“Conversations on Chinese Travel, Politics, and Lives in Europe During the 1920's"
Brief Project Summary

Modern China has experienced numerous transformations since the mid-nineteenth century, including reforms and revolutions. The overthrow of the Qing dynasty in 1911 and establishment of a republic fostered an era of intense patriotism, activism, and reflection. Twentieth century China was immersed in continual political, social, and cultural ferment. The creation of the People's Republic of China in 1949 did not halt the march of political movements. One important cohort of the Post-WWI generation of Chinese youth were those who voyaged to France. A complex set of situational determinants sharply etched their political landscape including: 200,000 Chinese workers in France and Belgium during WWI, over 1,600 Chinese youth who traveled to France in a Work-Study Movement between 1919-21, the growth of the New Culture Movement that created one of the most vibrant eras of thought and dialog (1915-1921), and a growing warlordism and decentralization in China. These factors all resulted in dramatic personal choices for Chinese youth abroad. Between 1922-24, five Chinese political parties were formed in France, Germany, and Belgium and political actions emerged that included robust propaganda agitation resulting in the recruitment of over 3,200 party members. There also were Chinese youth who made decisions to follow the path of social reform and returned to China to work within the system of politics and academe. Based on extensive interviews, archival materials, and previous scholarship, this research project will examine the political and cultural transformations of the European Chinese cohort through the lens of biography. This project focuses on Chinese political and cultural activists through numerous interviews that were conducted in China, and collected materials from Asia and Europe, that include their writings, French police reports and captured documents, university records, interview notes, photographs, and other resources.
The project involves transcription into Chinese and English translation of 64 digitized audio files, over 58 hours of interviews from 40 sessions that include three tiers of interviews and discussion, that were conducted in 1985 and 1990:

1. Interviews of Chinese political participants in Europe during the 1920s
2. Chinese Scholars Conversations and Interviews
3. Tsinghua University Conversations and Lectures

In addition, there are extensive personal notes to the interviews, conversations, and ca. 600 photographs that will be put into discrete digital albums alongside the sound file, transcription, and translations. These materials will be utilized in collaboration with colleagues at Tsinghua University and Hong Kong Baptist University. By mid-June 2017 we anticipate completing a first rough draft transcription for tier one and tier two interviews, and a beginning on tier three materials.

These materials will be made available to interested scholars. It is anticipated that there are numerous areas for international scholars to utilize these tapes, transcriptions, and translations. To name a few:

1. Individual biographical studies and biographical theories
2. Collective biographies and biographical theories
3. Chinese political party formations and activities in Europe
4. CCP historiography
5. History of Tsinghua University in the 1980s and the recovery of the Social Science disciplines