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Joining Forces to Save the Nation: Corporate Educational Governance in Republican China

Barbara Schulte

This chapter reassesses the modernization processes at work in Republican China during the Warlord period between 1911 and 1927 by focusing on corporate, public action by non-state interest groups and organizations. In particular, it looks at modes of corporate governing at the interface of business/economy and education: the realm of vocational education.

Educational associations during the Warlord period were among the non-state groups and institutions that to a certain extent governed the same Chinese society that they were a part of, thus constituting a form of self-government (*zizhi*). Their actions took place against the backdrop of an increasingly fragmented country whose cultural coherence seemed to be threatened by widening gaps between different geographical regions, different social groups, and different ideological factions. Although educational organizations were run largely by urban elites, they undertook countrywide efforts not only to recover a culturally defined “Chineseness,”¹ but also to create modern Chinese citizens who would belong to a nation that would be equal to the Western powers.

The chapter examines a particularly illuminative corpus of actors, the Chinese Association for Vocational Education (CAVE) (*Zhonghua Zhiye Jiaoyushe*), which was founded in Shanghai in 1917 by Huang Yanpei (1878–1965).² CAVE was

established amidst calls to “[save] the country through education” (*jiaoyu jiuguo*). This heterogeneous group comprising Confucian-educated scholars, modern scientists with international experience, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, craftspeople, journalists, politicians, and political advisors were particularly active (and partly successful) in formulating and promoting vocational education through their engagement in the media, in politics, in professional associations and guilds, and in schools. On the one hand, CAVE represented a quest for coherence and continuities within a fragmented society (and of the tensions that arose from this quest) and, on the other, a search for a modern nation-state in which Chinese adolescence would be turned into a productive workforce and loyal citizenry. Almost inadvertently, the association, with its members coming from all realms of Chinese urban society, served also as a case in point for corporate governance to reach these aims of unity and modernity.

Republican China at the Crossroads from Cultural to National Entity: Corporatism, Congested Governance, Civil Society, or Institutional Void?

Around 1911, Chinese society witnessed a sharp rise in all kinds of organizations and associations. Between 1911 and 1913 alone, 386 organizations emerged, with several thousand new members joining each day, for example, the *Tongmenghui*, an umbrella association of revolutionary organizations (Ju 2002: 50-51). Within the same period, 72 associations were founded in the broader field of industry, business, and trade, producing more than 50 different gazettes and journals in total (Liu 1997). In the educational arena, it was Jiangsu that became the hub of activity with approximately 56 organizations that dealt with various educational topics in 1908

(Zhang 2003: 49). At the top of these organizations was the Jiangsu Education Association (*Jiangsu Jiaoyuhui*), which was so influential that it was judged to have created the new education system that came into effect in 1922.

How can this multiplicity of organized actors be conceptualized? Did the Warlord era witness the emergence of a civil society? Or do instances of closely intertwined and at times almost symbiotic state-society interaction point to corporatist ways of governing? What role did the state play in this interaction, or rather, how much state was there at all? Were there too many actors that condensed into a “congested governance” (e.g. Everingham 2009) or did these various interest groups operate in an institutional void?

To find answers to these questions, both the time preceding and following the Warlord years should be taken into account. Until the Republican era, Chinese society had seen a continuous decrease in immediate government effectiveness. G. William Skinner (1977: 19) saw the beginning of this process already in the Tang dynasty, “whereby the degree of official involvement in local affairs – not only in marketing and commerce but also in social regulation (e.g., dispute resolution) and administration itself – steadily declined, a retrenchment forced by the growing scale of empire.” In many places, only one official was in charge of more than one million people (Yee 1995). Consequently, local associations such as guilds, community compacts, and territorial associations assumed public tasks – but this traditional form of “outsourcing” were, as many scholars noted, never cast into laws (see e.g. Fewsmith 1983; Übelhör 1989; Herrmann-Pillath 1996). Although guilds were important mechanisms of creating and maintaining social order, they were not required to register with the government. Existing state regulations, for example for

handicraft associations, were concerned with the quality and standards of production, not the guilds themselves (Moll-Murata 2001). The guilds' status of in-betweenness, of being "neither wholly autonomous nor state-dominated" (Pearson 1997: 116), led to a complex constellation in which guilds represented particular interests while they performed public tasks at the same time. As Joseph Fewsmith (1983: 620) wrote, there was a "contradiction between the de facto organization of local society and the lack of legitimacy such organizations possessed. Existing on the boundary between *gong* [public] and *si* [private], they often pursued *si* while the state pretended they were *gong* ..." It was in this extrabureaucratic nether world that traditional guilds existed.

While there was a tradition of governmental mistrust towards these social groups and non-state institutions throughout Chinese history, the Chinese state nonetheless increasingly depended on these groups and networks to govern its populace—not in the least to collect taxes. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this cooperation between state and social groups clearly reached a new level where local organizations became increasingly incorporated into state legislation even as they evolved into more autonomous social players. At the same time, the "extra bureaucratic nether world" became more and more professionalized.

