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Transcending the Barriers: Zhang Ruoming and André Gide*

"Son abandon de soi réalise son éternité dès à présent."
—Zhang Ruoming (1930)

"L'attitude d'André Gide (Essai d'analyse psychologique)"

"Je sors qu'il me semble renaître à travers vos pages, et que je reprends conscience de mon existence grâce à vous... je ne pense pas m'être jamais senti si bien compris."
—André Gide to Zhang Ruoming (31 Janvier 1931)

The revolutionary process in China during the twentieth century has been a multihued conflagration. It has included large and small players with varying impacts. Much too often those who make contributions during pivotal movements are lost to history by the time the motion has ended. This paper is about a small player, Zhang Ruoming (1901–1958), who made an important contribution to the feminist and overall student movement during the May 4 Movement in Tianjin, and who joined the Chinese Communist Party in France during the early twenties, only to resign from the party in 1924. Zhang went on to become one of the first Chinese women to obtain a doctorate in France. She wrote a thesis at the University of Lyon on the famous French writer André Gide (1869–1951) and sent him the thesis. Gide not only read her work but in a letter

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praised her comprehension of his development and the meaning of his work. This letter was so priceless to Zhang that the Chinese edition of her work contained it as a foreword. On her return to China in the thirties, Zhang became a prominent scholar in French literature and held faculty posts in Beijing and Yunnan, until her death in 1958. For the last decade of her life, she was involved in politics, although on a minimal scale, by participating in the Chinese Democratic Alliance. But the focal point of her life was her absorption with Gide, and although her assistance to political groups was notable, especially her feminism during the May 4 Movement, this paper will concentrate on the broader significance of her relationship with Gide.

The road from China to France, from Tianjin to Lyon, from Confucius to Gide was paved by the ethos of the New Culture Movement and the growing feminist movement in China. This paper will begin by looking briefly at the point of origin of this exodus of Chinese youth to France in the twenties. Second, Zhang Ruoming's participation in the New Culture Movement will be explored. Third, the paper will cover the first half of Zhang's decade in France, with the final section concentrating on Zhang Ruoming's penetrating thesis on André Gide, which transcended the barriers of culture and generation.

I

The 1911 overthrow of the Qing dynasty not only ushered in a new cycle of political violence and uncertainty in China, but by 1915 helped to generate a new era of basic reflections on the adaptation to the modern world, known as the New Culture Movement. Chinese youth struggled to fashion a world vision based on new ideas and behaviors. Turning to the West, they explored a multitude of Western concepts, prompting an era of intellectual richness and diversity.

One of the most fascinating episodes of this period was the experiences of Chinese youth who traveled to France after World War I. After the decimation of the French male popula-
tion, there arose in China a movement to send its youth to France. These Chinese youth planned to work in the undermanned French factories in order to earn enough money to study at French colleges. They wanted to utilize Western technology to modernize China. Known as the Diligent-Work Frugal-Study Movement [Qingong jianxue yundong, hereafter referred to as the Work-Study Movement], from 1919 until the beginning of 1921, over 1,600 Chinese youth traveled to France.²

There were several basic affinities that provided the Chinese and French with real touchstones of cultural interchange such as: the preeminence of elegant language and civility; an emphasis on ritualized social behaviors; the scholar class as the epitome of the two cultures; and, concerning social structure, a fundamental emphasis on the family and village unit. In the Western world, France had often been perceived as the leader of high fashion and cuisine, and as the nation to emulate in language and culture. In the Eastern world, the social and cultural position of China was identical.

For both the Chinese and French, the confluence of mentalities was implicitly and often explicitly enunciated in the establishment of mutual organizations. For example, in the founding meeting of the Association Amicale Franco-Chinoise (1907), the Chinese Minister to France compared the shared values between the Chinese and the French:

In China, as in France, we have the cult of our glorious ancestors. In China, as in France, we place all our pride of honor in our scholars, our philosophers, our poets, and our patriots. . . In China, as in France, we have a profound love of fertile 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.³

