

## **“The Chinese Labor Corps during World War I: prelude to political and cultural activism”**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The Chinese Labor Corps (CLC) who served the Europeans during World War I felt they were building their own country's capacity for economic development and contributing to world peace and the betterment of all humanity. Unlike the colonized peoples of India, Africa, and Southeast Asia, the Chinese workers often were seen as the most reliable and industrious workers and given the most difficult tasks. Within the CLC there was an array of issues that extended from literacy training, alcoholism, labor strikes, and cross-cultural transformation. The CLC during the war and immediately afterwards served as a key bridge to educational and political activism in the Chinese communities in France, Germany and Belgium.

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World War I (WWI) was a turning point in world history for many reasons ranging from the high toll of dead and wounded, issues of mechanization, the trauma of the extended trench warfare, and post-war socio-political impacts. One key element in the fighting of the war – often overlooked – is the role of colonial and non-colonial allies in providing labor to the war front. One such group of laborers were the Chinese Labor Corps (CLC). With death tolls reaching as high as 170,000 lives lost in a month, the Entente troops needed non-combatant labor so they could deploy their military troops. Thus, after protracted negotiations, in addition to other groups, France and Britain recruited Chinese laborers to help fill the severe manpower shortage required by the war. The Chinese Labor Corps had high hopes and ethics as seen in song lyrics: "*Marchons, marchons toujours! Les hommes sont frères. Une armée nombreuse de travailleurs se levé pour le labeur et reconstruira, pour toi, humanité, l'édifice de la Paix* (Le Temps, Septembre 1919, no. 30)!"

This paper will contextualize the CLC experience in terms of Chinese labor and student recruitment to France, before the war; the development and experiences of the CLC during the war; and the post-war impacts of the CLC experience. It certainly could be argued that of any Western country, France provided an environment that generated the most dynamic political environment for the Chinese, that ranged in the post-war period from political demonstrations to political party formations.

### **I. Cultural and Educational Preludes to the Chinese Labor Corps**

In his careful study of the CLC, Chen Sanjing makes the point that a demand for Chinese labor existed well before the outbreak of war (Chen Sanjing, 1986; also see Yen Ching-Hwang, 1985). A lower European birthrate and the proverbial industriousness of the Chinese created a demand for Chinese workers. France was seen as a compatible country by educated Chinese in the early Republican period because of France's high culture, secular government, and egalitarianism. For example, societies were formed during the first part of the twentieth century to promote intercultural interchange. At the founding of one such society, the *Association amicale franco-chinoise* in Paris on 24 May 1907, Liu Sheshun, the Minister to France from China remarked on these cultural affinities:

In China as in France, we have the cult of our ancestors. In China as in France, we place all pride of honor in our scholars, our philosophers, our poets, and our patriots. In China as in France, we have a profound love of productive peace and moralizing endeavors. We also practice solidarity and social foresight and the family virtues that are so honored in the West and particularly in France (“Discours de

son Excellence M. le Ministre de Chine,” Bulletin de l'Association amicale franco-chinoise 1, July 1907, 18).

In addition to exchanges based on culture and higher education, there were attempts to create a new class of modern Chinese citizenry. Chinese leaders, such as Li Shizeng (1881-1973), Wu Zihui (1864-1953), Wang Jingwei (1883-1944) and Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) promoted some of the earliest exchanges. These four educators were early subscribers to anarchism and later became prominent in the Guomindang (Chinese Nationalist Party). In particular, Li Shizeng, who graduated from the *École pratique du Chesnoy* in Montargis, had founded a printing house, a soybean factory, and helped establish the Frugal Study Society (*Jianxue hui*). The latter, founded in February 1912, was a movement that set up preparatory schools in China and succeeded in sending three batches of students to France, until interrupted by the dangers of the First World War. The idea was to promote frugal study and western learning to help in building the Chinese nation. This idea was later to be expanded in the Work-Study Movement discussed below.