Many of these changes— including growing professionalization and rule of law with regard to non-state groups—were motivated by a profound change in the Chinese state's self-perception as an increasingly international player: in effect, the Chinese state embarked on the nation-state project. While the China up to the nineteenth century had constituted itself through an "imperial fusion of culture and politics" united by ritual (*li*) and culture/writing (*wen*) (Wong 1999: 112), this notion

of a cultural China (*wenhua Zhongguo*) came to be seriously challenged with China's exposure to Western aggression and, concomitantly, with the Western understanding of the nation from a social-Darwinist perspective. Consequently, the paradigm of "modernization" conquered both official and popular Chinese discourse. "Law" was one trope in this discourse; "professionals" or "experts" were another. The famous reformer Ma Jianzhong (1844-1900), who was the first Chinese person to have ever obtained the *licence de droit* in France, argued for a stronger legislative regulation of state-economy interaction as a way to reach national prosperity. Simultaneously, growing legislation and institutionalization of non-state associations were seen as shields against Western aggression. The newly instituted chambers of commerce, for example, were encouraged to speak and negotiate with their Western counterparts in union rather than in scattered factions, as had been the case up until the nineteenth century.³

Apart from law, it was the growing importance of the expert that strengthened the role of non-state organizations. While experts had always been a part of government officialdom—albeit ones who were not legitimized through the examination system (see e.g. Zhu 1992)—it was not until the beginning of the *mufu* system (literally: "tent government") that the integration of experts was formalized in the state apparatus (Folsom 1968; Bailey 1998). Thus, the distance between politics on the one side and industry and commerce on the other, the latter of which had been preserved at least rhetorically since the Song dynasty, shrank continually. The character of the guilds changed accordingly. While the importance of their religious and ritual practices dwindled, they modernized significantly under this process of secularization. They united, for example, under the umbrella of the above-mentioned

chambers of commerce, although they continued to exist as separate organizations. At the same time, local governments increasingly pressed for a restructuring of the existing guilds into professional associations (*hangye gonghui*) and at times attempted to call into existence such associations in parallel to the guilds (for an overview, see Lu 2005). Added to this was the emergence of completely new professional organizations such as those representing the interests of modern doctors, lawyers and journalists. This tangle of different corporate actors led to a remarkable heterogeneity in the organization of social and working life. While organizations like the Shanghai Chamber of Commerce and the Shanghai Bankers' Association were still administered along regional and kinship relations (Sheehan 2005), the newly emerged organizations adhered to the principle of profession alone.

From a corporatist perspective, it should be noted that the growing importance of these new or re-fashioned organizations transformed ways of governing. The chambers of commerce, for instance, were allowed to file direct petitions to the throne and thus enter an immediate channel to the imperial palace in circumvention of the officials who were perceived as tedious, ignorant, and obstructive. In this sense, the new governance landscape of early Republican China was congruent with Roland Huntford's (1972: 86) view on associations acting within a corporatist framework as having attained, "like medieval guilds," a quasi-legal status, and a prescriptive right to speak for their segment of the population. They influence the process of government directly, by-passing the Diet (parliament). They are agents of authority. They deputise for the State in whole sectors of public life, and they have had duties delegated to them that properly belong to the civil service.⁴

Still, Philippe Schmitter's definition of corporatism, as discussed in the previous chapter, did not fit neatly with the existent Republican state-society relationship. Particularly in the Warlord era, corporate networks were neither limited in number, nor were they compulsory or noncompetitive. Although some organizations were de facto licensed by a (weak) state, it was not the state controlling the organizations (although it attempted to) but rather the other way round. As with the case of CAVE (discussed below), members of certain associations frequently secured positions in the government or otherwise recruited government officials as new members to advance their cause. Thus, at first glance, the state-society constellation in the Warlord era resembled more Schmitter's idea of *pluralism*, or civil society, as explained by Gordon White (1996: 435) as an "intermediate associational realm situated between the state on the one side and the basic building blocks of society on the other." But as Howard J. Wiarda (2009: 93) argued, the concept of "corporatism" should be kept flexible in order "to capture a mood, a style, a whole way of thinking and operating – a political culture – rather than any precise institutional arrangement."

Surprisingly, the Chinese guilds have drawn little scholarly attention as potential precursors of modern forms of corporatism,⁵ much in contrast to somewhat parallel developments in Europe. For example, the behavior of Chinese business and vocational education networks evoke Stefano Solari's account of how European nineteenth-century Catholic socio-economic thought conditioned vocational orders to act out a "'neo-medieval' institutional arrangement" (2009: 87). Also, ideas within European Catholic economic theory about a third way between a laissez-faire capitalism and socialism to resolve the "social question" (Solari 2009: 88) shows

striking similarities to the Chinese case: on the one hand, to the notion of a “third force” alongside Communists and Nationalists, as developed by Carsun Chang alias Zhang Jiasen (or Zhang Junmai 1887-1969), a well-known philosopher who was also a member of CAVE (Chang 1952; Jeans 1997);⁶ on the other, to the “question of livelihood” (*shengji wenti*), that is, solving social problems like unemployment, starvation etc., which was repeatedly brought up by CAVE’s founder Huang Yanpei. Furthermore, attempts by modern Chinese trade associations to link their activities meaningfully to older traditions of the guilds conjures up alternative, corporate ways of governing. Heike Holbig notes (2006: 8):

Tapping into the rich historical repertoire of imperial Chinese guilds, these trade associations were given traditional names such as trade guild (*tongye gonghui* or *hangye gonghui*) or ‘trade chambers’ (*hangye shanghui*) to stress the fact that they were founded, financed and run by non-state actors, usually by prominent entrepreneurs representing the respective local industries.

