sold well among Shanghai citizens. As a result, they were able to improve their living conditions by earning both a regular editorial income and a salary for novel-writing. Zhou Shoujuan, for example, managed to improve the financial situation of his family through his diligent writing. As a self-proclaimed "writing laborer," in his autobiographical novel, *In the Tent of Jiuhua*, he detailed the story of how he paid off his father's debts and improved his family's life with his writing.[29] Later, in another article, he told the story of how he got 400 yuan for selling his translation of *The Short Story Series of European and American Writers* to China Bookstore so that he could pay for his wedding.[30] Another example is Bao Tianxiao, who claimed in his memoir that he earned 80 yuan a month as a writer for *Shanghai Shibao* and 40 yuan a month as a part-time writer for *Xiaoshuolin*. With an income of 120 yuan per month, his family and personal expenses were only 50 to 60 yuan at most, which demonstrates how well off Bao was at that time.[31] Most of these industrious intellectuals were able to make a decent living by virtue of their writing career, and therefore when they wrote for *Free Talk*, payment was no longer their main consideration. These established writers used the platform of *Shenbao* to increase their popularity and promote their works, while they were free to engage in self-expression and aesthetic display. Moreover, the mutual soliciting and submission of articles between writers and editors maintained friendships in the group and consolidated the social networks they had formed.

[29] Zhou, "Jiuhua zhang li" (In the Tent of Jiuhua).
[30] Zhou, "Wushinian bimo shengya" (50 Years of Ink Career), 242.
[31] Bao, *Chuanyinglou huiyilu* (Memoirs of Chuan Ying Lou), 325.

Despite the fact that Zhou and his friends had built up a successful career in *Free Talk*, gaining popularity and an extensive readership that lasted for years, their position came to an end in 1932, albeit not without warning. In this year, some crucial events took place in China: after the September 18th Incident, the northeast of China was invaded by the Japanese army, who established a puppet regime in Jilin in 1932 and began their decade-long colonization. The national crisis stirred up nationalist sentiments and attacks on the authoritarian and corrupt KMT regime. Also in this year, the League of Left-Wing Writers formally defined itself at a meeting as a "revolutionary fighting literary group," establishing Marxism as its guiding ideology and beginning to rebuild itself from the previous attack by the KMT.[32] The left-wing writers began to interpret the Chinese social reality with the Marxist theories they had translated and internalized. These interpretations, built upon a set of new vocabulary and terminology, were soon accepted by the young students. During the revolutionary literary movement organized by the Left League, Shanghai's magazines and newspapers continued to amplify the Marxist discourse, and left-wing literature became a trend of the times symbolizing right and justice. Advocates of the new literature used Western theoretical discourse as a weapon to ruthlessly criticize what they saw as old-school popular writers and to compete for the right to speak to the readership in the media arena of Shanghai.

The trends of the times also influenced public judgment and expectations of press. Out of a sense of social responsibility, young readers gravitated towards left-wing literature, and the press accordingly adjusted their author selections to accommodate this shift in readers' tastes. On November 30, 1932, to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the founding of *Shenbao*, the

[32] Liu, "1932: Zhongguo zuoyi wenyi yundong lishi fenqi de shijian luoji" (1932: The Temporal Logic of the Historical Stages of the Chinese Left-Wing Literary Movement).

newspaper office published a manifesto, announcing their decision to reform the *Free Talk* supplement, stating that the future *Free Talk* should be "consistent with the trend of the times and the principle of massification."[33]At this time, Li Liewen, who did not belong to any party and had just returned from overseas study, was chosen by the manager Shi Liangcai 史量才 to be the new chief editor of *Free Talk*. In his foreword following the reform, he stressed that his editing policy would be one in pursuit of "progress and modernization."[34] Moreover, he was determined to draw a clear distinction between his editorship and Zhou Shoujuan's. As Li had been studying in Japan and France,[35] he was not familiar with the Shanghai literary circle. In this case, the potential market for left-wing literature and the prestige of left-wing writers led Li to first look to Lu Xun. After being introduced by Yu Dafu, he began to solicit contributions from Lu Xun and Mao Dun and with the joining of Lu and Mao, the relationship between *Free Talk* and the Left League began to take shape. Chinese scholar Zhen Haohan provided statistics on the authors (including their pen names) and the number of articles they published in *Free Talk* from 1933 to 1935, and he found that the Left League members and the writers who had a close relationship to them made the majority of contributions to *Free Talk* in this period.[36]

Table 2 Main authors in the late stage of *Free Talk*

Name	Year of Birth	Native Place	Educational Background	Media Engagement
Chen Wangdao 陳望道	1890	Zhejiang, Yiwu	Waseda University and Chuo University, Japan	*Xinqingnian* 新青年, *Taibai* 太白

[33] See "Jinhou benbao nuli de gongzuo" (The Hard Work of Our Newspaper in the Future), *Shenbao*, Nov. 30, 1932.
[34] See the Editorial Announcement of *Shenbao Free Talk*, Dec. 12, 1932.
[35] Li Liewen worked at the Commercial Press in 1921, and then went to study in Japan and France in 1926, where he obtained a degree in comparative literature from the University of Paris.
[36] According to Zhen's statistics, during this period, there are 107 authors who have written 5 or more articles for *Free Talk*, and a total of 3071 articles have been published by them. Among them, there were 73 (68%) leftists and pro-leftists, and 2,421 (78%) articles from them. See Zhen, "Zhongguo zuoyi zuojia lianmeng yu shenbao ziyoutan" (the League of Left Wing Writers and *Free Talk,* 1933-1935).

Yu Dafu 郁達夫	1896	Zhejiang, Fuyang	Tokyo Imperial University, Japan	*Dazhong wenyi* 大眾文藝, *Xiandai* 現代
Cao Yuren 曹聚仁	1900	Zhejiang, Pujiang	Zhejiang First Normal School	*Taosheng* 涛声, *Taibai* 太白, *Mangzhong* 芒種
Chen Zizhan 陳子展	1898	Hunan, Changsha	Refresher course, Dongnan University	*Dushu shenghuo* 讀書生活
Lu Xun 魯迅	1881	Zhejiang, Shaoxing	Sendai Medical Academy, Japan (dropout)	*Yusi* 雨絲, *Zhaohua* 朝花, *Yiwen* 譯文
Mao Dun 茅盾	1896	Zhejiang, Tongxiang	Foundation school, Peking University	*Xiaoshuo yuebao* 小說月報
Qu Qiubai 瞿秋白	1899	Jiangsu, Changzhou	Russian Language Institute, Peking University	*Xinqingnian* 新青年, *Xiangdao* 向導, *Rexue ribao* 熱血日報
Guo Moruo 郭沫若	1892	Sichuan, Leshan	Kyushu Imperial University, Japan	*Chuangzao ribao* 創造日報, *Jiuwang ribao* 救亡日報
Wang Renshu 王任叔	1901	Zhejiang, Fenghua	Zhejiang Fourth Normal School (dropout)	*Jiuwang ribao* 救亡日報, *Siming ribao* 四明日報
Xia Mianzun 夏丏尊	1886	Zhejiang, Shangyu	Tokyo Institute of Technology, Japan (dropout)	*Jiuwang ribao* 救亡日報
Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之	1896	Zhejiang, Shangyu	Hangzhou English Junior College	*Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌, *Shenghuo zhoukan* 生活周刊

With the joining of famous writers and young intellectuals with close ties to the Left League, *Free Talk* gradually transitioned from a platform for civic culture during Zhou's time to a front with left-wing discourse as the mainstream. However, in contrast with the early writers' ease, the mentality of those writers joining later was more nuanced. Besides Lu Xun and Mao Dun, who were invited at the beginning, the first group of intellectuals who published in *Free Talk* were some fledgling writers. Remuneration was the main factor that drove them to contribute their articles, which was also related to the social situation of Shanghai leftists at that time. After the failure of the National Revolution, the Left League was brutally suppressed by the KMT, and its membership rapidly dwindled. Most of the left-wing intellectuals were

demoralized by the repression by the authorities and looked for a way to make a living. Under heavy political pressure, some young writers were afraid to take up public employment. Unlike established writers who could earn enough money merely by writing, they often fell into distress and struggled during their stay in Shanghai. After *Free Talk*'s message of reform was published, these marginal intellectuals naturally flocked to it. Xu Maoyong 徐懋庸 (1911-1977), who was a young writer still unknown at the time, recalled that in 1932, when he came to Shanghai alone at the age of 20 without employment, he tried to submit an article to *Free Talk*, and to his surprise, Li Liewen not only published his article, but also wrote him a letter of encouragement.[37] In 1933, Ding Ling 丁玲 (1904-1986) from the Left League took the initiative to recommend the young writer Li Huiying 李輝英 (1911-1991) to *Free Talk* with the purpose of helping him to improve his living situation.[38]

Thereafter, once *Free Talk* had established its left-wing theme, this reorientation and the appeal of Lu Xun and other literary leaders attracted more left-leaning intellectuals to write for *Free Talk*. At this time, *Free Talk* became not only a channel for promoting newcomers to the Left League, but also an important front used by Left League members to disseminate propaganda, as Mao Dun wrote in his memoirs:

> *Since 1932, the Left League has been unable to publish its own publications due to various difficulties, but at that time the scope of outward activities of the League members has been expanded...Lu Xun used various pseudonyms to publish articles in Free Talk, attacking all reactionary ideas. Other left-wing writers and I often contribute to it under pseudonyms too.*[39]

[37] Xu, *Xu mao yong huiyilu* (Memoirs of Xu Maoyong), 62.
[38] Li, *Xiaopinwen yu manhua* (Essays and Comics), 77.
[39] Mao, *Zuolian huiyulu* (Memoirs of the Left League), 152.

