A Revolution Against and for Public Sphere: Xin Hai Revolution’s Different Force on ‘Place’, also ‘Di Fang’

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Published online: 10 August 2022

INTRODUCTION

The context of Public Sphere in China

In Chinese, 城市 (Cheng Shi [referring to cities or urban areas] is a compound word, ‘Cheng’ (城) represents a military defence facility, originally walls (like Great Wall, 长城) to prevent external forces from invading, but ‘Shi’ (市) is a market where economic transactions take place (like grass market, 草市). Cheng and Shi can exist completely independently of each other. These have been the two contradictory shaping forces of cities in post-Tang China. Based on the history of European cities, Weber (1962) analyses the long-lasting contribution of democracy of urban commercial activities. ‘Manor society’ (or Manorialism) and ‘market system’ just summed up these two forces. All exchange activities in the military lord’s manor must be involved by him, and only the lord can provide instructions and protection, which strengthens and exhibits his position in any activity, then the system; In the market, buyers and sellers negotiated based on self-government and excluded outsider of its process and outcome. For instance representatives of the guilds and business groups of the Republic of Florence actually controlled the governance of the city, which enhanced the characteristic of Florence as a commercial city and a democratic republic.

The earliest thinker who tried to conceptualize the term ‘public sphere’ was Habermas (1991). He gives a definition on the function and ontology of the public sphere: it is not a private space (such as a private house), nor is it a space of state or national power (court or parliament) but in the ‘middle’ of it; it is not affected by the regime’s power, but instead where criticize of the regime occurs. Salons and cafes in France, for example, are important public domains where ideas for change are brewed. But human geography scholar Cresswell (2004) reminds us that ‘sphere’ or ‘space’ are description through the process of ‘abstraction’. When using concepts such as commercial, regimes, public sphere or power, the characteristic of individuals and their experience that cannot be abstracted is ignored. Public sphere is initiative from people’s enthusiasm for publicity and public activities. ‘Like and actively use’ is the fundamental force that makes the public sphere a reality. This highly depends on the feature of the person. Cresswell uses ‘place’ to describe the geographical environment including ‘people’ and ‘person’, which is exactly ‘Di Fang’ (地方) in Chinese. In his opinion, places are not only objectively existing neighbourhoods, villages or towns, cities, but also a historical unit that divides the world, from this world composed of places, viewers can also see people or person’s emotional attachment and connection to places. Accordingly, because places are inclusive of viewers life experiences and interpersonal interactions, places never completes. Therefore, if combined with the concept of ‘place’ or Di Fang, the necessary conditions of Habermas’s ‘public sphere’, such as not being affected by the regime, criticizing the regime, and self-government through internal consultation, are also just a part of the outcomes in the unfinished ‘place’, rather than perfect assessing standards on publicity.

As noted earlier, commercial transactions, political intervention, and folklore, entertainment all jointly shape the public sphere. Si-yen Fei’s historical research on urban expansion (Nanjing) in the late Ming Dynasty is a typical case, for its Beijing court tried to convert ‘public labour obligations’ (Yao Yi, 徵役) into ‘obligations to tax’ in forms of land and crops, so how did urban residents without land pay taxes was unable to determine, this made local officials indulge or even support unfettered citizens’ ‘overstepping’ activities in order to avoid trouble and ensure political achievements. However, the citizen class in the late Ming Dynasty made full use of the unclear rules, they greatly influenced the agenda of commercial regulations, local religions, the dismantling of city walls, and even administrative divisions through protest and negotiation. Therefore, the public domain of the city in the late Ming Dynasty was not only the result of a superficial struggle against the political system, but also of cooperations with many powerful officials. The result of implicit cooperation. Business development, civic identity and political power are not confronted with clear boundaries as in Habermas’s concept, but fully cooperated to realize the publicity of the city. Si-yen Fei agrees with the concrete ‘place’ replaces
the abstract ‘sphere’ to understand the urban publicity of China around 1911 Revolution.

Therefore, with the background of the '1911 Revolution' and local characteristics, the identifying of urban public sphere should be discussed in two stages: from a purely ‘public sphere’ to a ‘power that influences politics’.

and whether this power will ‘backlash’ or ‘back feed’ in addition to the original public interaction.