Thus, corporate state-society interaction in present-day China seems to derive its legacy from early Republican China, when its execution has paradoxically been constituted as both a lived reality and an impossibility as the still-modernizing traditional corporatism meets a nation-state in the making. Consequently, social interest groups have acted against the backdrop of “a discrepancy between the existing institutional order and the actual practice of policy making” (Hajer 2003: 176); that is, their actions center on an institutional void. Having been caught in a transition from traditional interest aggregation to modern interest representation,

social interest groups are still deeply entrenched in a self-understanding that clearly subordinates them, as semi-autarchic organizations, beneath a stronger state. Thus, the image of a strong state pervades these groups' thinking and operating and coins their political culture, to take up Wiarda's wording again; from this perspective, these groups can be judged to be engaged in a corporatist-style interaction. However, given the repeated and continuous absence of the corporate partner, the state, during the Warlord era, state corporatism was more imaginary than real: it existed in the imagination and expectations of these organizations, while they were de facto parts of a civil society – a civil society that existed not in spite of a strong state but due to a weak state.

Education as the Motor of Change

The Warlord era was a time of crisis. Crisis had been an everyday experience of both the government and the populace since the Opium Wars in the late Qing era and during the rule of the Nationalists. Education was ascribed a dual function by the politicians, economists, and intellectuals of the time. On the one hand, education was touted by the reformer Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) as the transmission of knowledge and technology which could “save us from destruction” (quoted in Wang 1961: 396); on the other hand, a new type of education was expected to create a new type of Chinese citizen who would be prepared to unite with other citizens and take part in building up a modern nation. Simultaneously, education was linked to a number of problems, such as not being practically-oriented, or for being streamlined for career purposes only (in order to become a government official). Hence,

education stood as both the promise to advance China as a modern nation and an obstacle to such modernization.

Vocational education appeared as a salvation in this regard. Not only was it clearly practically oriented in purpose, but it also seemed to provide the tools that could transplant education into those sectors of society that had hitherto not been associated with education, such as the industrial, banking, craft and agricultural sectors. A new slogan of “vocational education to save the country” (*zhijiao jiuguo*) emerged alongside the existing catch phrase of “education to save the country.” The greatest advantage of vocational education seemed to be that it was situated at the interface of two crisis-ridden realms: the realm of education proper, and the realm of the economy. Thus, it was considered to be capable of solving two problems at once: replacing an educational clientele that was not interested in any practical matters with a loyal citizenry, and transgressing old-fashioned production styles with low-quality output under the new management of modern, professionally trained experts. In the economic realm, a sharp rise in the number of factories incited great need for trained personnel,⁷ and in the educational realm, a discursive boom of anything that had to do with pragmatism thrived since pragmatism came to be viewed as the precursor to strength and wealth (both individually and nationally).⁸ By combining the strengths and needs of education and economy, it was proclaimed that vocational education would solve the “problem of livelihood.”⁹ Vocational education was to be “a concept with consequences,” predicted CAVE founder Huang Yanpei (1916: 78) in 1916 when he returned from his educational tour through the United States.

Prior to the vocational education movement, during which CAVE was the driving force, education had been exclusively linked to the domain of the mind; now, it was

the body that moved to center stage. Manual work came to be seen not as something despicable, but as a technique that could frame the mind and preserve a degree of humility in each individual. Educators, notably the renowned CAVE member Tao Xingzhi (1891-1946), were therefore keen on preserving (and modernizing) the traditional apprenticeship system, since “civilization arose because mankind used both head and hands” (1991: 141).¹⁰ The idea of “joining forces” was not just directed at mutually integrating education with economy and getting their respective representatives together; it meant also a literal reconciliation of mental and manual labor.

Governing through Associations

How did this joining of forces take place? What kinds of actors were engaged in drawing up these new visions of a modern China? To be sure, actors who bridged the gap between the worlds of literati and entrepreneurs (in the broadest sense) did not appear out of the blue. Along with the developments described in the sections above, interaction between these two worlds had thickened. Paula Harrell (1992: 13) called these agents of change that had emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century “gentry-merchant-reformers,” or “a new social elite, still prizing rank and privilege within the traditional power structure, yet actively engaged in the modernizing sector as well, and possessing a political independence born of economic self-sufficiency and a mastery of new skills and information.”