Although the French factories were undermanned, the Chinese youth did not reckon with the economic and political dislocations brought about by World War I. The physical devastation of a war fought in France, the rising unemployment and inflation (prices tripling between 1914 and 1922, and doubling again between 1922 and 1928), the disarray of the socialists and the rise of the Parti Communiste Franciais (PCF), these were all part of the French environment in the early twenties.⁴

While these national problems existed, and perhaps in some way because of them, France also experienced a cultural revival. Paris, in particular, was a magnetic place for world culture and artistic inspiration during the twenties. Like many sojourners to France, the Chinese in France were particularly active in social and political enterprises. Youth groups that had existed in China flourished in the French environment, and several evolved into political parties that ranged from an European Branch of the Chinese Communist Youth Corps and Chinese Communist Party founded in 1922 [I collectively call these two groups the ECCO-European Branches of the Chinese Communist Organizations] to the anti-Communist Chinese Youth Party (Qingniandang) founded in 1923. Many illustrious Chinese leaders of every political persuasion formed their political convictions while in Europe. Perhaps the most famous of the expatriates were Zhou Enlai and Deng Xiaoping. However, there were many other influential leaders, including Zhu De, Chen Yi, Zhao Shaian, Wang Ruofei, Li Lisan, Cai Hesen, Xiang Jingyu, Chen Yannian, Chen Qianonian, Liu Bojian, Li Fuchun, Cai Chang, Xiao San, Li Weihan, Nie Rongzenh (ECCO); Zeng Qi, Li Huang, He Luzhi, Zuo Shunsheng, Hu Guowei (Chinese Youth Party); Ou Shengbai, Li Zhuo, and Hua Lin (Anarchists); Wang Jingqi, Guo Chuntiao, and Peng Rang (Guomindang), and many others.⁵

While the Chinese in France were sensitive to political tensions emanating from China, they were also involved in their own European experiences: traveling on new oceans, railways, and the metro, working in factories, learning an unfamiliar language, adapting to new technologies, being exposed to different cultures, and participating in the French educational milieu.

Among the many factors that influenced the intense organi-
zational atmosphere in the Chinese community in France were relations with the remaining Chinese Labor Corps laborers, who had served the allies during World War I, thousands of whom remained in France as contract laborers. Perhaps most significant were the increasing problems within the Work-Study Movement, as the numbers of Chinese youth increased by the end of 1920 and the unemployment figures for the Work-Study Movement simultaneously expanded. Thus, in 1921, there were three political struggles within the Chinese community that culminated in the Lyon Incident [September–October 1921] where 104 Chinese youth were deported for occupying a dormitory. This signaled the downfall of the Work-Study Movement and led to the political polarization of the Chinese community in France and the subsequent formation of Chinese political parties on foreign shores.

II

Zhang Ruoming was born on January 16, 1902, in Baoding, Zhili. Her father was a prominent member of the military. While Zhang was still a child he took a second wife, deeply humiliating her mother. Sympathizing with the suffering of her mother, even as a young girl, Zhang Ruoming displayed a spirit of independence. Another important family member for Zhang was her uncle, who had studied medicine in Japan and helped her attend elementary school. Beginning in 1916, she attended a girls college in Tianjin. Graduating with a certificate in education from the Tianjin Zhili First Normal Female School (Tianjin zhili di yi nüzi shifan), Zhang Ruoming was heavily involved in the New Culture Movement in Tianjin, particularly in regard to feminist issues.7

During the hectic activism of the May 4 Movement, Zhang’s activities centered on several groups. Her key concerns were not only the patriotic issues involved, but equal treatment of women. In her article “ji xianfeng” (The daring vanguard), published in January 1920, she argued that revolution was not, as Chinese tradition considered it, a bad phenomenon, but a necessity and should be considered a normal condition if the truth were to advance. Women were essential elements of the revolution, not just appendages to the men, and Zhang strongly argued for the psychological and professional equality of women and the abolition of old superstitions.

Zhang’s actions solidly supported her words. She was active in the formation of several women’s organizations, including the Nü jie aiguo tongzhihui (The association of the group of patriotic women), and the Nü ai hui (The association of patriotic women), the latter including female workers as well as women from academic circles. Zhang Ruoming was also an important founding member of the elite youth organization in Tianjin, the Juewushe (Self-Awakening society). The Self-Awakening Society was organized in September 1919 by less than a dozen youth from Tianjin. The remarkable fact was that more than half of the founders were female, unlike the original male composition of the Xinmin xuehui (New citizen’s society), or the Shaoqian Zhongguo xuehui (Young China association).