Namely, the historical variables affecting the outcome in these two stages. Therefore, a historical common sense is that the outbreak and completion of the Revolution of 1911 has always been divided between the northern and southern groups of powerholders in China. The revolutionaries (Tong Meng Hui) in the south and the independent provinces confronted the military leaders of the Qing Dynasty in the north and the final solution depended on the peace talks between the north and the south. The military leaders were willing to cooperate with the revolutionaries to end the Qing Dynasty and established the Republic of China. Therefore, the impact of the 1911 Revolution on the southern and northern cities should also be discussed in different categories. I chose Chengdu (成都) in the south and Peiping (北京) in the north as cases.

**Chengdu: Backlash caused by Confrontation**

Civil society in Sichuan has a long history. A British missionary from Friends' Foreign Mission Association, Robert J. Davidson (Chinese name was 董僑新), settled twice and worked in Chengdu (around 1898-1890 & 1900-1905). His first local experiences are recorded in In his book Life in West China: 1905). His first local experiences are recorded in In his autobiography: In the summer of 1911, Wang Di (2019) quoted a description from Elisabeth Comber's (韩素音) autobiography: In the summer of 1911, the police inevitably become the monitors and controllers of public activities. For example, the police will hang a ‘surveillance household’ sign on the door of a person who has no evidence to prove a crime but is suspected of breaking the law. In this period, nationalist revolutionaries were another force. Many of them had the background of studying in Japan, were infected by its strong national consciousness, and strongly rejected Manchu rule. Peng Jia Zhen (彭家珍), who was born and raised in Chengdu, used a suicide attack to kill Liang Bi, a Manchu aristocrat and power minister in Beijing; Long Ming Jian, mentioned above, who was also born in Sichuan and lived in Chengdu around 1906, mentioned in the footnotes of his poems that Chengdu at that time was called ‘Little Paris of the Orient’ in some French travel notes. From these circulating figures, the public sphere and public life were hardly excluded from the characteristics of Chengdu by European tourists at that time. And internal materials of Chinese, such as the diary of Zhang Ji Xin (张集薰), the governor of Sichuan during the Dao Guang (道光) period, stated in his personal records that in teahouses, ‘there was a land transaction presided over by government officials, and both parties could bypass the approval of local government.’ Geographically, almost every alley in Chengdu around 1909 had teahouses (out of 516 alleys in total, 454 had teahouses). That is to say, from Dao Guang period to the last eve of the 1911 Revolution, the teahouses widely distributed in Chengdu were already part of the locality, and their activities even partially replaced the government’s power to adjudicate and notarize transactions. It has also become a place where officials, internal and external religions, and the civil and secret society carried out extensive activities and competed for influence, which was far earlier than the role of the 1911 Revolution.

The transformation from the 1911 Revolution on Chengdu’s public sphere was that it disseminated the ‘place’ that supported diverse groups to carry out public activities and intensified the conflicts among them. An important variable is the modern police system. Zeng Chun,Xuan (曾春煊), the governor of the late Qing Dynasty who actively advocated westernization, established the Sichuan Provincial Police Headquarters in Chengdu in 1903. He explained to the imperial court the problems that he thought needed to be solved, such as the mess of population and household registration, problems of social violence, along with numerous and close exchanges between missionaries and ordinary people. In addition to improving the urban sphere, the police inevitably become the monitors and controllers of public activities. For example, the police will hang a ‘surveillance household’ sign on the door of a person who has no evidence to prove a crime but is suspected of breaking the law. In this period, nationalist revolutionaries were another force. Many of them had the background of studying in Japan, were infected by its strong national consciousness, and strongly rejected Manchu rule. Peng Jia Zhen (彭家珍), who was born and raised in Chengdu, used a suicide attack to kill Liang Bi, a Manchu aristocrat and power minister in Beijing; Long Ming Jian, mentioned above, who was also born in Sichuan and studied in Japan, organized violent revolutions in Chengdu many times and participated in the road protection movement. Strong nationalism made it impossible for the revolutionaries to compromise with the Manchu rulers.

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teahouses. The role of the police was highly politicized by this time, arresting people with other accents and encouraging people to report rebellions among each other; conversations in teahouses moved beyond civil issues and became places of incitement. In 1911, the anti-government road protection movement organized by the revolutionaries broke out in Chengdu, which led to a bloody incident on September 4. Duan Fang (端方), the ruler of Sichuan, was killed by the revolutionaries of 1911 three months later. What Elisabeth described was just the scene on the eve of the movement, and as the provincial capital that first responded to the 1911 Revolution, its public life was already full of political anxiety and unstable.