Still, Huang Yanpei’s alliance of Confucian-educated scholars, modern scientists with international experience, entrepreneurs, manufacturers, craftspeople, journalists, politicians, and political advisors¹¹ within CAVE went well beyond other unusual

coalitions that had permeated Shanghai's daily life. The city was replete with middlemen and their networks, crossing "national, cultural, social, and political boundaries to create a new hybrid urban culture" and providing "the glue that held Shanghai together on a day-to-day basis" (Dillon and Oi 2008: 6). CAVE's distinct position as a node where "gentry networks [...] intersected with networks of merchant guilds and associations" (Yeh 2008: 26) made this alliance particularly strong and pervasive. The importance of having guild representatives firmly integrated into CAVE's network should not be underestimated. This integration did not signify only the networking of networks, as often suggested by preexisting literature on CAVE (e.g. Yeh 2008), but also the establishment of links to agencies of social order, for guilds defined and provided space for the lives of workforces or social strata that were otherwise difficult to reach through ordinary schools or pamphlets. By having allies within this social "Other," CAVE was also able to activate the educational function of the guilds—a commendable feat since the guilds probably educated greater numbers of people than all the other schools taken together.

Thus, CAVE member Zhang Yi (1883-1936) erected several schools and a hospital in cooperation with the guilds during his function as entrepreneur in the timber business; Zhu Dechuan (1877-?), who was also wealthy and influential in the timber business, founded a separate Association for Advancing Education in Timber Trade (*Muye Jiaoyu Cujinhui*) in order to revitalize and modernize the educational tradition within this trade; Bei Renyuan (1870-?), father to the famous contemporary architect Ieoh Ming Pei, became rich within the textile business and sponsored a kindergarten (as well as CAVE); Zhao Zengtao (1866-1937), a mason, made his

fortune through several building firms before he financed a variety of schools as well as Shanghai's Red Cross hospital; cloth merchant and CAVE founding member Yu Dingyi (1875-1932) sponsored several local road construction and irrigation projects and founded the Society for Reading Books and Newspapers (*Yueshu Jiangbaoshe*), the predecessor of the later library in Changzhou, in addition to establishing a part-time school within the cloth business. These five members, all of whom entered CAVE shortly after its inception, are just a few examples out of many who bridged the gentry and the merchant world: roughly one-third of the early members of CAVE were recruited from the business world.

In this respect, CAVE and its members, in particular Huang Yanpei, were not just brokers between different social and political circles; they were also mediators between the audible and visible strata of society who were able to articulate group interests in the media on behalf of those who were unable to. This latter and by far largest part of the population was described by the educationist Yan Yangchu (1893-1990) as blind, deaf, and mute.

The largest part of the population cannot read, it cannot read books or newspapers, is that not blind? They have not received any kind of education and have no idea about the state of today's society, it is true that they have ears, but it is as if they had not any, is that not deaf? When society has come this far, who then are those who talk, and if the majority are those who cannot produce a sound, is that not mute? (Yan 1990: 5)¹²

CAVE succeeded in securing strongholds in the most articulate of all groups: in the

media and publishing industry. Six members¹³ worked as journalists for the most important newspaper of the time, *Shenbao*, which had been founded in 1872 as the first independent Chinese newspaper. *Shenbao* had a circulation of 8,000 to 10,000 copies with approximately ten to fifteen readers to each copy (Vittinghoff 2004: 89).¹⁴ Many more members worked in other newspapers, magazines and journals. Of all the professions pursued by CAVE's members, media and journalism occupied roughly twenty percent. By 1918, CAVE had established numerous strong connections to major publishing houses including the Commercial Press and the Chinese Publishing House, two of Shanghai's most important publishers. According to Christopher A. Reed (2004: 213), "the Commercial Press changed the face of Chinese education and informed opinion," and established Shanghai as a "national cultural centre" (Ibid: 24).