Furthermore, from 1933 on, when the power of the Left League gradually began to grow, writers of the Left League, such as Ai Wu 艾蕪 (1904-1992), Mu Mutian 穆木天 (1900-1971), and Ouyang Shan 歐陽山 (1908-2000), also appeared in *Free Talk* regularly and their contributions were often arranged by the organization. On the whole, the main reason for left-wing intellectuals to engage with *Free Talk* was that they had to find ways to earn a living. The second is the influence of the Left League, and the contributions of some left-wing members undoubtedly carried a propaganda purpose. More importantly, the changes in the political atmosphere at that time also led left-wing intellectuals to discuss politics and criticize the government using the platform of newspapers.

2.*The styles of media practice by intellectuals in Free Talk*

After *Shenbao* pioneered the modern commercial newspaper model, the commercialized media adapted to the cultural market and transformed itself into a mass-dominated form—the press was distributed to the public, and the management of newspapers needed to rely on a wider audience. Just as the urbanization of Shanghai increased the pace of life in the city, the general public was in dire need of interesting and leisurely reading to counter fatigue and relieve stress. For the early editor and writers of *Free Talk*, meeting the cultural needs of Shanghai citizens has become the first priority.

As the *Free Talk*'s early gatekeeper, the most important point of Zhou's editorial policy was "reader first." In his eyes, the newspaper was the pastime of the citizens and a cause shared by the public. He pointed out, "editing is seemingly simple but not so simple. Editor's choice of manuscripts, on the one hand, should suit their own vision, and on the other hand, should cater to the reader's psychology. The psychology of readers is different, some love one way, some love

another."[40] From this starting point, he first paid attention to readers' feedback and tried to interact with them in a variety of ways. For example, he held an essay contest to encourage readers to try their hand at writing and submit articles, and he also published a notice for readers to choose the topics that interested them in order to launch special issues. Secondly, he sought to diversify his selection of materials to cater to his readers' different needs. He significantly reduced the literary content in *Free Talk* after 1926 and substituted it for news, travelogues, cartoons, movie reviews, and other entertaining content. In terms of genre, there were novels, plays, poems, and essays, written both in classical and vernacular Chinese. In terms of content, Zhou did not rigidly stick to either tradition or modernity; *Free Talk* sometimes published poetry in English and sometimes serialized traditional poems by the late Qing literati.

Zhou's another important editorial idea was fun and popularity. In the daily life of Shanghai citizens in the 1920s, watching movies and dancing were undoubtedly fashionable entertainment. On March 10, 1928, Zhou published a special issue on "dancing," which included the introduction of various dance halls, beautiful dancers, and the latest foreign trends.[41] For ordinary Shanghai citizens, opera was also a form of popular culture in Shanghai, and Mei Lanfang 梅蘭芳 (1894-1961) was the biggest star. During Mei's visit to Shanghai, "Mei News"[42] became an ad hoc column in *Free Talk*, which not only introduced the plays performed by Mei, but also reported on his whereabouts, banquets, friends, and other anecdotes to satisfy his fans. Through the focus of the media, Mei Lanfang became a pop culture symbol, attracting even more people to take an interest in him.

[40] Zhou, "Bianji mantan" (The Editor's Ramblings).
[41] See the special issue of *Shenbao Free Talk*, Mar. 10, 1928.
[42] See the special reports of *Shenbao Free Talk*, Apr. 14, 1920.

However, Zhou's pursuit of fashion and trends did not mean that he ignored social realities. First of all, he paid special attention to the everyday life of citizens. He regularly opened special columns in *Free Talk*, introducing issues related to the daily life of the public in an interesting way, while also discussing the modern concept of marriage, family, and women's independence through open dialogues with readers. Moreover, he also focused on publishing articles related to current affairs. In 1931, after the outbreak of the September 18th Incident, from September 25 to October 5, he wrote a series of articles under the title "Heartbreaking Words," which called on the people of the country to "take up the responsibility of saving the country with iron shoulders...to restore our territory that was taken away inch by inch!"[43] Although there were many articles in the *Free Talk* after 1931 that focused on current events that expressed the writers' patriotism and sorrow for the national tragedy, these writers always wrote from the perspective of ordinary citizens. They acted as the spokesmen of common people and were unwilling to be drawn into political and partisan disputes.

In the later period of *Free Talk*, great changes took place in Li Liewen's editorial policies. Although such changes were enacted with the same aim of attracting readers, he did not cater to them but deliberately guided their reading interests. He valued the celebrity effect of the newspaper, initially inviting some prestigious authors from the literary field to contribute, but he was equally glad to promote newcomers. His criterion was that "if a manuscript is suitable for publication, we will publish it regardless of who the author is or whether he is new or old. If the manuscript is not suitable, we will not even accept the work of our best friend."[44] With this

[43] See the Editorial Comment, *Shenbao Free Talk*, Oct. 19, 1931.
[44] See the Editorial Announcement, *Shenbao Free Talk,* Dec. 12, 1932.

policy, *Free Talk* cultivated a new group of writers, such as Yao Xueyin 姚雪垠 (1910-1999), Liu Baiyu 劉白羽 (1916-2005), and Zhou Erfu 周而復 (1914-2004).

Secondly, Li also paid attention to the function of public opinion and social criticism of the media. He consciously addressed public issues and used opinion leaders to guide intellectuals and readers to engage in open discussions in the newspapers. In over two years, he organized a series of "pen battles," all of which centered on hot topics. Moreover, participants in public debates often had disagreements or disputes over a wide range of issues, but most of them recognized the significance of public discussions as a means to exchange views and interact with the public. In contrast with Zhou's position of non-participation in politics, Li characterized *Free Talk* by calling for short essays on various topics, most of which revolved around political affairs and social issues. For example, Zhili 致立's "Talking about the Emperor"[45] was a critique of Pu Yi's accession to the throne, shedding light on the truth of Pu Yi's role as a Japanese puppet. Xu Maoyong's "Hitler and Emperor Yongzheng "[46] satirizes the manipulation of the people by the tyrants, and took these two tyrants as examples to taunt the KMT and their obscurantism.

Overall, the key points in understanding intellectuals' engagement with the press during this period lie first in the role of social networks between chief editors and authors, and also in the need for the intellectuals to balance market demand with personal values. The intellectuals associated with *Free Talk* tended to have multiple jobs in the media industry, including editing, writing, and translating, and most of them came from undesirable backgrounds and stayed in the lower reaches of the social ladder, such that maximizing their involvement in the media was their

[45] See Zhili, "Tan huangdi" (Talking about the Emperor), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jan. 21, 1934.
[46] See Xu, "Xitela yu yongzhengdi" (Hitler and Emperor Yongzheng), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Sep. 14, 1933.

only way out of poverty. Differing a lot in their educational backgrounds, political positions, and professional interests, these intellectuals were divided into different clusters when they came to *Free Talk.*

Discordant Identities: Intellectuals' Images Reflected by the Press

Once the groups of *Free Talk* writers located the regular arena to publish their work, they used the press to disseminate their literary creations, present their personal lives, and offer commentaries on social issues. Through this process, their press discourse also unknowingly completes a series of projects such as self-presentation, self-positioning, and identity construction. As Ron Scollon argues, the social construction of identity within press discourse "is a highly interdiscursive process in which identities are claimed and disputed, ratified and repudiated, displayed and masked depending on the ongoing social-interactive processes."[47] More importantly, the construction of identity is tightly bound up with language use, with the set of beliefs, ideas, and values hidden behind the language system. Since the end of the Qing Dynasty, language reform had been a primary issue in the construction of the nation-state and the drive for modernization. Accordingly, as the most popular newspaper supplement in Shanghai, *Free Talk* and its leading figures could not avoid the topic of language. The following will analyze the discussions surrounding classical Chinese (*wenyan* 文言), vernacular Chinese (*baihua* 白話), and mass-language (*dazhongyu* 大眾語) in *Free Talk* and use them as a thread to examine the two groups of intellectuals' cultural identities and the self-awareness associated with them, assembling a richer portrait of intellectuals in Republican Shanghai.

1. *Intellectuals in the Early Period: Hovering between Old and New*

[47] Scollon, *Mediated Discourse as Social Interaction*, 252.

As Leo Ou-fan Lee points out, "from Liang Qichao's 'New People' and Chen Duxiu's 'New Youth' to such prevalent compounds as 'New Tide,' 'New Literature and Art'...the notion and value of 'newness' are defined in a context of unilinear time and a unilinear sense of history that is characteristically untraditional and western."[48] In modern China, the "newness" which swept in with the wave of national revolutions and social movements, broke with any "oldness" in the name of historical progress. When a culture or language is given legitimacy by the word "new," its counterpart, the "old" culture or "old" language, is in a predictable situation. Around the May Fourth period, the new literature advocates launched the New Culture Movement and the Vernacular Movement, with the aim of sweeping away any culture considered "old" and learning from the West instead. The term "old-school literature" (*jiupai wenxue* 舊派文學) was explicitly used in Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962)'s "On the Construction of a Literary Revolution" published in 1918. In his framing, classical poetry and popular novels from the late Qing period were regarded as "old literature," in contrast to the "new literature" he advocated for. For the new-school litterateurs, the use of vernacular Chinese also became the key criterion for discerning the old from the new.