Zhang Ruoming and her female compatriots published proclamations, traveled to Beijing for supportive demonstrations, held mass meetings and rallies, organized a female speaker’s bureau, and participated in demonstrations in which several individuals were seriously injured by the police.8

Zhang Ruoming’s special organizational capacity and commitment were central to feminist as well as broader political issues during this period. According to fellow Self-Awakening Society member Chen Xiaocen, Zhang held a place on the three-person Executive Committee of the New Student Association (Xinsheng lianhui). This was one of the first male-female integrated organizations in Tianjin. In Chen’s assessment, the responsibilities of being the only female on such an important Committee were handled with diligence, attention to detail, and efficiency by Zhang Ruoming.9

By the end of 1919, Zhang was one of two people responsible for running the New Student Association, which led
to several demonstrations and imprisonments. In January 1920, Zhang Ruoming, Zhou Enlai, Guo Longzhen, and Yu Fangzou, amidst a demonstration of several thousand students who went to petition the government on behalf of students imprisoned the previous week, comprised a special delegation who were able to directly confront government officials. This resulted in their own imprisonment for a duration of almost half a year. Liu Qingyang, another strong female leader, was left on the outside to organize a nationwide protest against the student incarcerations in Tianjin.10

Prison was a dismal experience, but it strengthened the resolve of Zhang Ruoming. She resisted efforts by her father to have her recant and, instead, stayed in prison until everyone was released together on July 17, 1920.

Upon their release in mid-1920, several Self-Awakening Society members, including Zhang Ruoming, began to prepare for a new venture in the New Culture Movement quest, as they booked passage for France toward the end of 1920, arriving in January 1921. Thoughts of escaping possible government retaliation in Tianjin, and efforts by her family to force a marriage, were also instrumental motivations for Zhang Ruoming’s voyage abroad.

III

The Self-Awakening Society leaders who traveled together to France, such as Zhou Enlai, Zhang Ruoming, Liu Qingyang, Guo Longzhen, and Guan Yiwen, did not conceive of themselves as Work-Study participants but as Frugal-Study students (jianxue sheng), the designation by which they referred to themselves.11 This concept of “frugal student” as opposed to “worker-student” put a certain distance between the Self-Awakening Society members and the Work-Study participants. From the ideological standpoint prevalent in the “sacredness of labor” during the New Culture Movement, they did not utilize the factory experience as a necessary “education.” Zhou Enlai, for example, worked as a journalist, contributing numerous articles for a Catholic newspaper in Tianjin. Zhang Ruoming also contributed several articles to Chinese newspapers. The Self-Awakening Society members in France, although not themselves Work-Study participants, were originally sympathetic to the goals of the movement. However, since they arrived in France at the beginning of 1921, which was the low point of the work-study movement, it is not surprising that their writings soon expressed disillusionment with the potentialities of the work-study movement.

The members of the Self-Awakening Society remained at the periphery of the three struggles of 1921, although Zhou Enlai’s journalism was important in the summer struggle against a French loan to China. The clannish behavior of the Self-Awakening Society drew them into organizational options outside of the Work-Study Movement, although they espoused the goals of uniting with the working class. For example, writing in the spring of 1921, Zhang Ruoming mockingly held the New Culture Movement values up to close scrutiny and yet still argued for a breakdown in the barriers between the intellectual and the laborer:

The current dissemination of the New Culture Movement in China is a hodgepodge (wuhua shise); it contains every oddity. There are those who speak of “New Thought,” those who say “Democracy,” those who say “Marxism,” those who introduce “Bolshevism.” . . . [E]verything is different, but taken all together it can be called no less than the secure life of “man.” . . . We want to go one level further, not to seek the secure life for the intellectual class, and not to seek the secure life for the laboring class; the higher goal is to combine the personality of the intellectual and the laborer for everyone; there will be no so-called class, a person who is a laborer, is [also] a laborer with knowledge.12