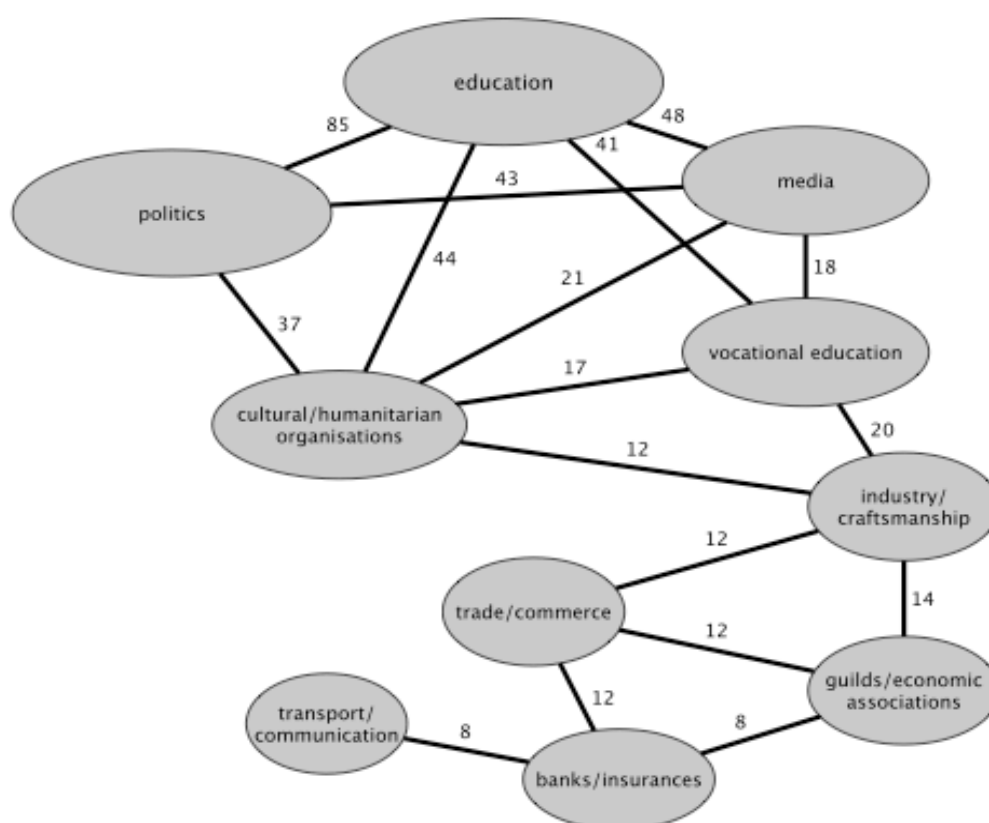
The majority of professions pursued by CAVE members, however, were within the realms of politics or government administration. CAVE members populated different local, regional, and national parliaments. Many of them were county or even provincial governors (like Guangdong) and mayors of major cities (like Nanjing). Naturally, CAVE members were strongly represented in the different educational ministries and school administrations, with some positioned as provincial ministers of education and one, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940), as the first minister of education in the new republic in 1912 (Huang Yanpei himself repeatedly declined to take up the post of education minister). The presence of CAVE members was almost equally ubiquitous in economic ministries and in legal and fiscal administrations. Some members were eminent participants— or rather, the driving motors—of the self-government movement inspired by both Japan and the West.

CAVE member Wang Zhen (alias Wang Yiting, 1867-1938) was one of these proponents of self-government and local public welfare, an “apprentice-turned-comprador,” whom Shen Kuiyi (2008: 46) identified as “one of the most notable activists in the Shanghai social networks.” Similar to the setting up of the chambers of commerce, the establishment of self-government was seen as a way to compete qualitatively with the obviously well-organized Western settlements. Another member, entrepreneur and politician Zhang Jian (1853-1926)—mentor to Huang Yanpei and at the time of CAVE’s inception president of the Jiangsu Educational Association—re-created the city of Nantong according to an idea of “village-ism.” Nantong, or “Zhang Jian’s kingdom” as it was called at the time, was to represent the ideal community, combining industry, a modern metropolis, and public welfare (including schools) for all social strata.¹⁵

A closer look at individual members revealed the multifunction of most members, with a majority crossing occupational borders easily and repeatedly, sometimes working at different jobs at the same time (but most often moving from one job to the next successively). Some were active in up to nine different occupational realms. This high degree of professional mobility allowed for cross-connections between different sectors which were further enhanced by the fact that professionally mobile members were, through CAVE, connected to other professionally mobile members. According to Figure 2.1 below,¹⁶ professional mobility was particularly high between the sectors of education, politics, media, vocational education, and cultural/humanitarian organizations, resulting in professional clusters. For example, 85 members worked in both education and politics while 48 members who were active in education also pursued occupations in the media business. The

entrepreneurs among CAVE's members were mainly linked to the rest of the association through those members who were active in vocational education and cultural/humanitarian organizations. The 32 individuals involved in the latter two sectors constituted the crucial linkages between the gentry and the entrepreneurial world, ultimately opening up communication channels that were often nonexistent in other associations.

Figure 2.1: Clusters of occupations that were pursued by identical individuals (with numbers of individuals in the overlapping section)



Aside from networking through their connections to the guilds and media, CAVE members used yet another strategy to reach their target group and to influence

societal and political decision processes: they entered other organizations, often in groups. There were at least 28 organizations that had, among their members, three or more persons from CAVE. These organizations included various educational associations as well as philanthropic (e.g. Red Cross Society), political (e.g. Chinese Communist Party), and economic (e.g. Economic Association of Southern Shanghai) associations. While political and economic channels were clearly being sought to produce a friendlier climate for vocational education (in terms of regulations and structures), philanthropic organizations were often frequented for fund-raising. On these occasions, Huang Yanpei would sell vocational education as charity; he would present the sponsorship of vocational projects as a way to donate to the poor, and thus as a way for the wealthy to attain a calm conscience (Huang 1929: 2). Organizations such as the China Christian Association, the Youth League or other organizations active in the countryside were contacted through actors with dual membership for the purpose of instigating vocational education programs that targeted groups who were ideologically, generationally, or geographically more remote from the immediate circles of CAVE.

All in all, although the majority of CAVE's members came from an academic background, the association also succeeded in securing strong links in the realms of politics, economy/business and media. In its interactions with other institutions and social groups, CAVE relied on a multi-central network structure, a finding also supported by Brett Sheehan (2005), who observed the same structure for Chinese financial cliques at the time. An apparent advantage of such a multi-central network arrangement is its resilience and endurance in times of crisis, for this network could continue operating and communicating even if several channels were blocked.