In the cultural circles of Shanghai in the 1920s, the debate between the old and the new raged on. Beginning with the reform of *Novel Monthly* (*xisoshuo yuebao* 小說月報), the new literature camp provoked a polemic against the Saturday School writers. In 1920, the government-sponsored National Language Campaign (*guoyu yundong* 國語運動) changed the language of elementary school textbooks from classical Chinese to vernacular Chinese, and the Commercial Press in Shanghai echoed this change by handing over its magazine *Novel Monthly*

[48] Leo Ou-fan Lee, "In Search of Modernity: Some Reflections on a New Mode of Consciousness in Twentieth-Century Chinese History and Literature," 111.

to Mao Dun to carry out the reform. In the first issue of *Novel Monthly* after the reform, Mao Dun announced that the time for treating literature and art as pastime had ended, and that literature should now be seen as an eternal career for life.[49] Zheng Zhenduo 鄭振鐸 (1898-1958), a member of the Literary Studies Society (*wenxue yanjiu hui* 文學研究會) like Mao Dun, also followed, saying that literature is about blood and tears, and it should embody the spirit of the times.[50] Their important reform initiatives included introducing naturalistic theories and literature, promoting the use of vernacular Chinese, and calling for the transformation of vernacular Chinese with a Europeanized grammar. Meanwhile, Mao Dun emphasized that only new literature represents science and progress, and as such, the redundant classical Chinese and the old-school literature should be eliminated.[51] It should be noted that the "oldness" that Mao Dun referred to, was the Saturday School, which dominated the cultural market in the 1920s.[52]

Compared to Mao Dun, Zhou Shoujuan shows a different attitude towards the "old" and "new." During his time as chief editor, there were often novels, poems, and essays in *Free Talk*, written both in classical and vernacular Chinese. He also noted in the editorial notice that he welcomed submissions from readers, with no restrictions on the use of classical or vernacular Chinese.[53] It is easy to see that, in contrast to Mao Dun's strong opposition to the old-school literature, Zhou and his group of writers treated classical and vernacular Chinese, old and new

[49] Mao, "Wenxue yanjiuhui xuanyan" (Manifesto of the Literary Studies Society).
[50] Zheng, "Xue he lei de wenxue" (Literature of Blood and Tears).
[51] Mao, "Xinjiu wenxue pingyi zhi pingyi" (A Review of Old and New Literature Equalization).
[52] Chen Jianhua in his book *Cong geming dao gonghe* (From Revolution to Republic) 171-205 also discusses the controversy between Zhou Shoujuan and Mao Dun in more detail and examines how this controversy relates to Saturday School's place in literary history.
[53] See the editorial notice of the first issue of the special *Novel Issue* in *Free Talk*, Jan. 9, 1921.

literature, in an inclusive manner. We can further understand his attitudes through two passages written by Zhou in *Free Talk*:

> *There are two styles of novels, the old and the new. People either admire the new or the old, and which of the two is the canon has not yet been decided. My opinion is that it is better to let those two groups stick to their own preferences, and leave the choice to the readers.*[54]
>
> *The newness of a novel does not lie in the form but in the spirit. If the spirit is new, even without the new style of punctuation and without using the word "Her" (ta, 她), it will not be treated as not new...Suppose there is a fuddy-duddy person here, and let him wear the clothes and hat of a Western doctor, can he be seen as a new character?*[55]

The new punctuation, the use of "her,"[56] and the West, these elements were put forward by Zhou as representations of the new culture, suggesting to the readers that the difference between the new and the old does not lie in the form of the language. In other words, classical Chinese can also serve as a carrier of new culture and new spirit. Faced with the question of which language to use in writing, Zhou and other Saturday School writers did not reject writing in vernacular Chinese. In fact, they had already started the practice of writing vernacular Chinese in their early periodicals even before Hu Shi advocated for it. Nevertheless, they were also unwilling to give up writing in classical Chinese, which represented the classical tradition and language habits of the majority of society, so their newspapers adopted a language strategy of co-existence, leaving the choice to the readers and the market.

The justifications set out by the Saturday School writers did not satisfy the new culture camp. Realizing that there was still a thriving market for the old-school literature, they mounted fiercer attacks on Zhou and his fellow writers. The language ideology established by the new-

[54] See Zhou's short commentary in "Free Talk of *Free Talk*," *Shenbao Free Talk*, Mar. 27, 1921
[55] Ibid., May. 22, 1921
[56] Before the May Fourth Movement, the third-person pronoun "he" (ta, 他) in Chinese could refer to men and women. In 1918, Liu Bannong firest invented the word "she" (ta, 她) to refer specifically to women, corresponding to the English word "her." However, many writers at that time, including Zhou, were reluctant to use this word, and used "yi" (伊) instead.

school litterateurs, became "important tools in excluding, stigmatizing or 'othering' individuals and groups."[57] As such, the writers of the old school were called "Shanghai slippery literati," "literary beggars," and "literary evil" amongst other insulting names. Cheng Fangwu 成仿吾 (1897-1984) called the newspaper they sponsored "a sordid periodical used to make money,"[58] with Mao Dun commenting that, "their authors are not high-minded people, and what they describe in their works is nothing but the blind life of pathetic and selfish Chinese."[59] Even the vernacular writing in Saturday School's works was considered to be an appropriation of the new literature, and Mao Dun claimed that this falsified "newness" would undermine the authority of the real "newness"—"the gradual use of the vernacular Chinese in Saturday-style novels...This could be considered an insult added to the new cultural movement."[60] In another commentary by Mao Dun, he directly attacked the leading figure, Zhou Shoujuan, saying that his works could only get "the attention of petty citizens (*xiaoshimin* 小市民) who read novels as a pastime," and went on to point out that his article in *Free Talk* "spoke a few lines of foul classical language," which was "the best trick of literary beggars."[61]

The "petty citizens" Mao Dun mentioned is a title worthy of our attention. In contemporary China, the definition of "citizen" is rather vague and broad, referring to the local people who live in the city. However, in the context of 1920s Shanghai, who did Mao Dun mean by "petty citizens?" As Historian Lu Hanchao explains, "petty citizens" was a blanket term used to refer to "city or town people who were of the middle or lower-middle social ranks" in a

[57] Johnson et al, *Language Ideologies and Media Discourse*, 184.
[58] Cheng, "Qilu" (Branch Road).
[59] Mao, "Ziranzhuyi yu Zhongguo xiandai xiaoshuo" (Naturalism and the Modern Chinese Novel).
[60] Mao, "Baihuawen yu zuoezhe" (The Vernacular and the Evil-doers).
[61] Mao, "Zhe ye yougong yu shidao me?" (Is This Also Meritorious to the Way of the World?).

condescending manner.[62] Lu argued that the major constituents of "petty citizens" were the various types of employees (*zhiyuan* 職員) and industrial workers living in Shanghai, and that by the 1930s, employees and their family members alone accounted for 40% of the city's total population. Mao Dun was right to a certain extent, for popular fiction as a new form of traditional literature was still prevalent in the narrow alleys of Shanghai. Zhou also admitted that the majority of his readers were working people in big cities, and that the purpose of his newspapers and the literature he wrote was to serve them. Unlike the grand narratives of literature constructed by the advocates of new literature, the Saturday School members did not like high-profile revolutionary claims. Instead, they preferred to dedicate the press to their readers as a pastime, and help them to solve the practical problems.

In between revolutions and wars, people need to return to their daily lives. However, after the 1911 Revolution, the old ethics remained relatively unchallenged in rural areas, while new problems arose in the process of urbanization. For example, in his discussion of the transformation of villagers into citizens, Fan Boqun 範伯群 mentioned that many men who came from the rural areas to work in Shanghai chose to take over their wives from their hometowns once they obtained stable employment.[63] This precipitated a shift away from large families to nuclear families, giving rise to new problems concerning clan, love, and marriage. At this time, new family ethics and new marriage outlooks were required for the new way of life. Zhou and the members of Saturday School were keenly aware of these issues concerning the livelihood of the public and tried to convey what they considered to be new morals and ethics, as well as

[62] Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century*, 61-63.
[63] Fan, "Shimin dazhong wenxue: 'xiangmin shiminhua' xingxiang qimeng jiaokeshu" (Popular Literature of the Citizens: A Textbook for the Enlightenment of 'Citizenship of the Villagers'), 34.

spreading new knowledge and new ways of living in their publications, a notable case being the *Family Issue* of *Free Talk*.

The *Family Issue* was a weekly forum for discussing family issues by Saturday School members. In this column, they reinterpreted the definition of family and sought new ways to build a modern family. The writers rallied at the corruption of the old family, believing that superstitions and customs such as inheritance, concubinage, early marriage, and the cult of chastity should all be abolished. But rather than simply overturning traditional family values, they strived to find a blend of the traditional and the new family. According to Zhang Shewo, "people who specialize in destruction tend to give opponents a matter for derision; people who hold ideas that are too new also make others appalled, which will lead to resistance to reform."[64] Therefore, he believed that the only way to change the stereotyped concept of family is to start with each individual's action and use their own example to gradually influence others. Moreover, the special issue also introduced the necessary common sense and practical knowledge for building a modern family, such as home decoration, household cleaning, and cooking knowhow.

While they advocated marital autonomy and improved lifestyles, they were reluctant to give up all the traditional ethics. Some of their articles emphasized the value of traditions. For example, while favoring free marriage, some authors argued that parents could supervise young people so as to ensure they do not choose the wrong mate due to superficial experiences.[65] Also, some authors believed that traditional values should not be completely abandoned, such as "filial piety" or women's role as good wives and kind mothers in the family.[66] These authors took a

[64] Zhang, "Wu zhi gaige jiating fa" (My Approach to Reform the Family) *Shenbao Free Talk*, Aug. 14, 1921.
[65] Xunzai, "Ziyou jiehun fumu ying chu jiancha diwei" (Parents Should Be in a Position of Supervision in Free Marriage), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jul. 23, 1922.
[66] Fu, "Lun funü chujia ying ju zhi daode" (On the Morality Women Should Have in the Family). *Shenbao Free Talk*, Sep. 11, 1921.

stand on the old culture and used their discourse to reconcile traditional Chinese values with radical thoughts at that time. In their view, family is the place where the individual belongs. It is also the core element of social organization that determines the future of the nation. From this perspective, the construction of each nuclear family contributes to the construction of an ideal civil society.