## **II. The First World War and the Chinese Labor Corps**

After the outbreak of war in 1914, the Chinese government remained neutral, but was looking for a way to join the war. Diplomatic barriers, the role of Japan as a Western ally, and the newness of the Chinese republic played important roles among other issues in deferring Chinese involvement in World War I at the early stages of the war. However, influential leaders, especially those with strong French ties like the financial expert Liang Shiyi (Liang Yansun), advocated a policy of sending workers instead of soldiers (*yi gong dai bing*) in order to support the Allies without committing military troops. According to Liang's rationale, making a contribution to the war effort would certainly give China some leverage in postwar negotiations. The negotiations for Chinese labor by the French, British, and American governments were rather protracted, and the work battalions did not see service until 1917. But their numbers eventually grew to enormous proportions, reaching between 175,000 and 200,000. It should be mentioned that currently there are sources that claim these numbers reached 136,000 to 145,000. Because new documents have been discovered in Weihai, and more probably are waiting to be discovered in other archives in China, the actual numbers of CLC participants need to be correlated with the European archival information to determine an authoritative figure.<sup>1</sup>

The CLC laborers had three to five-year contracts negotiated by a Chinese syndicate and later by the Chinese Emigration Bureau. The Chinese laborers under the British worked in industries and agriculture until August 1917 but never in Britain due to labor union insistence. After August 1917, when China declared war on Germany, large sections were transferred to work for the British army. The Americans also used the Chinese as physical laborers. The war-related tasks performed by the Chinese in France included employment in digging trenches, building aerodromes, loading and unloading transports, working in chemical laboratories, the manufacturing of guns, airplanes, and paper, construction work, and mining. The French also assigned the Chinese to rebury the dead in destroyed districts. After the war the CLC workers helped in the dangerous work of clearing the minefields.

The CLC-negotiated contracts provided for a salary of one to two francs per day, with more pay for

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1. I am giving the figure calculated by Chen Sanjing, whose very complete survey of the CLC utilizes extensive archival sources (Chen Sanjing, 1986, 34-35). According to Ta Chen, there were about 150,000 Chinese laborers, Ta Chen, 1923): 142-47. Ta Chen's 1923 monograph, of which chap. 9 deals with the CLC, is the best account of the CLC in English. Newer accounts of 145,000 CLC participants are presented in a nine-part CCTV series, and are in part based on Chinese archival discoveries; The 136,000 figure is primarily presented by British War Museum historians.

hazardous or skilled labor. The British had a lower pay scale, and they also put aside half of the wages to be remitted to the worker families in China. In general, the British tended to maintain the labor camps under military discipline, whereas the French treated the laborers as civilians (Scott, 1980, 8-13; Ta Chen, 1923, 147-49). Issues of medical compensation and liability for injuries and death were issues that were slowly resolved, if at all (Chen Sanjing, 1986, 102-3).

Although the majority of the CLC worked in the north and northeast of France, it was the British who employed the most Chinese. According to Peter Scott, by the end of the war there were 195 companies of the CLC attached to the British Expeditionary Force, 57 companies of Indians, 42 companies of South Africans, and 16 companies of Egyptians. Although the warfront work was dangerous and stressful, of the foreign labor corps, the Chinese were the least disturbed by warfare bombardments and also the most efficient. "By the end of the war, and for some considerable time thereafter, virtually all the cranes in Calais, Dieppe, Havre, Rouen and Zeneghem were operated by Chinese crane drivers (Scott, 1980, 11-13)." Participation in the CLC was not without physical danger and CLC participants suffered casualties on the trip to Europe, several ships were destroyed carrying the Chinese battalions, and in bombardments close to the front, or through disease and influenza. The figures for the number of CLC participants who died varies greatly in the literature from 1,600-1,800 (see for example, Fawcett, 2000, p.18) to 20,000 dead (Ji Xiaojun, 2009).

As might be expected there were also CLC misunderstandings and adaptation problems. According to Judith Blick, in their free time the laborers sometimes gambled with their surplus wages, which prompted efforts to establish savings associations. A second problem was alcoholism. Finally, there was the frequenting of prostitutes and the prevalence of venereal disease.<sup>2</sup> More importantly were the cultural clashes and misunderstandings, including stereotypes and racist attitudes that would emerge. Judith Blick has characterized the attitude of the British and French toward the CLC participants as paternalistic: "They described their charges as being passive, goodnatured, playful, affectionate, but usually untrustworthy. Their feelings were heavily tinged with bewilderment, amusement and at the same time, real contempt for what they considered to be the childishness of the coolie. (Blick, 1955, 124)" The Chinese laborers often resented their treatment, especially by the British, and between 1916 and 1918 there were twenty-five strikes. Most of these resulted from simple misunderstandings due to differences in language and custom, but there were also strikes based on contract violations. (Ta Chen, 1923, 150-51; Blick, 1955, 128-30)