CAVE was also multi-central in a political-ideological sense as it kept relations to several political factions and governments that were often in conflict with each other. CAVE accommodated Christians, Buddhists, and agnostics; it provided a platform for monarchists, Communists, and Nationalists alike. While maintaining close ties to the Nationalists, Huang Yanpei also cautiously approached the Communists. In May 1938, Huang met Zhou Enlai (1898-1976) for the first time and subsequently enlisted Zhou to give several talks at events organized by CAVE. In 1945, when relations between the Guomindang and Communists had reached a historical low, Huang visited Yan'an with a deep appreciation for the Communists' pragmatic approaches (Huang 1945). On another occasion, however, Huang (1931: 150) cunningly used the threat of spreading Communism as a deterrent when he addressed potential followers or sponsors of his educational project: "At the assembly [of CAVE in 1931 in Suzhou], there was somebody who reported that nine out of ten bandits come from the army and nine out of ten Communists are recruited from recent school graduates. One can see from this what danger prevails here in reality." This duplicity in voice—or, to put it more positively, the adaptability of CAVE's core members—made it easier for the association to survive both the Nationalist and Communist takeovers even though both seriously restricted the association's possibilities of social and political participation.

CAVE was an important organization not just in terms of its high connectivity but also by the sheer number of its members. CAVE was one of the biggest associations of its time with 786 members in its first year, 1917, and double that number in the following year. By 1929, it had ten times as many members than in its founding year. Of the 7000-plus members in CAVE in 1929, there were over 140

corporate members who helped incorporate an impressive number of institutions into its network. Hence, CAVE could claim to be one of the biggest and most influential educational associations of the time. Moreover, CAVE members were active throughout the country and not just in the association's strongholds in Shanghai and Jiangsu Province. The frequent tours of core members like Huang Yanpei ensured that CAVE gained a foothold in almost every province. This nation-wide range of action distinguished CAVE from many contemporaneous Chinese associations that were much less significant outside their home regions.

CAVE's political influence was cemented through its symbiosis with the Jiangsu Educational Association. While the latter made use of CAVE's nation-wide network to push forward certain policies, CAVE utilized the Jiangsu association's semi-governmental status to directly influence political decisions (Liu and Xue 2000). Thanks to this participation in a quasi-corporatist mode of decision taking, CAVE succeeded in integrating vocational education into the new education system of 1922 (Qian and Liu 1998: 90, 92). Thus, from the perspective of effectiveness, Huang Yanpei had chosen wisely in having avoided becoming a full-time politician (or minister); given the porous and fast-changing government structures of the time, Huang was able to achieve much more by operating through a chameleon-like organization that was capable of accommodating all kinds of different political and social actors.

For CAVE members, networking was twofold: It constituted both a technique and a credo. First, networking or brokering was clearly needed to bridge geographical, ideological, and social divides to reach common goals in a fragmented society. Networking or brokering allowed CAVE to influence decision processes that went

on in the political and economic arenas without actually becoming an institutionalized body within either of these arenas. CAVE members exploited their association's intermediary status to push through policies and structural changes that could not have been implemented through authoritative rule in one of these arenas alone. Second, the association linked this networking technique back to the discourse of "joining forces," in the sense that only a united effort would enable the country to strengthen. CAVE members diagnosed Chinese society with a lack of will to unite. The pedagogue and educational politician Jiang Hengyuan (alias Jiang Wenyu 1886-1961), one of the core members of CAVE, complained that "the Chinese would not form groups of more than ten persons" and that "China was a nation without organizations" (1933: 2). This complaint might come as a surprise given the numerous organizations that mushroomed at the time. However, Jiang and many of his colleagues in the association attacked what they perceived as factionalism which, in their eyes was prevailing all over the country. They believed that the spread of factionalism would lead individual groups to gang up and push forward only their own cause while ignoring those of the rest of society. In the words of Jia Fengzhen (1880-?), founding member, editor of the widely read journal *New Education* (*Xin Jiaoyu*) and teacher at the eminent Nanyang Gongxue, factionalism would lead to the consequence "that one knows only that oneself exists, but not that there are also other people; that one knows only the private, not the public" (1916: 48-49). Thus, "joining forces" was not just a strategy that CAVE members engaged in amongst themselves; it was also made into the principal aim of mass education and, consequently, of vocational education (which was considered the gist of mass education). Only if 'education to become a group' (*qunyu*) were

made part of the curriculum, would the Chinese state rise from the ashes.

However, the nature of networking was such that it would include one thing or one sort of people while excluding another. With CAVE, networking was done to embrace certain aspects of modernity but to ward off certain others; it was to discard certain parts of the tradition, but cling to others. Besides the mutual respect that brought gentry and guilds together in CAVE, it was also their ambivalent attitude towards tradition and modernity that united them. With regard to tradition, the academic members were expecting their entrepreneurial counterparts to rid education of its tendency to create useless graduates wherever it spread. As expressed by CAVE's famous founding member Liang Qichao (1873-1929): "As long as education has not diffused, there still exist farmers, craftsmen, and merchants. However, as soon as it spreads out, these farmers, craftsmen, and merchants all want to become officials [...]" (1962: 955). On the merchant side of the relationship, entrepreneurs were expecting educators to modernize traditional training practices in order to make "the archconservative people who are stuck in their old ways" disappear, as the wealthy entrepreneur and CAVE member Mu Ouchu (1876-1943) put it (1928: 604).