Although she advocated enlightening the Chinese laborer, Zhang Ruoming accepted the defeated portrait of the Work-
Study Movement as early as in the spring of 1921. She trusted the judgments of the promoters of the Work-Study Movement such as Cai Yuanpei and Li Shizeng. This was in contrast with others in her organizational set. Zhou Enlai, for instance, writing in March 1921, chastized people like Cai Yuanpei for their abrogation of responsibility for the Work-Study Movement: “Mr. Cai is the President of the Sino-French Educational Association, he has been a promoter of the Work-Study Movement, he cannot but be concerned with the current matters of the Movement.” Zhang Ruoming on the other hand, accepted and echoed the negative verdict of the Work-Study participants made by these distinguished promoters, when she asserted that “it is not that the Work-Study Movement is not feasible; however, the people who have come cannot speak French, cannot find work, and cannot endure hardship, and so it has been defeated.”

Zhang Ruoming was not only skeptical of the Work-Study Movement, she also looked down upon other sectors of the Chinese community in France. For example, in her analysis of Chinese restaurants in Paris, Zhang wrote of the Zhongguo fandian (China restaurant) that it was frequented by the ruffian students (liumang de xuesheng) and that “those of a higher personality did not want to go often,” although the price of a meal was less than 5 francs. In the same article, she claimed that Chinese language publications for workers had little value because few of the workers were literate, and her analysis of the four branches within the Chinese student community in France was even more caustic. She lauded her own group of the Frugal-Study students, but stigmatized the Work-Study Movement as a failure and asserted that there existed two more categories of “Playboys” and “Ruffians” (Gongzi pai; Liumang pai).

In 1922, after the Chinese Communist Party was established in France, Zhang Ruoming, through her connections with fellow Self-Awakening Society associates, became a party member, and rose high in the ranks. According to her son, Yang Zaidao, she was a member of the Executive Committee of the European Branch of the Chinese Communist Party until late 1924 when she quit the party. Zhou Enlai, who by 1924 was the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in France, had left in September, and, after his departure, Zhang Ruoming had several personal disagreements with Ren Zhumoxuan, the new Secretary, about generalized Chinese participation in several Parti Communiste Francois demonstrations. But one wonders if these personal disagreements were an excuse for a more profound change in Zhang’s outlook on life, particularly on her view of the role of the intellectual in relation to social and political change. [Perhaps it is no coincidence that 1924 also marked the year in which Zhang Ruoming received the baccalauréat par équivalence, from the University of Lyon. Her certificate specified her topics as psychology, philosophy, logic, morals, and sociology.] One also wonders about the role of women in ECCO upper echelons, and whether Zhang had experienced a sense of discrimination. From her writings during the May 4 Era, we know that she was adamant that the liberation of women must accompany the revolution. Quitting the party, concentrating on her French and her literary studies, Zhang Ruoming also pulled away from old organizational ties, and was intent on exploring the world of French literature.

IV

In 1927 Zhang Ruoming was admitted to the doctoral program at the Faculté des Lettres at the University of Lyon as a student of the Institut Franco-Chinois, which had been established in 1921. J. Segond, professor of philosophy, served as both Zhang’s undergraduate and graduate advisor. He was impressed by Zhang’s abilities and her elegant writings: “Not only have I found her a very attentive student, but I have perceived the finesse of her spirit and the remarkable knowledge she has of the nuances in our language.” Segond went on to say that Zhang’s work would be an honor to the Institut.

Zhang finished her doctorate in three years. She wrote her
Beyond the glorified status of André Gide, both the style and content of his work had a certain appeal to Asians. For example, in her remarks on the role of André Gide in the “art for art’s sake” debate during the 1930s among the Vietnamese literati, Hue Ho Tam Tai, after discussing the support that Gide provided by his ultimate renunciation of the Soviet Union, goes on to underline the dramatic impact of Gide’s behavior by contending that “Gide was not merely a convenient weapon in their [Vietnamese Trotskyites] long-standing battle against the Communists; he was also a real source of inspiration.”