The Chinese laborers in France gained many social and educational benefits. In his comparative study, Ta Chen claimed:

Never before in the history of Chinese labor abroad had the social welfare of the workers been so well looked after as was done in France. This work was done chiefly under the direction of the Y.M.C.A., many of whose workers among the Chinese were themselves Chinese . . . . The work done by the Y.M.C.A. among the Chinese was along social, recreational, and educational lines. Canteens were established . . . . Recreation in the form of moving pictures, concerts, theatricals, games, athletics, etc., was provided . . . . A Chinese weekly was issued . . . . Evening classes were formed in a variety of subjects . . . . When the Chinese first arrived in France, only about 20 percent were literate, but toward the end of 1921, when the educational work had been going on for over two years, this figure had risen to about 38 percent.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Blick, 1955, p. 122; Blick characterized the venereal disease rate as 20 percent which is accepted by Chen, 1986, p.138.

3. Ta Chen, *Chinese Migrations*, 153-54.

Work with the CLC built upon an ongoing concern for the educational benefit of Chinese workers in Europe. In 1916, the Chinese Labor School (*Huagong xuexiao*) was established. It was funded with 10,000 francs and begun with twenty-four students. Prominent Chinese educators assisted with the teaching. For example, Cai Yuanpei gave forty lectures covering a wide range of subjects at the school.<sup>4</sup> Available statistics for the years 1917-18 reveal an effort by the workers to improve themselves. The Chinese Labor Magazine (*Huagong zazhi*) was only circulated among 100 workers in May 1917, but it increased its readership by the middle of 1918 to 30,000. Chinese attending science, French, and Chinese literacy classes numbered 20,000 by July 1918 (FUFA, 1:252-55). Educational classes and Chinese newspapers were available and social activities were organized inside the CLC camps. The impact of labor education was key to the development of Chinese intellectuals such as Yang Yanchu (James Yan), who developed techniques to teach Chinese basic literacy. He later dedicated his life to educating the peasants in rural China, but began his life's work in the CLC labor camps of France (Hayford, 1990).

Not only was educating the CLC seen as an opportunity to extend education to the common people, but it was also a preemptive tactic against the adoption of corrupt habits. As one student urged in the American-published *Chinese Students' Monthly*, "Shall we let these fellow-countrymen of ours be corrupted and return after the war a menace to the general welfare of our home communities, or shall we now extend to them a helping hand? (April 1918, 327)"

The overall impact of the French experience on the members of the CLC is difficult to assess. Ta Chen indicated that the overall experience of the Chinese laborers had deleterious effects on their lives. He quoted an excerpt from a letter of a YMCA worker:

One would be more inclined to think that their stay abroad has done them more harm than good. They lived in abnormal conditions in France and had a comparatively easy life. On coming home they generally look for the kind of work that requires less exertion and yields greater profit. This, of course, is not easily found, and consequently they are a dissatisfied lot. True, their eyes were opened to newer things and their needs were enlarged, but their ability did not grow proportionately. (Ta Chen, 1923, 157-58)

Current research does not support a view of the life of the CLC participants as "easy." In comparison to the hardships of the peasantry at home, some of their conditions and their rations may have been better, but this was balanced by the danger of the front, the dislocation to a different culture, and the rigor of the work they did perform.

### III. Post-War Repatriation and Legacies of the CLC

Demobilization of the CLC was a prodigious task that lasted over two to three years, as the Chinese often wanted to work until the end of their contracts.<sup>5</sup> In addition, between 10,000 and 30,000 laborers remained and renewed their contracts. According to one newspaper, in 1921 there were still 17,171 war workers in France.<sup>6</sup>

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4. For a list of the forty lectures see Chen Sanjing, 1986,126-27

5. E.g., see the report by O. S. Moss, "Demobilization of the Chinese Labour Corps," 31 October 1920, PRO, FO 37116602 2509/33/10, 1-13.

6. An interesting last issue of a newspaper, which was probably called *The Awakened Lion* ([1 January 1921]: 8). Just this one issue of *Yishui xingshi* [The already sleeping awakened lion] is in AD série E, Chine, vol. 49.

Directly after the war, Chinese laborers in France, particularly in Paris, played an important role in the protest that took place during the Versailles Treaty, which clearly ignored the contribution of the CLC, by giving over the Shandong Peninsula to the Japanese. Chinese workers and students surrounded the Chinese officials in protests, and ultimately the Versailles treaty was not signed by the Chinese government.