While the new literature advocates struggled with the division between the old and the new, the members of the Saturday School were not too distressed by it. For them, enjoying modern life does not mean rejecting traditional culture, as the old and the new do not need to stand at opposite ends. For example, their urban mentality and grasp of fashion trends were extremely new. Many of the newspapers and magazines they edited followed the fashion trends of Republican Shanghai from layout to content, such as travel, dancing, and movie watching. They not only wrote popular novels on various subjects and translated literary theories, but also spared no effort to promote Hollywood movies and write scripts for film companies. Meanwhile, they also inherited traditional aesthetic and lyrical traditions. Due to their educational backgrounds in private and new-style schools, most of them maintained the traditional literati's love of poetry, horticulture, and antique collection—Zhou Shoujuan loved to grow flowers and potted plants, Cheng Xiaoqing collected famous paintings and calligraphy, and Chen Diexian was obsessed with classical poetry and composition. In their daily gatherings and interactions, what we see is an elegant, leisurely, and self-contained life, in which a consistent attitude towards life and an open-minded approach to the world is held, consciously adapting to various conflicts in their construction of identity.

Although the value judgments of the Saturday School members remained unchanged, in the face of the increasing exclusivity of vernacular Chinese and new literature, Zhou Shoujuan

had to make concessions under the pressure of reform, and classical Chinese was inevitably marginalized in *Free Talk*. Taking old-style poetry as an example, since its founding in 1911, *Free Talk* published old-style poems written in classical Chinese every day, later including vernacular works in 1921. However, by 1928, *Free Talk* made it clear that it no longer welcomed old-style poems as contributions. In the following years, the space allotted to old-style poems in *Free Talk* continued to shrink and by 1930, only one old-style poem by Yang Xingfo 楊杏佛 (1893-1933) was published in December.[67] The marginalization of classical Chinese and the monopoly established by the new-school litterateurs over the use of the vernacular Chinese reveal their divergence with Saturday School members. For new-school litterateurs such as Mao Dun and Zheng Zhenduo, their new identities entailed a revolutionary agenda to transform the old culture as a whole. They also seemed to uphold a condescending posture and believed that the general public was ignorant and therefore needed to be transformed by intellectuals. The tense confrontation between new litterateurs and Saturday School members reinforced the cultural identity of the latter and made them clearly realize their relationship with their audience: they used press discourse and personal experience to serve them, and in the process, achieved unexpected effects of subtle enlightenment.

2. Intellectuals in the Late Period: Allies of the Masses

New literature advocates gradually assumed the leadership of Shanghai's cultural circles in the late 1920s. As the national crisis intensified, these new intellectuals with a historical-evolutionary viewpoint increasingly showed their moral superiority, making up the major authors of *Free talk* in the late period. In Shanghai in the 1930s, the term "masses" (*dazhong* 大眾) was

[67] Hua, "Xinjiu shixue lunzheng yu ziyoutan gaiban" (Old and New Poetics Debate and the Reformation of *Free Talk*), 79.

associated with the new ideological discourse during the cultural and literary movements, becoming a frequently used term with legitimacy. Intellectuals from the League of Left-Wing Writers made the so-called "massification of literature and art" (*dazhonghua wenyi* 大眾化文藝) one of their key aims. Their purpose behind this campaign was to inspire and awaken Chinese people by creating new genres of literature, so that all classes could be mobilized in the revolution. For these intellectuals, achieving literary massification inevitably entailed the massification of language, and the vernacular Chinese being the first target of revaluation.

Although the influence of the vernacular Chinese in social life gradually expanded following the New Culture Movement, some critics argued that vernacular Chinese still retained many of the undesirable influences of the eight-legged (*bagu* 八股) style, and even in its modified colloquial form it was not sufficiently plain. Also, the vernacular language's borrowing of Europeanized syntax and vocabulary alienated it from the general public; this half-classical/half-vernacular language was even more opaque than its classical counterpart. The left-wing intellectuals, led by Qu Quibai and Xia Mianzun, argued that classical Chinese deprived the masses of the ability to speak, and that vernacular Chinese since the May Fourth period was also out of touch with the masses as it did not assimilate and incorporate the oral language and dialects of the common people. From their Marxist view of history, they accused vernacular Chinese of being a "hybrid pseudo-vernacular" used only by a minority of people such as the "new bourgeoisie" and the "compradors" (*maiban* 買辦).[68] At the same time, vernacular Chinese could not satisfy the cultural conservatives either. The New Life Movement inaugurated by Chiang Kai-Shek 蔣介石 with the goal of reviving native morality and Confucianism had placed

[68] Mentioned by Jiawei in "Guanyu pipan he renshi" (About Criticism and Awareness).

vernacular Chinese in an even more awkward position. In this context, Wang Maozu 汪懋祖 (1891-1949)[69] took the lead to advocate for a revival movement of classical Chinese, which directly prompted the discussion of the "mass-language."

In fact, the discourse that has developed around the mass-language was an orchestrated plan proposed by *Free Talk* writers. Cao Juren recalled that the language debate was initiated by Chen Zizhan, Xia Mianzun, Chen Wangdao and others after a discussion in a small restaurant in Shanghai, where they proposed a new concept, namely, the mass-language, and discussed how it could be used to combat classical Chinese and the vernacular Chinese.[70] With the approval of the chief editor,[71] they decided to promote the concept with ongoing articles in *Free Talk*. This pre-planned public debate, which began in *Free Talk* and involved dozens of other Shanghai newspapers, soon achieved its desired effects, and drowned out calls for a revival of classical Chinese. Subsequently, the mass-language became the focus of press discourse in left-wing circles. So, what exactly was the "mass-language"? The leaders of this movement, Chen Zizhan and Chen Wangdao, believed that the mass-language, in form, should be a language that the masses can speak, understand, read, and write.[72] In terms of content, Tao Xingzhi claimed that the mass-language should be a discourse representing the progressive consciousness of the masses.[73] Another writer, signed as Wenxin 聞心, also shared this view, arguing that the mass-

[69] He published "Jinxi wenyan yu jiangzhi dujing" (Forbidding the Study of Literary Language and Forcing the Reading of Classics) on May 4, 1934 in *Shidai Gonglun*, which became the trigger for the debate between classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese.
[70] Cao, *Wo he wo de shijie* (Me and My World), 464.
[71] Due to pressure from the KMT regime, the chief editor of *Free Talk* in the second half of 1934 was forced to change from Li Liewen to Zhang Zisheng, but Zhang Zisheng continued the editorial policy of Li and maintain *Free Talk* as a front for left-wing intellectuals, so we still see 1932-1934 as a stable period.
[72] See Chen Zizhan's "Wenyan-Baihua-Dazhongyu," *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jun. 18, 1934. and Chen Wangdao's "Guanyu dazhongyu wenxue de jianshe" (About the Construction of the Mass-language Literature), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jun. 19, 1934.
[73] Tao, "Dazhongyuwen yundong zhilu" (The Road To the Mass-Language Movement), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jul. 4, 1934.

language must abandon the past, including old dictions, old writing styles and old thoughts. Only the language that best represents the needs and emotions of the masses can become the mass-language, as Wenxin wrote, "the mass-language, on the one hand, aims to destroy the stereotyped forms of language and social consciousness, and on the other hand, spread progressive consciousness among the masses with new tools."[74]

These arguments concerning the mass-language seemed to be consistent with the requirements of the "massification of literature," but in fact, the concept itself was ambiguous and full of paradoxes, making it difficult to be applied in real life. For the mass-language, the first issue is—who does the "mass" in this term refer to? Unfortunately, it was difficult to clearly discern the identity of the "masses" and there was no consensus, even amongst the left-wing intellectuals. For example, Qu Qiubai thought the "masses" were the proletariat in big cities and modern factories, whereas Yang Hansheng 陽翰笙 (1902-1993) argued the concept of the "masses" had to encompass all workers and peasants from different areas.[75] A further issue was that—the mass consciousness that intellectuals want the mass-language to reflect was not a unified concept. Wang Renshu realized this and pointed out:

> *The people who kneel before the feudal monarch and shout long live can be certainly called the masses; the people who demand to overthrow or uphold in a revolutionary square may also be called the masses...So, what kind of masses will we take as the basis? The chasm between the consciousness of backward masses and advanced masses is almost as far as a century.*[76]

[74] Wenxin, "Dazhongyu yundong de jige wenti" (Several Issues of the Mass-Language Movement).
[75] Xiao, "Sanshiniandai wenxue dazhonghua yundong de yuyan jiangou he wenti jiangou" (The Construction of Language and Genre in the 'massification of Literature' Movement of the 1930s), 194.
[76] Wang, "Guanyu dazhongyu wenxue di jianshe" (About the Construction of the Mass-language Literature), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jul 3, 1934.

His argument implied that there were two opposite types of masses, one was the advancing masses and the other was the backward masses, which brings us to another question—how to define the "advanced" masses and build a mass-language that only represents the advanced portion of the masses? Tao Xingzhi proposed two approaches: one was for intellectuals to teach the purified and filtered phonetic symbols to the masses, so that they could create a mass-language based on their own spoken language, and the other was for intellectuals to participate in the life of the masses and therefore create a mass-language for them.[77] However, as a matter of fact, the majority of the Chinese population was largely semi-literate and illiterate at the beginning of the 20th century.[78] As such, it is almost impossible for them to create a written language based on the guidance of a few intellectuals. Although Tao emphasized the role of intellectuals, at the time, the languages intellectuals used were mainly classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese that were difficult for the masses to understand, so the intellectuals can hardly construct an ideal language to meet the needs of the masses based on their existing experience.