In reading her thesis, one can clearly see that Zhang was attracted to the simplicity, the personal honesty that shone through the writings of Gide, as well as his casual elegance. In addition, Gide was a breaker of traditions and, in many ways, an individualist. For a young woman who was first breaking away from traditional society during the New Culture Movement, and then from newly formed organizational ties that had lasted almost half a decade, these were important elements in Gide’s work. Finally, the theme of youth finding its way through the twists and turns of modern life was an important message, as for example in The Counterfeiters, which, according to Germaine Bree, “portrays the struggle of the young to discover through trial and error the genuine forces and limits of their personalities, in the face of obsolete social forms and ethics that tend to impose stereotyped feelings and attitudes upon them.”

The desire for a free personality was important to the Chinese youth in the New Culture Movement, as they explored new physical and social worlds, in their quest for personal and national liberation.

If André Gide thought of art as expressing life, Zhang Ruoming took him at his word, and viewed Gide’s life as art. She perceived three elements in Gide’s personality: “moraliste, mystique, et artiste,” which were “a succession of blossomings, in which each attained its own singular perfection.”

Zhang traced Gide’s Protestant background and adherence to Christianity, with the influence of Nietzsche and the Symbolist

thesis based on a psychological perspective of André Gide.23 Entitled, “L’attitude d’André Gide (Essai d’analyse psychologique)” (1930), Zhang won the annual prize for the best work at the Institut Franco-Chinois and received an award of five hundred francs.24

André Gide, whose short novel The Immoralist had been controversial when it was published at the turn of the century, had finally achieved success in his forties, with his novella, Strait is the Gate (1909), the theme of which was self-abnegation. His first full novel was the experimental The Counterfeiters (1926). A controversial figure because of his changing literary style, his brief flirtation with communism and the Soviet Union during the early 1930s, as well as his open admission of homosexuality, it was not until 1947 that Gide was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

One might wonder what would attract a young Chinese woman to Gide’s art? It might be suggested that by the mid-1920s Gide’s work had come into vogue. For almost thirty years, Gide’s works had sold in only limited editions. However, according to David Littlejohn, due to several reviews that ranged from the scathing to the worshipful, as well as some positive literary citations by other authors, Gide suddenly won recognition.25

By the end of the 1920s, most of Gide’s books were back in print. Les Nourritures terrestres (Fruits of the earth) had become a cause célèbre and was selling in the tens of thousands. The first English translations of his novels began appearing in 1920 and by 1927, with the appearance of The Counterfeiters (Les faux-monnayeurs), he was being ranked by popular American reviewers as the peer of Proust, Joyce, and Mann. . . . few important French writers of the twenties and thirties failed to comment on the Gide phenomenon; and outside of France his work was accorded the attention due that of an international master. He was the subject of panel discussions, public opinion polls, and special issues of magazines; every analysis of the “new novel” found room for Les Faux-Monnayeurs.
Movement as the first phase of his development, with his voyage to Algeria in 1893 and the subsequent liberation of his art as expressed in *Nouritures terrestres* and *l’Immoraliste*. This involved a transition to the evolution of art as religion for Gide. The source of art was life, which gave a rich, multidimensional depth to Gide’s literary expression.

Zhang relied on both Gide’s works of art as well as his published correspondence. She showed several stylistic and theoretical comparisons with Rimbaud, Barres, Proust, and Baudelaire. Gide’s style was unique. While Proust looked at the nonreal world, Gide wrote of the simple, present world. While Nietzsche was anchored in a morass of disorder, Gide was more unaffected, because of his relationship to the moral universe. "Nietzsche criticized the moral mostly as [en tante que] a moralist; but Gide analyzed the moral experience mostly as an artist." Gide’s style was closer to Baudelaire, as they both wrote in terms of emotions as sensations. Baudelaire’s sensations, however, were more fused together.