The services of the CLC were crucial to the war effort, but Chen Sanjing is correct in concluding that this contribution to the Allied effort had little diplomatic reward for China. The Allies paid very little attention to China's interests at Versailles in 1919, giving the Japanese the previously German-occupied territory of the Shandong Peninsula (Chen Sanjing, 1986, 189-90). For example, when it was suggested in the British demobilization report that some Chinese officials receive decorations from the British, the eventual negative decision was influenced by opinions of an interdepartmental debate that included comments such as the "Chinese government were obstructive throughout the war. The coolie scheme was put through despite their opposition . . . . the Chinese government deserves no recognition whatsoever."<sup>7</sup> In a very real sense, the establishment of the CLC was a misguided calculation from the perspective of advancing China's foreign policy objectives. However, in the longer view of a historical lens, the CLC provided some key bridges for both political and cultural endeavors.

A Returned Laborers' Union was formed in China. Although Blick concedes that this was one of the first modern unions organized in China, she claims it was out of touch with the labor issues of the time: "The direction that the Chinese labor movement took after the war varied considerably from that taken by the Returned Laborers' Union (Blick, 1955, 132)." However, Chow Tse-tsung claims that this Returned Laborers' Union was quite important to the Chinese labor movement, becoming "the backbone of the new labor movement [in Shanghai] .... In Canton alone, twenty-six modern unions were organized by such returnees in 1919. These were considered the first Chinese labor unions in the modern Western sense. Unions of this kind in Canton increased to 130 in the following year. (Chow Tse-tsung, 1960, 256)."

Many of the laborers who remained in France organized themselves into the Chinese Labor Union (*Huagong hui*) in January 1920. There were thirty-six sections with over 6,000 members. The major activities were to protect the rights of the Chinese laborers and to extend their education (over thirty schools were started). In the light of the spreading Work-Study Movement, many wanted to be released from their contracts in order to convert to "free labor." Another goal of the union was to encourage virtuous behavior with restrictions on prostitution, gambling, drinking, and opium.<sup>8</sup>

Another organization that undertook to protect Chinese labor interests was the Association Générale des Travailleurs Chinois en France (*Liu Fa canzhan Huagong zonghui*). In 1925 it petitioned for compensation for injuries sustained during the war and for the erection of monuments and made other demands (Chen Sanjing, 1986, 156-57). Thus, as political developments in the Chinese community accelerated and focused during the early twenties, the Chinese laborers provided a rallying point for radical activity, especially in terms of trying to abolish the contracts made during the war. The CLC also provided a body of potential activists, which the European Branch of the Chinese Community Party, established in 1924, was able to mobilize effectively.

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7. See the Minutes preceding Moss, "Demobilization of the Chinese Labor Corps."

8. Bali Huagong hui" [The Parisian Chinese Labor Union], and "Liu Fa Huagong gonghui jianzhang" [Guidelines for the travel to France Chinese Labor Union], *Xin qingnian* 7 (1 May 1920): 1-7.

However, it is more difficult to judge the consequences of the CLC as an intercultural endeavor. We have seen that many Chinese developed both technical and intellectual skills. There also were significant political ramifications both for the China returnees and for the Chinese community in France. Finally, there were French who were responsive to the presence of the CLC phenomenon, both in a material sense as an aid in winning the war, and also in the educational sense of overcoming some cultural barriers. One example was Louis Grillet, one of the French officers who took over the direction of the CLC in China from Colonel Truptil.<sup>9</sup> He wrote a fascinating paper in 1918 in which he was excited about the cultural developments occurring in China, paying special attention to the influence of Cai Yuanpei, "who had a deep knowledge of economy and industry." Grillet believed that China's economic potential was bound to be developed and suggested that the French should help foster this economic emergence through concrete economic plans and intercultural exchanges, which was a restatement of the philosophy of the Sino-French Educational Association (SFEA) founded in 1916. In a confidential section Grillet suggested a ten step plan for this cooperation. Echoing the sentiments that Minister Liu Sheshun had expressed in 1907, Grillet was convinced that France held the greatest cultural affinities with China of any Western nation:

The Chinese culture is essentially philosophical, moral, and social, and if during the [last] five centuries, from the Ming until 1905, the mode of recruitment of the scholars has stressed a literary education that is detrimental to the thought [process], this has been contrary to the aspirations of the Chinese and designed to serve the defense of the dynasties. By the same token, the essence of French culture is also completely philosophical, moral, and social; the differences are in the development of science, industry, and literature."<sup>10</sup>

Grillet concluded that French culture could inform the Chinese without threatening the integrity or independence of important Chinese values.