Due to the contradictions of mass-language itself, the discussion surrounding it died down after only a few months without any actual linguistic results or lasting impact. However, examining the debate in its historical context illuminates an important change in Chinese intellectuals' self-awareness.[79] In the 1930s, the Chinese intelligentsia lost confidence in their

[77] Tao, "Dazhongyuwen yundong zhilu" (The Road To the Mass-Language Movement), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jul. 4, 1934.

[78] According to statistics, in 1936, there were 3264 secondary schools with a total of 627,246 enrolled students, 42 universities and 30 colleges with a total of 29,416 enrolled students in China. In general, the foundation of basic education and higher education in China was still quite weak, and illiterate and semi-literate people were the majority in the vast rural areas. See *Zhonghua minguo dangan ziliao huibian* (Compilation of archival materials of the Republic of China), 519.

[79] Chinese scholar Tang Xiaobing also analyzed this issue and further discussed how the intellectuals' discovery of the masses in the mass-language movement reflects a populist tendency to sanctify the masses, and he believed

own abilities and their sense of subjectivity also started to be eroded away. Accompanying the intellectuals' self-deprecation was the recognition, even the worship, of the power of the masses. The formation of these sentiments is closely related to the historical context of that time. With the breakdown of the First United Front and the White Terror in 1927, those Chinese intellectuals who had hoped to unite together in the struggle for national awakening abandoned their earlier beliefs. As Vera Schwarcz described, "each, for a while, experienced history as a personal defeat; each viewed his or her own fears as a sign of individual weakness exacerbated by the class foibles of the petty bourgeoisie."[80] Back to the previous section on the living situation of left-wing intellectuals, sorrow and bitterness were indeed the feelings most acutely felt by such individuals at the time, and thus their press discourse was mostly filled with laments for the status quo and grievances for themselves. In "Our Way Out," the author enumerated the anguishes of young people who cannot find their way out in a time of economic depression, foreign aggression, and numerous evildoers.[81] "To Shanghai" described how the author felt the horror of the rural depression and wept bitterly as farmers plunged into hunger and poverty.[82] In addition to lamenting about their hometown, many authors also pointed out the evils of the city: the suffering of Shanghai's underclass was ignored, and they painfully questioned readers whether they notice "the beggars in the streets, the unemployed workers, the helpless prostitutes."[83] Overall, the reflection on the May Fourth enlightenment and the loss of political independence dulled the previous aura of intellectuals. In the meantime, the intensifying national

that the concept of the "masses" holds the revolutionary fervor and psychological comfort of the intellectuals. See his book Xiandai Zhongguo de gonggong yulun (Public Opinion in Modern China), 273-274.

[80] Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment*, 198.

[81] Fuer, "Women de chulu" (Our Way Out), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Feb. 24, 1933.

[82] Zhang, "Dao Shanghai qu" (To Shanghai), *Shenbao Free Talk,* Apr. 15, 1933.

[83] Shu, "Jiubai jiushijiu ge" (Nine hundred and ninety-nine), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Feb. 21, 1933.

crisis and political pressure led the defenseless intellectuals to doubt their own value, so they began to rethink their relationship with the masses.

In the discussion of mass-language, it is interesting to note how the changing self-awareness of the intellectuals reflects the ambiguity of their self-positioning. On the basis of self-depreciation, intellectuals identified with the power of the masses and even wanted to rely on this power to some extent. However, in reality, the masses were less educated and less cultured. In light of this situation, their psychological treatment of the masses presented different facets: some intellectuals adhered to their previous attitude, believing that the masses still needed elite intellectuals to guide and enlighten them. Nevertheless, those who emphasized the leadership of intellectuals did not ignore the significance of the masses. In view of the differences between the intellectual class and the masses, the intellectuals are encouraged to "go to people" (*dao minjian qu* 到民間去) before they took on their tasks. As Chen Zizhan wrote in his article on the mass-language and poetry, "only by sympathizing with the masses, understanding the masses, joining in with the masses...gaining the awareness of the masses and learning the language of the masses, can we create poetry in the mass-language."[84] The intellectuals believed that only by incorporating intellectuals into the workers and peasants could real mass-language literature be produced.

The other approach to the masses insisted on their inherent power, ignoring the role of intellectuals, and even blaming them for monopolizing culture and knowledge at their expense. On more than one occasion, some radical leftists demanded that groups including intellectuals be held accountable for the ignorance of the masses, arguing that the intellectuals "have used feudal

[84] Chen, "Dazhongyu yu shige" (The Mass-Language and Poetry).

Chinese characters to consolidate their privileges and to implement a policy of fooling the people…so that the masses are forever confined to the abyss of ignorance, darkness, and barbarism."[85] In the discussion of mass-language, some intellectuals positioned themselves as objects of enlightenment. They insisted that as long as the masses existed, the mass-language itself would exist, and that the masses, even if they were ignorant, cannot stop talking and what they say can be considered mass-language.[86] The intellectuals who blamed the Chinese characters for the difficulties faced by the masses in accessing the progressive culture, therefore, proposed a solution for the development of mass-language: abolish Chinese characters and carry out linguistic reform through the form of Latinized alphabet to allow the masses to create a new Chinese language based on their oral speech.

In the later stage of the discussions on the mass-language, the left-wing intellectuals mostly focused on describing an idealized mass-language and imagining its potential power for social change, and the masses in the mass-language were entrusted with the mission of saving the nation. As Hanbai 寒白 described in the article:

> *In China's economically deformed society, there is a great need for a common language—dazhongyu. It can link the consciousness of all the people of China closely, so that people with low literacy standards can reap the fruits of the new culture; so that countless millions of illiterate people can easily learn a universal wisdom, and then all of them work hand in hand on a common front to build the paradise they can live in.*[87]

[85] Ye, "Yige ladinghua lunzhe duiyu hanzi baiwu zhuyizhe de bochi" (A Latinizationist's Refutation of Chinese Character Worshipers).
[86] Ren, "Dazhongyu zai naer?" (Where is the Mass-Language?).
[87] Hanbai, "Dazhongyu de chansheng he jianshe" (The Creation and Construction of the Mass-Language). *Shenbao Tanyan*, Jul. 3, 1934.

Upon further reflection, it is apparent that this idealized image of the "masses" and "mass-language" was closely related to the Marxist discourse that were popular in 1930s. In the historical picture painted by Marxists, the masses of people and the classes they made up were the true and ultimate driving force in history. Accordingly, the left-wing intellectuals, who had absorbed the Marxist theory, regarded classical Chinese as a product of feudalism and vernacular Chinese as a tool of the bourgeoisie, while eagerly awaiting the arrival of a new language for the proletariat—the mass-language. For the left-wing intellectuals, the mass-language represented the direction of historical progress and therefore it must be inherently superior. However, leaving aside the question of whether it corresponded to the reality of Chinese society, this mode of analytical discourse often reflects a holistic character from its logic, exposing itself to the danger of falling into moral idealism.

The public discussion on the mass-language signaled a shift in the position of intellectuals who sought to change themselves to fit with the masses, ultimately blurring or even misplacing their own cultural identity. Considering the context of a gloomy and dangerous social situation, perhaps the organizational strength of the Left League also played a key role. The Left League was founded under the direction of the CCP's Cultural Working Committee. For the league's radical members, the value of literature lay not in its aesthetic character, but in its capacity to function as propaganda. Although there were still many intellectuals who did not abandon their hope for enlightenment, it is undeniable that the focus of the intellectuals in the 1930s shifted away from enlightenment towards mobilization, especially for those in the Left League, who played roles more akin to propagandists and activists. While this was certainly related to the survival of a political party at the time, the urgency of mobilization also, in a certain sense, turned *Free Talk*, a cultural platform for "petty citizens," into a space for

ideological work and sociocultural criticism. The mass-language campaign led by the left-wing intellectuals of *Free Talk*, as a hastily launched product, started with an inspiring aim, namely the call for equality and justice, but the analytical discourse of this discussion is often restrained by ideological frameworks, therefore lacked a rigorous examination, and yielded no lasting impacts.

Combined Effects: the Organic Bond between Intellectuals and the Press

Having identified the intellectuals' media practices and press discourse, the interactions and connections between the intellectuals and the press in the 1930s can be readily recognized. On the one hand, intellectuals were the main group building, developing, and promoting the press, and it is their identification with and dedication to their profession that created the prosperity of Shanghai's publishing industry and cultural market. On the other hand, the dual role of intellectuals as readers and authors enabled them to forge deep ties with the city and society in which they live. As such, they could quickly respond to the market and update their writing style accordingly. The following will detail this organic bond between intellectuals and the press by exploring some individual cases and addressing the importance of this bond in a modern society.

1. *The Dual Role of Lu Xun in Free Talk*

Marshall McLuhan's research on mass media at the end of the last century illustrated the fundamental impact that new forms of communication have on the way in which humans perceive and express themselves. As a print medium, newspapers offered people a new perspective on the outside world. McLuhan emphasized that "the press repeats the excitement we have in using our wits, and by using our wits we can translate the outer world into the fabric of

our own beings."[88] Likewise, the daily newspapers were an important medium through which Shanghai's intellectuals could learn about their era and society. They received ever-changing news and information quicker than ever before. More importantly, in the dual role of reader and author, they also used their writing to reflect their perceptions of society and the city, while engaging in real-time dialogues with the public. Like many other intellectuals, for Lu Xun, *Free Talk*'s star writer, the Shanghai press played a notable role in the second half of his life. In 1927, Lu Xun gave up his teaching position in Guangzhou and moved to Shanghai, where he initially lectured and taught part-time in colleges. However, soon afterwards, the authorities secretly banned his lectures and the distribution of his works.[89] Thus, Lu Xun had to turn to Shanghai press to sell his articles for a living. Assuming the role as a regular contributor to *Free Talk* was a major change for Lu Xun. Previously, Lu Xun had mostly written in his peer newspapers, targeting a small group of readers and professionals, and his move to *Free Talk* in 1933 allowed him to enter the public space to speak directly to the public on social and cultural issues. To a certain extent, writing for the press became his only means of survival, and it helped him to create a unique space for discourse and a legitimate front for struggle. In addition to his authorship, he was also a devoted reader of Shanghai's newspapers; reading was an important activity in his life. During the period when he lived in Shanghai, he spent most of his time in his apartment, reading and clipping newspapers. He read all kinds of publications ranging from Shanghai's commercial newspapers to the government-run newspapers. For Lu Xun, reading newspapers was one of the most effective ways to get a glimpse of society and consume news about current events, as he once wrote: "not counting what I have heard and saw, just reading the

[88] McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 211.
[89] For more details, see Lin, "Lu xun de zuihou shinian (1927-1936)" (The Last Decade of Lu Xun, 1927-1936), 128-134.

newspaper, I can see how much injustice there is in society and how many grievances people have."[90] From then on, the social conditions reflected by the press penetrated Lu Xun's vision, prompting him to pay attention to the citizens and their daily life in Shanghai.