Regarding the envisaged ideal type of modernity, both gentry and merchant members of the association shared a critical take on Western modernity. The academics' glimpse into the manufacturing and business world through CAVE made them aware of the fact that what worked in one country was not equally good for another: educational systems were not simply transplantable. Wang Maozu (1891-1949), a proponent of mass education, warned against simply "pumping up efficient results from abroad" for fear of increasing "the mistakes and disadvantages that

[would] flow out of this” (1920: 3). Also, to many members, Western modernity seemed to bring unaffordable temptations. Shu (1925: 6) opined that every day, students at urban schools were confronted with luxury items that they would most probably never be able to buy. At the same time old socialization mechanisms, like vocational training within the guilds, broke away without equivalent replacement. Vocational education was supposed to restore the missing link of socialization through learning and training. Interviews with bankers that were published by CAVE define moral virtues and civilized behavior as the gist of business education (Shen, 1923); other interviewees reported values like honesty, patience and endurance, civility, modesty and readiness to serve as being of central importance to employers and called for an integration of these values into vocational education (Pan, 1923: 1-2). Vocational guidance as a newly imported idea from the United States was less about helping an individual find the right job and more about making this individual accept his or her situation (Wei 1928: 533). Thus, the particular alliance between educators and the business world within CAVE gave primarily voice to progressive conservatives: the masses were to be educated, but not in order to achieve social mobility but stay content, disciplined, and productive in their ascribed place. This powerful coalition left little room for the articulation of the interests of genuine workers, let alone farmers.

However, CAVE was not able to maintain its status quo as *éminence grise* in political, economic and educational matters after the Nationalist takeover. In 1928, the Nationalist government dissolved the Jiangsu Educational Association, thereby blocking CAVE’s most crucial channel of political participation. Although CAVE’s headquarters lay within the French settlement, its members were nonetheless

increasingly exposed to threats from the Guomintang and their henchmen. French police files on CAVE read like crime stories in which offices were raided and members were threatened or even assassinated. Amongst those assassinated were the publisher Shi Jiaxiu (1879-1934), who edited the Guomintang critical newspaper *Shenbao*, and Liu Zhan'en (1895-1938), who had openly criticized the Nationalists' attitude towards the Japanese (Shanghai Fazujie Gongdongju, 1926-1940). Later official documents from CAVE assumed a more pleading tone that subjugated, in a Leninist-Fascist fashion, the vocational education project to Guomintang ideology. Vocational education became tailored to fit the Three Principles, and a special commission within CAVE, called the "commission for education for the rebirth of the nation", was established to ensure that new programs and strategies were executed in compliance with Guomintang ideology (Jiaoyushe 1936). Subsequently, after the Communist takeover, CAVE again indulged in self-criticism for having been too bourgeois, and re-organized its activities around the new catch phrase of "free-time education" (*yeyu jiaoyu*) (Jiaoyushe 1951). Thus, while CAVE started out as an influential political and societal player, it ended up acquiescing to the co-optation of the government.

Conclusion: Who Incorporates Whom?

Margaret Pearson's (1997) study of China's business elites left no doubt that business experts had been co-opted by the state throughout Chinese history. The "tradition of dualism" (Pearson 1997: 117) among Chinese business corporations and guilds meant that these organizations performed public acts on behalf of the state even as they abided by state governance. Pearson argued that this dualism

simply “reshaped in the post-Mao context into a socialist version of state corporatism” (Ibid). Political and economic actors both in the Nationalist and Communist era by and large followed this dualist tradition which was facilitated by institutional continuities and, in the post-Mao era, a re-appreciation of late Qing and Republican China modes of governing. However, there were two notable exceptions to this continuity: the heyday of Maoism in which the state claimed absolute (physical and discursive) power over all spheres of society and the “‘golden age’ of merchant autonomy and political influence” between the revolution in 1911 and the Nationalists’ take-over after 1927 (Pearson 1997: 52-55).

This chapter focused on the latter period of hitherto unseen civic participation through corporate action with relatively little interference from the state. As has been shown, it was the representatives of the state corporatism tradition—i. e. the members of guilds, clans, and territorial associations with their modern associates—who resembled most closely a sort of civil society: for a brief time, these groups occupied an arena that transcended family and business networks and that escaped close supervision by the (weak) state. But why did these societal-*cum*-political actors let go of the chance to seize the reins and translate their corporatist traditions into something like a societal corporatism, or even a civil-society way of interacting with the state? Why did they let themselves be incorporated into the Nationalist government with so little resistance?