The post-war process of politicization of the Chinese in France was informed by the experiences of the CLC. For example, involvement in CLC education was important in shaping the perspective of Li Shizeng, Wu Zhihui, Wang Jingwei, and Cai Yuanpei. It reinforced their belief that the spheres of the intellectual and the laborer were not mutually exclusive. The culmination of a series of educational endeavors, after the war these leaders organized and promoted the travel to France Diligent-Work Frugal-Study Movement, (*Fufa qingong jianxue yundong*) [referred to as the Work-Study Movement]. They succeeded in motivating approximately 1,600 Chinese youth to travel to France between 1919 and 1921. The goal of the Chinese worker-students was to labor in the post-war, undermanned French factories and pay their own tuition to French colleges and obtain technical educations. The idea that the industrialization of China was a key to national salvation, and the concepts of mutual-aid and working with one's hands were also components of the Work-Study plan. Although effective in inspiring the Chinese youth, the economic situation in France did not really allow for the influx of Chinese worker-students, and as more youth arrived they fell into a difficult situation.<sup>11</sup>

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9. "Recrutement de travailleurs Chinois pour l'agriculture et l'industrie pendant la guerre 1914-1918," AD, série E, Chine, vols. 41, 145. Also see Chen Sanjing, 1986, 29.

10. Louis Grillet, "Note du Chef de bataillon Louis Grillet sur un plan d'action pour le développement en Chine et de l'influence de la culture françaises," 20 Novembre 1918, AD, série E, Chine, vol. 47.

11. Hundreds of Chinese worker-students had to sleep on the floor of the Chinese Federation or outside in tents donated by the American Y.M.C.A. By the beginning of 1921 the flow of Chinese worker-students was halted and tensions simmered during 1921 in a series of three struggles. The first of the three struggles, the so-called "Twenty-eighth Movement," was an attempt to gain government support for the worker-students on a large scale. A demonstration was held outside the Chinese legation, and resulted in a police dispersal of the demonstrators. Unsuccessful in achieving its goal, the Twenty-eighth

The apogée of the politicization of the Chinese in Europe, and in particular, in France, was the development of five political parties during the years 1922-1923. These political parties held serious polemics with each other and were involved in political activities in Europe as well as back in China. The exposure to European ideology and the peoples and cultures in their own context, gave them a different understanding of ideology and politics that was to influence attitudes throughout twentieth century Chinese political history.

**Table 1. Chinese political parties in Europe during the twenties.**<sup>12</sup>

Political Party	Founding Year	Activities	Major Leaders	Publications
Gongyushe, Surplus Society (Anarchist Party) [GYS]	1922	Recruitment and propaganda. Rejected the Soviet Union leadership; Famous polemics with the ECCO in 1922 [<100 members]	Li Zhuo, Hua Lin, Bi Xiushao	Gongyu, The Surplus
Zhongguo gongchandang lü Ou zhibu, European Branches of the Chinese Communist Organizations [ECCO]	1922 June and Winter	Included Youth Group and Party. Recruitment, propaganda-agitation. Conflicted with GYS and QND, United Front with EGMD (1923-27); Mass rallies and legation occupation during May 30th Movement; Major support from Chinese workers; International in scope [>500 members]	Zhao Shiyan, Zhou Enlai, Ren Zhuoxuan, Li Fuchun, Nie Rongzhen, Deng Xiaoping, Fu Zhong	Shaonian, Youth, Chiguang, The Red Light
Zhongguo shehui minzhudang, Chinese Social Democratic Party, [SDP]	1922	Recruitment and propaganda. Rejected the Soviet Union leadership; Attended international conferences. [ca. 500 members]	Wang Songlu, Yang Gengtao, Gao Chengyuan]	Fendou, The Struggle
Zhongguo guomindang lü Ou zhibu, The European Branch of the Chinese Nationalist Party, [EGMD]	1923	Recruitment and propaganda-agitation. United Front with ECCO (1923-27); Mass rallies during May 30th Movement; Major support from students and workers in factories and had some mariner branches; International in scope. [>2,000 members]	Wang Jingqi, Zhou Enlai, Fang Ditang, Long Zhanxing, Deng Xiaoping, Xia Ting, Yi Guangyi, Peng Xiang, Liu Hou, Song Guoshu, Chen Shunong, Zeng Boliang	Guomin, The Nation, Sanmin, The Three People's Principles