The dual role of reader and author undoubtedly shows the close connection between Lu Xun and the press, and this connection also influenced Lu Xun's writing and expression. With regard to the author's role, on the one hand, the unique communication and publication methods of newspapers required authors to shorten their writing time and focus more on hot topics. On the other hand, newspaper supplements' space constraints required authors to break away from their original writing style and ensure their articles were short and concise. In this context, *zawen* (miscellaneous essays 雜文) became the most suitable genre for newspaper supplements. During the year he spent writing for *Free Talk*, Lu Xun's published articles mainly took the form of *zawen*. From January 30, 1933, to September 1934, he published 141 *zawen*, most of which were between five hundred and eight hundred words, under a total of 38 pseudonyms.[91] The experience of writing for *Free Talk* allowed Lu Xun to develop and perfect his writing style. As he described, "there is no mystery of the universe or the true meaning of life in *zawen*. I have written down what I have encountered, what I have thought, and what I have said, no matter how shallow or radical it is."[92] For Lu Xun, the genre of *zawen* no longer focus solely on grand history or esoteric philosophy; instead, it was firmly grounded in reality, confronting the reader with the author's observations and reflections in urban life. The "miscellaneous" nature of *zawen*

[90] Lu Xun, "Shigu Sanmei", *Shenbao Monthly*, Nov. 15, 1933.
[91] There are various accounts of the number of pseudonyms used by Lu Xun in *Free Talk*, this thesis mainly refers to Xue Suizhi's statistics in "Lu Xun and *Free Talk*" in *Lu xun shengping shiliao huibian diwuji xiajuan* (Compilation of historical materials on the life of Lu Xun), 593.
[92] Lu Xun, "Hugaiji Xubian: Introduction" 華蓋集續編·小引 in *Lu xun quanji* (The Complete Works of Lu Xun), vol 3, 183.

meant that various topics could be discussed, resulting in more topics entering the realm of public discussion. Moreover, the synchronicity of *zawen* allowed Lu Xun to interact directly with social life and public issues. He could write short comments of a few hundred words to respond quickly to social phenomena and his detractors.

In terms of the reader's role, the news and information that Lu Xun obtained from the media directly provided resources for his writing. A considerable number of his articles published in *Free Talk* quoted from news reports and newsletters of the time. Some other articles, while not directly naming specific newspapers or news headlines, were also responses to or commentaries on topics of public interest. One typical example is "Reminiscent of the Past on the Double Tenth Day,"[93] which begins with Lu Xun stating that the method of writing for the essay is "waste utilization," with the main body of the essay consisting of 62 clips from various Shanghai newspapers published between October 3 and 10, 1930. Although these extracts are arranged seemingly at random, they ironically reveal the two opposite lives of the powerful and the disadvantaged in Shanghai in 1930. Another essay, "Strategic Relations" opens with an editorial from *Jiuguo Ribao* 救國日報.[94] The article satirizes the fact that the government was using strategic relations as an excuse to whitewash its incompetence. It can be seen that through the selective quotations and secondary processing of the news texts, Lu Xun's essay not only

[93] This article was written on October 1, 1931. The provisional Senate of the Republic of China in 1912 decided to take October 10 as the National Day, which is also called Double Tenth Day. See Lu, "Shuangshi huaigu" (Reminiscent of the Past on the Double Tenth Day) in *Lu xun quanji* (The Complete Works of Lu Xun), vol 5. This article was not able to publish in *Shenbao* before it was included in Lu's book.

[94] "Zhanlüe guanxi" (Strategic Relations) was written on January 3, 1933, when the Japanese army captured Shanhaiguan, and Beiping was under serious threat. The KMT were prepared to abandon Beiping and move the antiquities south, so they advocated the use of force to suppress the masses who opposed this. The news report quoted in the article see the *Jiuguo Ribao's* editorial "Wei qianyi gugong guwu gao zhengfu" (Informing the Government for the Relocation of the Forbidden City Antiquities), Feb. 6, 1933.

reflects the timeliness of the news, but were also imbued with the argumentative and interactive nature that news lacked.

Moreover, writing for the press radically affected the way authors expressed themselves. In Shanghai in the 1930s, the KMT continued its authoritarian regime, exerting control over the cultural field by censoring newspapers. Faced with draconian restrictions, writers had to devise a way to circumvent these constraints to publish their work and reach their readers. Against this backdrop, the writers began to use a variety of expressive and verbal techniques, such as irony, allusion, insinuation, analogy, and metaphor to work within the confines of the press restrictions. They would not directly point out their arguments in their essays, but rather, give the readers suggestive inspirations, allowing them to draw their own conclusions from their reflections and associations. The semantic uncertainty that results from this roundabout way of expression allowed the authors to protect themselves from the censors and still achieving their critical purposes. For example, in his article "Modern History," Lu Xun describes two kinds of juggling in daily life, and went on to point out that both tricks aimed to cheat the spectators out of money, and the spectators remain indifferent even if they are cheated. On the surface, the scenes described appear to have nothing to do with the title, but Lu Xun's last sentence pretends to be a dawning realization when he writes, "only here did I remember that I had written the wrong title, which really became something half-dead."[95] Lu Xun uses juggling as a metaphor for modern Chinese history: the rulers are always deceiving and fooling the people, and the people are always desensitized, and thus, the history of Chinese society is a process of constantly repeating the juggling act of deceiving and being deceived.

[95] Lu Xun, "Xiandaishi" (Modern History), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Apr. 8, 1933.

In the process of establishing a connection with the press, Lu Xun also brought together his identities of reader and author to examine the press and the cultural industry. He sometimes escaped from within the press to become a critic of the medium itself, exposing the press's vices and drawbacks. On March 8, 1935, Ruan Lingyu 阮玲玉 (1910-1935), a famous movie star, committed suicide because she could no longer stand the pressure of public opinion, leaving behind a suicide note saying that "rumor is dreadful" (*renyankewei* 人言可畏). Lu Xun wrote an article[96] using this quote to criticize the media for failing to play a supervisory role in society; instead, the media fabricated news and exaggerated facts to drive sales. Lu Xun argued that, despite the press's eagerness to absolve itself of responsibility, Ruan's death reflected the collusion between journalists and public authorities. Moreover, the power of the press discourse far exceeded that of any individual, and due to the actions of the media, women often became victims of lies and gossips. In another article, "The Case of Mrs. Qin Lizhai,"[97] Lu Xun criticized the media for its stigmatization of the weak in society, saying that those who blame individuals for committing suicide deliberately ignored the social mechanisms underpinning the incident and were actually accomplices. The suicides of both celebrities and ordinary people were alarming to Lu Xun and prompted him to consider the unequal power relations inherent in the news and the oppression suffered by those disadvantaged.

Being among the daily goings-on in Shanghai's alleyways, Lu Xun penetrated his perceptual nerves into every corner of social life through his reading and writing. At the same time, the press also shaped Lu Xun's adoption of diverse writing topics and techniques. Through the critical and timely nature of his essays, he quickly reacted to current events and received

[96] Lu Xun, "Renyan kewei" (Rumor is dreadful), *Taibai*, May 20, 1935.
[97] Lu Xun, "Lun Qin li zhai furen shi" (The Case of Mrs. Qin Lizhai), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Jun. 1, 1934.

echoes from society. The symbiotic relationship between the modern press and Lu Xun allowed him to simultaneously occupy the positions as a professional writer and an urban intellectual, a situation that was also reflected to varying degrees in other *Free Talk* writers of the time, such as Qu Qubai, Mao Dun, and Tang Tao. For the press, the group of regular contributing writers, especially intellectuals with considerable reader appeal, were the basis of its existence and the source of its influence. For intellectuals, the press provided them not only with a means of survival, but also with a basic channel through which they could gain discourse power and access to the public sphere. Thus, an organic bond formed between the press and intellectuals, the effects of which were played out in a larger public space.

2. *Free Talk as a Public Forum and Public Stage*

The press, as a discursive platform for public discussion, is naturally one of the key mechanisms of the public sphere. According to Habermas, the public sphere is "a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed."[98] He went on to explain that the public sphere is open to all people to assemble, and if private individuals come together to engage in discussions on issues of common interest, they become a public body. When the public body reaches a large size, it requires "specific means for transmitting information and influencing those who receive it," and "newspapers and magazines, radio and television are the media of the public sphere."[99] It is worth noting that the public sphere as discussed by Habermas is abstracted from European history and based on the social situation in England and France in the 17th and 18th centuries. As a complex theoretical concept, we need not only to grasp its historical connotation and structural features, but also to pay attention to its

[98] Habermas, "The Public Sphere: An Encyclopedia Article," 49.
[99] Ibid.

limitations when applied in the Chinese context. In Xu Jilin's view, the Chinese public sphere "has nothing to do with civil society, but is mainly related to the political themes of the construction of the nation-state and social change."[100] Therefore, he suggests that:

> *From the very beginning, the Chinese public sphere was not dominated by bourgeois individuals, but by groups of scholar-officials or intellectuals, skipping the transitional stage of the European literary public sphere and directly taking political content as the starting point for its construction. The institutions of public space were not cafes, bars, or salons, but newspapers, societies, and schools.*[101]

However, given that the openness, publicness, and criticality of Habermas's public sphere are the same values sought by modern Chinese media workers, we can identify several key features of the public sphere in the rise of the Chinese press and the role assumed by intellectuals. As modern press, newspapers since the late Qing Dynasty have performed the functions of expressing public opinion, criticizing current affairs, and promoting social progress. It was through newspapers that modern intellectuals sought to construct a public spere concerned with public interests and social issues.