In her chapter on "Le narcissisme de Gide," Zhang argued that Gide’s art expressed a unity between the artist’s self and the external world, a true melding of emotions and the physical world. He echoed his inner song outwards. It was this facet of his personality that allowed him true self-abnegation, and renunciation of individuality meant the triumph of individualism. "He abandons himself, and realizes his eternity in the present." It is this abandonment of the self that allows a true renunciation of individualism. This is the basic message that Zhang repeated several times. In discussing the humility of Gide stemming from his Christian heritage, Zhang contended that it was after his turning away from God that Gide was able to realize his individuality and artistic destiny at the same time:

Gide discovered the secret that permitted the triumph of individualism. It seemed as if the affirmation of the self was fully attained when one renounced one’s individuality. True individualism embraces the two poles of life, the personal and the universal. One part is the individual experience that constitutes a personality, makes the personal value, and the other part is logically ordered according to this organizational experience, and makes the universal value. The formation of the individual personality that contains the personal and universal corresponds to the division between the Me [moi] and the I [je]. Because of their origin, the Me and I are mixed in action. The I remains in imminent thought to the Me that acts.

In a final chapter on Gide, as viewed by his contemporaries, Zhang used this argument of true individuality as the expression of ultimate freedom and order to counter the aspersions of moral corruption suggested by Gide’s prominent critic, Henri Massis, as well as the implications of Gide’s constant changes in style and perspective. Addressing the question of the moral purity of Gide’s work, Zhang contended that his work held a purity of both harmony and order. "No other author," maintained Zhang, "could create a work possessed of such fidelity or wholly spiritual richness organized by a powerful equilibrium." The confusion caused by the multiperspective and stylistic differences was not a contradiction, but a matter of a total immersion in art, an abandonment of the self, because "the opposition between two points does not mean a discontinuity of thought." Zhang concluded that it was this self-abnegation that gave continuity to Gide’s work.

Zhang’s 1930 analysis of André Gide illuminated and contended themes relevant in contemporary Gidean criticism. For example, according to David Littlejohn, three of the most important themes in a collection of critiques on Gide were: (1) his lack of belief in a God; (2) his obsession with literature, with art as almost a religion; and (3) the almost autobiographical implications of Gide’s literary characterizations. All of these themes were highlighted in Zhang’s thesis.

In addition to her understanding of the French language and culture, one might also suggest that Zhang Ruoming’s Chinese heritage allowed her some insights into the personality and art of André Gide. According to Chang Chung-yuan, the Chinese Daoist artists also saw “unity within multiplicity.”
From the changeless to the ever-changing, we see creativity in the process of transition; from unity to multiplicity, we see creativity in the process of concrescence. Both concrescence and transition are in the grip of what Whitehead has called the "creative advance into novelty." In fact, concrescence is in transition and transition is in concrescence. In the absolute realm of creativity, they are identified.\(^{35}\)

Zhang understood that Gide expressed in his art a fine tuning between his social conscience and natural human emotions and behaviors. The Confucian tradition also emphasized this continuum of human action. Benjamin Schwartz, in his discussion of polarities within the Confucian tradition, states: "A central polarity in such works as the Analects is the polarity of self-cultivation . . . leading to personal self-realization, . . . and the ordering and harmonizing of the world . . ."\(^{36}\)

Zhang sent Gide a copy of her thesis, and, following his return from a voyage to Africa, he read her work and wrote a letter expressing his amazement at being so well understood. This was important to Gide personally because of several recent critical reviews, one of which touted the "death" of Gide as a talent. Thus, Gide wrote:

> It seemed to me in traversing your pages, that I regained consciousness of my existence. Your chapter five [on narcisisme] in particular delighted me, and I do not think I have ever felt so well understood: "Each time he creates a person, he consents first to live in their place; etc. . . ." But the thing that made me read your study one more time! How I liked this affirmation that is so simple in its achievement [in] the first part of the last chapter: "The opposition between two points of view does not mean a discontinuity of thought." . . . I am so grateful for the light that you have brought to my work! It seems to me as if it is to a friend I write, because, in truth, the "thank-you" that I address to you comes from my heart."\(^{37}\) [Emphasis Mine]

Writing in his journal the same day he wrote his letter to Zhang Ruoming, Gide was not as complimentary as in his correspondence. Again, he mentioned the fact that Zhang's positive thesis occurred simultaneously with a negative literary review, but, with a shade of cynicism, he related, "I read a rather long study by a Chinese woman on L'Attitude de André Gide because it is made up of quotations (but well chosen), it seems to me excellent, and because she is willing to take me simply for what I am."\(^{38}\)

According to one of Gide's closest confidantes, Roger Martin du Gard, André Gide was becoming more sensitive as his fame spread during the late 1920s.