Movement also split the Chinese worker-student community in terms of their goals and tactics. This factionalization was halted by the second struggle of 1921, which was a unified and successful effort among the Chinese community in France to oppose a Sino-French loan agreement. Unified and militant, the worker-students organized a hundred strong vanguard to protest when it was learned in the fall of 1921 that the Sino-French Institute at Lyons was about to open, but that Chinese worker-student matriculation would be limited. This vanguard of worker-students who went to Lyons would not vacate a dormitory and were arrested. These worker-students were detained and then quickly deported back to China. This third struggle, the "Lyons Incident" symbolized a new phase in Chinese radical politics in Europe. Although many stayed with the Work-Study agenda, there were those who, disappointed in the educational route, chose to emphasize party politics. Thus, the following few years saw the formation of several major Chinese political parties on European soil. *Selected References* at the end of this article includes resources on the Work-Study Movement and Chinese political party formation in Europe during the twenties.

12. Table and discussion from Marilyn A. Levine and Chen San-ching, "Communist-Leftist Control of the European Branch of the Guomindang, 1923-1927" *Modern China* 22:1 (January): 62-92.

Qingniandang, The Chinese Youth Party, [QND]	1923 December	Recruitment and propaganda. Had a platform similar to the United Front, but rejected both the Communists and GMD; Advocated an integral nationalism; Major activities during the May 30th Movement, including a successful anti-ECCO action by turning in names of ECCO members to the French government for expulsion. [ca. 100 members]	Zeng Qi, Li Huang, Hu Guowei, Chen Qitian	Xiansheng, The Pioneer
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#### IV. Conclusions

The history of the Chinese Labor Corps is in the realm of building bridges across cultures, with the results perhaps unanticipated. The Great War itself was a shock to the world in terms of creating a truly new world landscape in the post-war period. Among the areas of significance of the CLC, some include:

- **Contribution to the war effort.** The Chinese Labor Corps undertook enormous physical and mental challenges to aid the the Europeans during the First World War. They were key to the logistical support of the Western Front. While one naturally thinks of the impact on the Chinese and the process of the war, it also would be interesting to know how the French, British, and American troops felt to observe Chinese and other Labor Corps units in their midst.
- **Short-term defeat – long term victories.** Whether one perceives of the Versailles Conference as a diplomatic defeat for Chinese foreign policy or not, the issue of post-war influence of the CLC experience is worth noting for the larger panorama of Chinese politics, as the Returned Labor Union and other groups helped propel movements to overthrow the warlords and foreign control of Chinese industries. The issue of national reclamation and class struggle were key motifs that underlie much of the Communist revolution.
- **Cultural and educational exchanges.** An array of ongoing educational and cultural enterprises were strengthened by the CLC, particularly the Work-Study movement, as the founders were influenced by the notion of physical labor as holding an honorable and useful role in possible cultural and educational movements.
- **Political party and leadership development.** The activism of the CLC in the short space of time they resided in France carried over to the post-war situation for the Chinese who stayed in France and those who returned to China. Issues such as their contract status and the participation of Chinese factory workers in Chinese political activities in post-war France is worth remembering. The formation of five Chinese political parties on French soil during the post-war period is an amazing phenomenon. It brings the discussion full circle to the issue of cultural perceptions and why is that French political culture found such fertile ground among Chinese leaders?

In conclusion, the Chinese Labor Corps during World War I was important in the war effort, as testified to by numerous sources. The diligence and strength of the Chinese workers was important logistically to the British, French and Americans troops. Along with other foreign labor corps the Chinese made an immense contribution to the war effort. The stories and experiences of the laborers is truly a compelling story in itself. However, as a component of Chinese foreign policy, the CLC effort

clearly was not appreciated during the post-war negotiations at Versailles. The subsequent May Fourth Movement to protest the treaty, including participation in France by Chinese laborers, was an important step in the New Culture Movement that spurred Chinese intellectuals to go beyond the normal social reforms advocated by traditional Confucian behavioral modes. The development of western style unions, political parties, and ideologies was to significantly change China during the twentieth century.

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