According to Habermas's definition of the public sphere, there are some apparent similarities with the modern Shanghai press. First, the group of writers in *Free Talk*'s two periods included most of the intellectuals in Shanghai, and the gathering of writers from different intellectual backgrounds and public stances made open and rational discussion in *Free Talk* possible. Second, both chief editors of *Free Talk* were aware of the public space opened up by the media, and they tried to construct this virtual space for the public through their own efforts. As the name of *Free Talk* suggests, there are no set parameters for what is to be discussed, which

[100] See Xu's introduction for *Zhishifenzi de neizhan* (The Civil War of Intellectuals), 9.
[101] Ibid.

led to the inclusion of diverse genres and content. Zhou Shoujuan intended to make *Free Talk* a "public forum" for the citizens of Shanghai, setting up special themes from time to time to solicit articles and publish special issues around them, covering various areas of social life, such as the *Love*, *Medicine*, *Women*, and *Travel Issues*. On these topics, contributing readers and authors express their own opinions through their articles and exchanged ideas with others based on their experiences, implicitly shaping the public consensus through their writing. After 1932, Li Liewen also likened *Free Talk* to a sort of "public stage," saying in his statement as a chief editor that "*Free Talk* can be treated as a 'stage' of freedom. On this stage, we can 'perform' freely. That is the free 'talk'."[102] The role as a public forum was further amplified in the later *Free Talk* led by Li. Between 1932 and 1934, more than thirty critical debates took place in its pages, such as the debate on "children's education," "the liberation of words," "criticism and invective," "art theory," "satire and humor," "back to the countryside," "form and heritage of art," and "literature and life" amongst others.

Whether it is a forum or a stage, *Free Talk*, as a mass medium, undoubtedly played the role of an intermediary to facilitate the gathering of private individuals from different groups. Simultaneously, the close relationship of intellectuals and the media shaped an open space for public discussion. In principle, every author and reader had the opportunity to enter this forum and participate in the discussion of public topics. As Habermas emphasized, the public sphere is above all a forum in which "the private people, come together to form a public, readied themselves to compel public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion."[103] Habermas argued that the public sphere is independent of political constructs, and the public opinion it

[102] See the Editorial Announcement of *Free Talk*, Dec. 12, 1932.
[103] Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 25-26.

generates is critical of political authority and meanwhile forms the basis of political legitimacy.[104] The critical nature of *Free Talk* is evident in both its earlier and later periods. After Zhou took over the editorship of *Free Talk*, he opened and wrote his own columns of editorial commentary for a long time. In these columns, he expressed his views on current affairs each day, writing tens to hundreds of words attacking the corruption of warlords and imperialism. The topics discussed in the later *Free Talk* were even more connected to current politics, as left-wing intellectuals criticized the hypocrisy and deceit of the ruling class through a series of interpretations and satires of political news, thereby fundamentally questioning the legitimacy of the KMT leadership.

However, despite the efforts made by editors and writers to construct a public sphere, it could not stop the gradual erosion of *Free Talk*'s freedom, and those intellectuals in the midst of it were left helpless. In 1930, the KMT promulgated the Press Law and the Publication Law, severely restricting the publication and distribution of newspapers, books, and magazines. In August of the same year, the legislature of the KMT government secretly passed the "Regulations on the Disposal of the Communist Party," deciding to "capture and immediately execute" all members of CCP. Some tabloids also attacked Lu Xun and Li Liewen, claiming that they had turned *Free Talk* into a "red kingdom" with Lu Xun as the "tyrant."[105] During this period, the commentaries and essays published in *Free Talk* inevitably attracted the ire of the party ministry in Shanghai. Some KMT officials wrote to Shi Liangcai requesting the removal of *Free Talk*'s chief editor and attempted to replace him with one of their own. After Shi's refusal, censorship of *Free Talk* became more stringent, with newspaper articles often edited or removed

[104] Ibid., 199-201.
[105] Song, *Shenbao de xingshuai* (The Rising and Fall of Shenbao), 172-173.

at the censorship office's will.[106] The intellectuals were unable to protect public opinion from the intervention of political forces, and their struggle for expression was ultimately met with a tragic end—on November 13, 1934, KMT agents assassinated Shi Liangcai on the Shanghai-Hangzhou highway, and on November 1, 1935, *Free Talk* ceased publication for three years.[107]

In addition to the political interventions mentioned above, the ideologically-based divisions and struggles within the intelligentsia also weakened the intellectuals' efforts to cultivate a healthy public opinion. Taking the debate on *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Wenxuan* 文選 in *Free Talk* as an example, in September 1933, at the invitation of the editor of *Dawanbao*, Shi Zhecun 施蟄存 (1905-2003) listed the names of two books, *Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan*, on a form of recommended books for young people.[108] This seemingly insignificant matter sparked a two-month-long debate in *Free Talk*. On October 6, Lu Xun first published an article in *Free Talk*, relating Shi's choice of books to the revivalist classic-reading campaign advocated by Chiang Kai-shek, arguing that the books Shi recommended were a manifestation of his opposition to the new culture.[109] Just two days later, Shi posted an article in *Free Talk* explaining his position, saying that he recommended the two books in order to suggest the cultural cultivation of young people because he found their essay writing to be substandard at that time. Shi emphasized that his recommendation was not intended to encourage young people to write in classical Chinese.[110] Shi's response was sincere, for he realized that the poverty and coarseness of literary language at that time had indeed become a major problem. However, in light of the circumstances, almost all

[106] Ibid., 173-175.
[107] After the assassination of Shi Liangcai, *Free Talk* was in a difficult situation and ceased publication for three years from 1935-1938. Although it resumed publication after 1938, it failed to regain the influence it once had.
[108] Shi's list of books was published in the September 29, 1933 issue of *Dawanbao·Huoju*.
[109] Lu Xun, "Gan jiu" (Feeling Old), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Oct. 6, 1933.
[110] Shi, "*Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan*", *Shenbao Free Talk*, Oct. 8, 1933.

the writers involved in this debate were on Lu Xun's side. For example, Mao Dun argued that *Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan* were not helpful to young people,[111] and Cao Juren also accused Shi of being "completely wrong."[112] In the face of these criticism, Shi expressed his disappointment with the public debates in *Free Talk*, arguing that these discussions had devolved into a battle of emotionalism and deviated from their original purpose.[113] Despite his repeated self-justification, the criticism against Shi did not abate. For some time, Shi was branded a reactionary literary figure, with some speculating that his motive was to "to please the authority."

The root of this debate actually lies in the divergent views of intellectuals on the treatment of traditional culture. During the New Culture Movement, *Wenxuan*, representing parallel prose and old-style poetry, was regarded by Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (1887-1939) as *yaonie* (evildoer 妖孽) and was considered by some advocates as a typical example of oldness. Shi's arguments contradict those of the pioneers of the New Culture Movement, insisting that "each generation's literature must draw on the literature of its predecessors."[114] Like many other academic debates in the press, the public debate over the recommended book list gradually moved away from literature itself and became a debate between the two camps: new literature and old literature. The debate did not end here. A number of intellectuals went on to discuss writing and literature in light of this event, such as Cao Juren, who proposed a "reform of writing," and Chen Zizhan, who further probed the question of what kind of literature young people needed.

[111] Mao, "Wenxue qingnian ruhe xiuyang" (How to Cultivate Literary Youth).
[112] Cao, "Lun zhuangzi yu wenxuan" (On the *Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan*).
[113] Shi, "Zhi li lie wen xiansheng shu (fu gengzheng)" (Letter to Mr. Li Liewen, with corrections), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Oct 20, 1933.
[114] Shi, "*Zhuangzi* and *Wenxuan*," *Shenbao Free Talk*, Oct. 8, 1933.

Examining the debate as a whole, one can see that it did create a public space of discussion made up of strings of issues, where those involved in the discourse can discuss a topic in the way of "inter-referring."[115] Also, the *Free Talk* debate can be seen to be largely based on media mechanism, where both sides of the argument were fully expressed and effectively responded to, which then led to broader and deeper discussions. However, the disparity in power between Lu Xun and Shi Zhecun meant a truly equal conversation is hard to take place; meanwhile, their dichotomous positions, informed by subjective speculations about their opponents' political positions and psychological motives, also made it difficult for this public debate to produce constructive results. In this sense, it is hard to argue that the public opinion of *Free Talk* played its intended role.

On the whole, this public space jointly constructed by *Free Talk* and intellectuals produced a public opinion made up of the convergence of multiple voices and allowed for a kind of extra-institutional supervision and criticism. However, it can also be argued that it has always been distant from the ideal public sphere, as this form of free speech was not completely independent of the authorities. The oppression of political power and the lack of legal safeguard gradually eroded the space of discourse it created. Another reason is that from the perspective of the public debate itself, the discourses created and propagated by left-wing intellectuals sometimes still lacked a degree of professional knowledge and reasoned arguments, which resulted in their perceptions and judgments being disturbed by their positions, with some debates eventually lapsing into battles of emotions.