The ‘place’ on which the public sphere rests disintegrate in the anxiety and panic caused by the violent confrontation. The outbreak of the 1911 Revolution did not address the source of anxiety. An important piece of evidence is that the police system has continued and become more politicized. The new police posted revolutionary posters and portraits of Sun Yat-sen in teahouses, and still monitored speeches against the revolution; The confrontation before the 1911 Revolution was a confrontation between political forces, but later turned to a reformist confrontation of local traditions. Local newspapers at that time highlighted the public’s dissatisfaction with the 1911 Revolution, because the new regime pre-levied taxes and confiscated land. This kind of confrontation is more reflected in public life, and because the Sichuan military government established by the Revolution of 1911 adopted institutional controls on political gatherings before the revolution, speeches must be reported to the military government and can only be carried out after passing the preview. The audience participating in the speech cannot include religious figures (monks, priests), students, teachers, and all women. It can be said that the revolutionaries of 1911 very likely deprived them of the promised public freedom.

As a city with a long tradition of public spheres in Sichuan, how people in their ‘places’ perceive the public sphere is crucial to the existence of the latter. After the Revolution of 1911 intensified internal confrontation, the political power born in its public sphere had a backlash against the public sphere itself.

**Peking: the Political Anxiety Dispelled**

As the capital (Beijing) of the Qing Dynasty, Peiping was highly sensitive politically. Peiping, like Chengdu, had teahouses for chatting, but because it was the center of power and control, there were not many records of Peiping’s civil society, especially political ones. Like Chengdu, pre-1911 Beijing was also under tension. However, since the political centre shifted to the south after the revolution, the changes in its public sphere showed the opposite trend to that of Chengdu.

The most obvious evidence lies in the expansion of freedom of movement in cities and the reduction of restricted areas. After the Revolution of 1911, the national government consciously transformed Peiping from a political city to a cultural one. For example, the Temple of Heaven, the Summer Palace, and many areas in the imperial city were opened as public parks to demonstrate the progress of the ‘Republic’. Qing Dynasty Beijing official Yun Yu ding (尹士鼎) expressed his frustration and indignation in his poems when he saw that the “rules and regulations” of the Qing Dynasty were broken and the former imperial forbidden area was full of civilian tourists; And newspapers editors praise for the progress of the ‘public domain’. Regardless of the attitudes, in fact, because of the Revolution of 1911 and the deliberate intervention of its leaders, its political constraints have been greatly reduced. From 1913 to 1931, citizen groups of Peiping protested against the lack of openness of the Forbidden City, handing on petition for further attention to Peiping’s status as a ‘cultural city’.

The opening of the space has gradually lifted the restrictions imposed by political anxiety on the public sphere, then the people of Peiping have also adapted to and recognized the reality of the public sphere, forming their own Di Fang by a more public mean; until the Japanese invasion in 1937.

**Conclusion**

Although the Revolution of 1911 was a nationwide regime change, due to the different geographical and political factions of the participants, it had completely different effects on the public sphere in different cities. In areas where the public domain was already a traditional, conflicts within the domain have intensified, leading to the disintegration of the common place consciousness, and the phenomenon of backlash the public domain; Slowly the political anxieties were lifted, and there was a development of the public sphere and civic culture. From a local perspective, the Revolution of 1911 had a possible ‘betrayal’ of the public sphere. Those mother bodies that conceived it, the streets, theatres and teahouses in the southern provinces, were backlashed by it; The power to feed them back, on the contrary, was to the political cities full of fortified areas. The cause of this inversion resulted from different approaches that cities included into the 1911 revolution, those without a force to balance radical groups and opinions have no condition to maintain the internal compromise within public sphere, leads to the disintegration of place or Di Fang, which seriously collapse the foundation of public sphere; however, the north cities was gradually and indirectly influenced by the revolution, both groups were kept restrain to domain those cities, so their effort were more on beneficial policy but not political power. The latter ‘back feed’ phenomenon were just similar to the situation of southern cities long before the 1911 revolution.

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