After having been unknown and misunderstood for more than thirty years—and after having endured those years with the noblest, proudest, most uncomplaining resignation—he now cannot resist the temptation of taking his revenge. And so it is that the all-echoing little world of letters is ringing with the noise of his complaints and controversies. How I should like to see him meet such things with greater detachment, with indifference, in fact!\(^{39}\)

Thus, we can understand some of the overstated effusiveness and gratitude to Zhang, who indeed wrote of Gide as if he were a living myth, albeit in an eloquent vein.

There were those in French scholarly circles who took Zhang's thesis and the response from Gide with some seriousness. For example, Jean Rodes, who wrote an article in late 1931 about Zhang's work, with a reprint of the Gide letter attached, was astonished at Zhang's command of the French language and her understanding of French culture. Rodes judged Zhang's work in superlative terms, writing, "I think that her treatment of 'Gide moraliste' ought to be placed in the first rank [of analysis]. One finds her material particularly fine, delicate, in short phrases, clear, penetrating, where one would not change one word, a dissection that would not be disavowed by the best practitioners of the literary scalpel."\(^{40}\)

Copies of Zhang's thesis soon were in short supply. Although the printers, Bosc, Frères and Riou, had printed over
180 copies, of which 80 went to the Faculté des Lettres, 30 to the Institut, and 70 to Zhang, in less than five months, a request from a scholar in Aix en Provence to the Institut Franco-Chinois, met with the response that none were left.\textsuperscript{41}

Zhang continued as a Gide authority, even after her return to China. For example, several years later when Gide was in the midst of his flirtation with communism, Zhang Ruoming was able to have her opinion published in *Le Mercure de France*. In her short article, Zhang fiercely defended André Gide, even though she had withdrawn over a decade previously from her own allegiance to communism. Writing in 1935, Zhang believed that Gide was satisfying his habitual thirst for the new, the creative, and that his artistic vision was still sacrosanct. Gide would never abandon the freedom of the arts. As history has shown, in this assessment, Zhang was ultimately proven correct.\textsuperscript{42}

V

After the completion of their graduate studies, Zhang Ruoming and her new husband, Yang Kun, returned to China in 1931.\textsuperscript{43} The couple led the life of academics with some mild political participation. Zhang taught as a professor in Beijing, and later in Yunnan, and spent much of her time writing scholarly articles and translations in the area of French literature. After 1950, she was involved in the *Zhongguo minzhu tongment* (Chinese democratic alliance) although not in any major organizational capacity. Zhang Ruoming died suddenly in 1958. In his autobiographical article, Yang Kun states that he had been on the road when he received a telegram with the news of Zhang’s shatteringly sudden death.

Yang Kun has become an authority on Chinese minorities, as well as an important mentor in introducing the field of sociology to China. He was department head at Yunnan University for over thirty years, and, as a robust 87-year-old man, he is still continuing to teach and conduct research at Beijing Normal University.

In common with her hero, André Gide, Zhang Ruoming had traversed a winding road between various cultures. It would appear that her own break from tradition as a prominent feminist during the May 4 and New Culture Movements, and as an active Communist during the early twenties, contributed to a general growth of her political consciousness. However, it also allowed her some discernment of the limitations of politics through group formations. Through her understanding of French culture, and André Gide’s work in particular, which she was able to understand on its own terms, Zhang also gained insight into the nature of the relation between the individual and artistic freedom. I would contend that she linked these observations together and refused to submit to an overriding group ethos that the Communist Party demanded and, instead, from the mid-twenties, led a life committed to scholarship, to individual growth, and freedom.