[115] Taylor, "Modernity and the Rise of Public Sphere," 224-229.

Conclusion

The so-called "literati" have become intellectuals...This transition is part of the process of modernization in China, in which Chinese intellectuals have accomplished their tasks and still want to continue, sharing the same fate as intellectuals elsewhere in the world in this era.

—Zhu Ziqing, "On Integrity," 1947[116]

Throughout China's long dynastic history, there were no newspapers as a mass medium. The purpose of the so-called *dibao* (court bulletin 邸報) in the Han and Tang Dynasties is mainly to convey the emperor's decrees in a kind of unidirectional communication. The unprecedented emergence of the modern newspaper for the first time in Chinese history broke the elite's monopoly of power on knowledge and information, providing precious space for the public to speak. The intelligentsia, through its organic connections with the press, became a major force in constructing the space of public discourse and cultivating public opinion in modern society.

The period from 1926 to 1934 warrants further examination, for during this time modern Chinese society witnessed the warlord chaos to the gradual consolidation of the nascent KMT regime. The archives of *Shenbao Free Talk* from this period also serve as a valuable resource to trace how the intelligentsia's fate was intertwined with the history of revolution and war in 20th century China. In the early days when Zhou Shoujuan was the chief editor of *Free Talk*, he and other Saturday school members were characterized as "non-mainstream" or "non-political" in modern Chinese history, and thus received less attention from scholars. However, their role in the press was essential to the construction of Shanghai's urban culture and public space. As media practitioners, Zhou and his fellows made subtle use of the law of media communication to create a "public forum" for ordinary citizens, in which they were committed to sharing urban

[116] Zhu, *Zhu Zi qing quanji* (Complete Works of Zhu Ziqing), 153-154.

entertainment and modern experiences, while also advocating for a civilized lifestyle and drawing attention to social problems. This changed when Li Liewen assumed the chief editor position in 1932, and after *Free Talk* underwent profound reform, it became a hub for left-wing intellectuals. The collective focus of the editor and writers shifted to the narration of suffering, launching criticism against political affairs, and offering cultural reflection. As a result, authors either delineated the hardships suffered by the lower classes in the metropolis, or reflected upon social maladies and the hypocrisy of those in power. *Free Talk* became a "public stage" that allowed these writers to build consensus through their sardonic and trenchant essays, and thus guided another kind of public opinion featuring rebellion and criticism. Unfortunately, they had difficulties stepping out of the shadow of political interventions and the discipline of ideology. Therefore, intellectuals still had little say in protecting public opinion from the pressure of political power.

In contemporary China, "intellectual" (*zhishifenzi* 知識分子) seems to be a self-explanatory concept. The Modern Chinese Dictionary defines "intellectuals" as "people with a high level of education and engaged with intellectual work," and this seems to be the general perception many people would have of intellectuals. In fact, after 1949, intellectuals were clearly marked as a social classification referring to various types of people with knowledge, such as writers, reporters, educators, scientists, and engineers. Nevertheless, those who have thought deeply about intellectuals would also consider them not only as experts who have mastered a specific field of knowledge, but also as having a strong sense of social responsibility and conscience. As indicated in the first chapter, this is related to the origin of the term in the West. Precisely as "intellectual" is a modern concept introduced from the West, it is a matter of concern how the authors of *Shenbao* perceived this role at that time.

According to the electronic archives of *Shenbao*, the new term *zhishijieji* first appeared in a press release on November 15, 1915 of *Shenbao* and was used frequently in press releases after 1919. It was only in 1930 that the term *zhishifenzi*, as we now more commonly use it, began to appear in *Shenbao*. It was often used by left-wing intellectuals to simply refer to individuals who were knowledgeable. For example, the person who signed as Gannu 紺弩 wrote, "from the term intellectual, we don't get anything other than the fact that we know that there is knowledge."[117] Another person who signed as Heng 恒 said in his article, "what people call intellectuals is what we used to call *shi*."[118] In contrast to its etymological meaning, intellectuals were used as "educated people" after they entered China out of their original context. Whether *zhishijieji* or *zhishifenzi*, both can be understood as a group or a part of a collective, losing theirs original meaning of autonomy and individuality. Unsurprisingly, some left-wing intellectuals used the term *zhishifenzi* in their articles of *Free Talk* in the 1930s, often with an undertone of contempt. For example, a number of writers thought that intellectuals lacked courage and perseverance. Their resolve was easily shaken, and they were as just as likely to serve their country as they were to throw themselves into the arms of money or power. While this was certainly related to the propaganda policy of CCP, the self-deprecating mentality of some intellectuals is also evident. In the light of this attitude, in a 1927 speech, Lu Xun proposed the concept of "true intellectuals", arguing that the true intellectual was "unconcerned with profit and loss," "never satisfied with society", and therefore "eternally critical" and always prepared for future sacrifice.[119] Judging from his speech, he seemed to have an awareness of the historical

[117] Gannu, "Guanyu zhishifenzi" (About Intellectuals), *Shenbao Free Talk*, Oct. 15, 1935.
[118] Heng, "Tan zhishifenzi" (Talking About Intellectuals), *Shenbao*, Nov. 10, 1935.
[119] Lu Xun, *Lu xun qaunji* (The Complete Works of Lu Xun), vol 8, 229.

background of the term intellectual, and his interpretation also aligns with the definition of intellectuals given in the Western context.

Although there is certain research pertaining to the spread of the term intellectual in Republican China, we may not be able to know whether Zhou Shoujuan and his fellows were already familiar with the term and considered themselves as intellectuals in the 1920s. However, most of the writers contributing to the later *Free Talk* undoubtedly had an awareness of intellectuals. Although they reluctantly admitted that they were intellectuals themselves, they were still suspicious of their own identity because they did not appreciate the value that knowledge had in those days. Regardless of how they defined their identity, for the purposes of this thesis, I still want to consider them as intellectuals. One consideration is based on the contemporary definition of intellectuals, i.e., intellectuals represent people who perform intellectual work, and they are a new division of social labor that has emerged in modern society. Another consideration is related to the connotations of intellectuals in Western context. For example, according to Ron Eyerman and Richard Posner, intellectuals tend to write to the public about public issues, and they are important expressers of public opinion.[120] They both insist on the public role assumed by intellectuals, believing that intellectuals are those participating in public life so as to exert an influence on society.

More than one hundred years have passed since the founding of the Republic of China. The recurrent nature of history implied in Lu Xun's "Modern History" also seems to show traces in the changing role of intellectuals. Whether it was the return of the new enlightenment agenda of intellectuals in the 1980s, the emphasis on academic professionalism in the early 1990s, or the

[120] Eyerman, "Intellectuals and Cultural Trauma," 454-455. Posner, *Public Intellectuals: a Study of Decline*, 7.

stigmatization of “public intellectuals” in the early 21st century, the relationship between intellectuals and political parties, the state, and the public constantly faces complex situations that require adjustment. The persistent praise and criticism of intellectuals, both in China and in the West, seem to go hand in hand. In his book *Intellectuals and Society* (2009), Thomas Sowell criticizes the intellectual “laziness” of left-wing intellectuals. This “laziness” is reflected in their tendency to appeal to moral high-ground rather than offering empirical arguments to support their views, and it is also shown through their lack of reflection on their own errors and omissions. Confusing value statements with factual statements and replacing public discussion with moral crusades or even personal attacks also seem to be mistakes that some intellectuals discussed in this thesis were apt to make. However, the possible weaknesses of intellectuals do not mean that intellectuals should stay away from the public sphere, but rather a cause for reflection on what principles and in what ways intellectuals should intervene in media practice.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the widespread popularity of the Internet and the rise of new media have ended the era when traditional media dominated public opinion. In the virtual public sphere built by the Internet, the audience of the newspaper era becomes the new publishers and disseminators of information. Compared with traditional media, the openness, decentralization, and interactivity of the Internet are more conducive to the free expression and public discussion of its participants. At the same time, the Internet provides a channel for every netizen to express opinion on political and social issues, so the public has a wider space to evaluate public affairs and form public opinion. Whether it is major public event or ordinary daily life, the maturity of mobile networks and new media have allowed an increasing number of individuals to participate in public issues, forming a continuous public opinion by virtue of public discourse, and undermining or reinforcing the mainstream official discourse.

Changes in the media environment not only transformed the way the public assembles and speaks, but also influenced the media engagement of intellectuals in a profound way. Although established intellectuals still occupy a relatively large share of cultural capital, the development of self-media is constantly breaking the intellectuals' gatekeeping and control over the press. The tension between intellectuals and the public also shows a more complex form, and neither the role of the enlightener nor the dependent is sufficient to explain. When social media such as microblogs first emerged, a large group of public intellectuals, known as opinion leaders, actively participated in public affairs, and tried to exert influence in politics. In a series of public events, these intellectuals have effectively influenced government responses and decisions by setting the agenda for the public and guiding the direction of public opinion through new media. Yet with the stigmatization of public intellectuals in recent years, public attitudes toward intellectuals, especially those who assume public roles, are becoming ambiguous. Admittedly, with changes in communication methods, today's intellectuals have more opportunities and access to public discourse, but they also face more advanced censorship techniques than intellectuals did 100 years ago. When their own freedom of expression is not guaranteed, the public speech of intellectuals as dissidents either needs to be self-imposed or to bear the pressure and risks from the authorities.

When exploring the relationship between intellectuals and the press in Republican Shanghai, we are also reflecting on how intellectuals should self-identify and reconstruct their vision after the inevitable transformation of the media, so as to grow and develop into a more organic producer and disseminator of knowledge. More importantly, contemporary intellectuals, like their predecessors, face the ever-present challenges of censorship and political discipline,

and the question of how the public opinion that is manipulated by institutional power can release the vitality of reason and action remains unanswered.

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