First, incorporation did not in fact take place smoothly.¹⁷ People were threatened and assassinated; there was a real danger in obstructing the way of the Guomindang. Second, the actors involved perceived both internal and external threats that compelled them to subordinate their quest for autonomy to the aims of any nation

state that was not dominated by the Communists or the Japanese. To most members of the gentry-merchant alliance, the Communists presented a potential danger to social order and harmony. Japanese aggression, on the other hand, was not only experienced as humiliating, painful, and cruel but was also judged to lead to the extinction of Chinese culture. In this light, the Guomindang seemed to constitute the least of the three evils. Finally, in the eyes of these activists, state and government were never meant to leave as large a space for civic action as had been the case during this “golden age.” As golden as this age might look in retrospect, at the time, the actors had been much more concerned about how weak the state was and how this fragility resulted in turmoil and chaos. These activists saw their work not as governing on behalf of the state, but en lieu of the state; they considered their engagements a temporary task that would, and should, soon be retaken by a capable government. These actors were willing to carry this responsibility on their shoulders for a limited time span, and indeed, joining forces in the Democratic League in 1941 was a clear sign of this willingness. However, the hegemonic image in the actors' minds was that of a strong nation-state. Although, as has been shown, during these less than two decades, diverse associations and interest groups were infiltrating and incorporating the government, these practices did not match with corresponding social representations (at least not among the majority of actors within CAVE). In these representations, taking public action was seen as a common, but nonetheless exceptional activity: exceptional in that it contradicted the state's supremacy; common in that this supremacy seldom converted into social reality.

This imagined, and acted upon, supremacy of power leads to a final question: Does the term *corporatism*—or *state corporatism*—suffice to denote Chinese state-

society (or government-business) interaction? A state-corporatist view of state-society interaction seems to be peculiarly void of ideology even though ideology appears to be the decisive factor of defining what Chinese state-society interaction actually is. As David Yang (2004: 6) notes, corporatism in Schmitter's sense can do without ideology if the state merely wishes to manage the aggregation and articulation of interests. By contrast, in contemporary China—and one may very well add in Guomindang China—the state aims to simultaneously manage, define and monopolize the articulation of interest.¹⁸ While corporate actors may have seized or been endowed with the task of accomplishing public acts, the ultimate construal of what this public act constitutes for society stays within the domain of the state. This domain was only diffusely delineated during the Warlord era: for a short time, there existed multiple, and equally legitimate, ways of interpreting the needs of society. When the Guomindang succeeded in assuming power, this multiplicity was reduced to a prescribed uniformity. Still, as it is also characteristic of present-day Chinese state-society interaction, this uniformity is characterized by incorporating a multiplicity of actors and organizations – who are, however, subjected to a monophonic interpretation of society.

Notes

1. “Chineseness” is understood here as the countrywide project of constructing a unified cultural identity through writing and rituals, which Chinese elites had been engaged in over centuries. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, this project

was fused with efforts to install a nationally defined Chinese identity; see e.g.

Herrmann-Pillath (1996: 19).

2. For an extensive study on this association, see Schulte (2008).

3. The chambers grew rapidly in number from thirteen in bigger cities to more than one-hundred in smaller towns and thirteen overseas in 1908. By 1912 there were 1,200 of such chambers with a quarter million members in total (see Fewsmith 1983: 637).

4. Also quoted (with slight deviations) in Schmitter (1974: 100).

5. A notable exception is Margaret Pearson's study, which devotes a separate chapter to the Chinese guilds (1997: 44-64).

6. Carsun Chang spent some time studying and teaching in Germany and became familiar with different European interpretations and traditions of "modernization" including those of the Italian and German corporate tradition. See also Jeans (1997).

7. Each of the years between 1903 and 1908 witnessed the building of twenty-one new factories on average, and this number doubled between 1913 and 1915.

Between 1916 and 1919, an additional 125 factories were set up annually. Half of all Chinese factories were situated in Shanghai (see Qian and Liu 1998: 89; Liu 2006).

8. On the pragmatism debate, see Schulte (2008: 89-97).

9. As stated in CAVE's founding manifesto in 1917 (*Jiaoyushe* 1917: 7).

10. The article was originally published on November 12, 1931, in the newspaper *Shenbao*.

11. For a more detailed professional and networking profile of CAVE, see Schulte (2008). A condensed summary can be found online in Schulte (2010).
12. The article was originally published in the journal *Xin Jiaoyu* 7, 2/3 (1923).
13. Besides Huang Yanpei, the other five members were the above-mentioned Tao Xingzhi, the eminent publisher Shi Jiaxiu (1879-1934), the Japan-educated journalist and diplomat Zhu Baokang (1881-1942), the Guomindang member and local politician Pan Gongzhan (1894-1975), and the journalist Zhao Shuyong (1891-?).
14. For an overview of the publishing landscape, see also Wagner (2007).
15. On this village-ism, see Shao (2004).
16. In Figure 2.1, a connection between two sectors was created if more than one-third of those working in one sector were also active in the other. It thus illustrates only large overlaps, not every single connection.
17. Strangely, Dillon and Oi do not consider this even though their edited volume points to many instances of physical violence, with one chapter entirely devoted to one of the most well-known mafiosi, Du Yuesheng: Martin (2008).
18. Thus, the corporatist project, as Yang states, “may be no more than a new institutional strategy for social mobilisation” (2004: 7).

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