There is a Chinese term for one who understands another, who can empathize totally with someone else. This is “Zhiyin,” which means “to know the sound (or music).” In several ways Zhang Ruoming and André Gide were *true zhiyin*. Both felt the seduction and yet the confines of culture. Both felt that real self-cultivation lies in the freedom of expression, in a dynamic mode, whose continuity only requires true self-abnegation, the merging of the self with reality, the coordination of the *Je et Moi*. Both were short-term Communists, and long-term devotees of the necessity of truth as the prerequisite of freedom. Zhang Ruoming believed in this necessity very strongly, and this concept was so linked with her belief in André Gide, that she, who had never met André Gide face to face, only knowing him through the precious letter he wrote her and his more treasured works, was able to predict with confidence that Gide would never stay a Communist during the mid-thirties. For, as she proclaimed in her article in *Le Mercure de France*, “The more I reflect, the more I believe that the artist must remain free and that André Gide, the artist, could not believe otherwise.”
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Notes


6. For the most complete work on the Chinese Labor Corps see, Chen Sanjing, Huagong yu ouzhuan [The Chinese Labor Corps of the First World War] (Taipei: Zhongyang pub., 1986). Chen puts the number of the Corps who helped the Allies in Europe between 175,000 to 200,000, pp. 34–35.

7. The material for much of this section has kindly been provided by Zhang’s son, Yang Zaidao, as well as his correspondence, 18 February 1987; 20 April 1988.


11. According to the registry of the Huafa jiaoyu hui (The Sino-French Educational Association), which most Chinese arriving in France signed, there were real regional disparities involved in this self-concept. For example, according to the registry records in both Chinese and French at the Archives Diplomatiques, of 251 Guangdong registrees, only 27 students or 11 percent designated themselves Diligent-Work Frugal-Study students, whereas of 346 students from Hunan, 326, or 96 percent, conceived of themselves as the more “tough and tumble” Diligent-Work Frugal-Study students; Archives Diplomatiques, Series E Chine Asie 49 Carton 24 Dossier 4.


14. V nüshu [Zhang Ruoming], “Huaren zai da jinggao zhi ge zongzhi” (The organizational groups of those who have set up in France) (April 3–8, 1921) in Fujia qingong jianxue yundong shi [2:56. [I am grateful to Professor Liu Guisheng at Qinghua University for the information that V nüshi was Zhang Ruoming.]

15. Ibid. p. 155.

16. According to Chen Xiaocen, Zhang became a Communist in 1921, but I have not found evidence that she was a major participant in founding the ECCO, although Liu Qingyong and Zhou Enlai were instrumental in a small Paris cell as early as spring 1921.


18. Dr. Yang Kun, interview, October 14, 1985 (Beijing). Dr. Yang is the husband of Zhang Ruoming, and continued himself as a party member, as well as an important Guomindang member, until 1927. He rejoined the Chinese Communist Party in 1985.

19. Certification from the University of Lyon, dated July 19, 1927, for Tchangle Lamian [Zhang Ruoming], upon her entrance to the Institut Franco-Chinois, Zhang Ruoming Dossier, Archives Association Universitaire Franco-
Chinois (AACF), at the Institut Franco-Chinois (Lyon).

20. According to Chen Xiaocen, Zhou Enlai was very angry when Zhang quit the party. According to other historians in the PRC whom I interviewed, this may also have been a case of unrequited affection. Interestingly, while Chen speaks of alienation, Zhang’s husband, Yang Kun, mentions in a short autobiographical piece that Zhou Enlai visited them for several hours of amicable talk in 1955 in Yunnan, where both were teaching. Yang Kun, “Wode minzu zai yanjiu wushinian” (My fifty years of minorities studies), in Zhongguo dangdai shehui kexue jia (Contemporary Chinese social scientists) (Beijing: Shumu wenxian chubanshe, 1982), 1:200.


22. Letter of recommendation by J. Segond, September 2, 1927, Zhang Ruoming Dossier, AAFC.

23. A copy of her thesis can be found in the Bibliothèque Municipale de Lyon, but because she was married at the time of the printing, the author’s name is given as YANG Tchang Lomine. I am indebted to Jean-Louis Bouilly, curator of the Chinese collection at the Bibliothèque, who not only found Zhang’s thesis in the library, but also some important articles that he was gracious enough to pass on to others.


29. Ibid., pp. 49–59.

30. Ibid., pp. 69–82.

31. Ibid., p. 115.

32. Ibid., p. 27. This is a very eloquent way to capture the ultimate meaning of Gide’s approach to writing. For example, in The Counterfeiters, he has the protagonist Edouard discuss the “theory of the novel,” exclaiming: “By localiz-