

**The cosmopolitan moment in colonial modernity: The Bahá'í Faith, spiritual networks  
and universalist movements in early twentieth century China\***

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POSTPRINT: Forthcoming in *Modern Asian Studies*.

Accepted on 16 Mar. 2019.

**Abstract**

This article outlines the spread of the Bahá'í religion (known in Chinese as *Datong jiao* 大同教) in Republican China (1912–1949), as a form of religious cosmopolitanism that originated in Iran, whose spread to China can be traced to links with the Ottoman Empire, British Palestine, the United States and Japan. By tracking the individuals, connections and events through which knowledge of the Bahá'í movement spread in China, our study reveals an overlapping nexus of networks that shared cosmopolitan ideals: intellectual reformers, liberal Christians, Esperantists, Confucian modernizers, redemptive society activists, and socialists. The Bahá'í connections serve as a thread that sheds light on a unique 'cosmopolitan moment' in Republican China, hitherto largely ignored in the scholarly literature on this period, which has focused primarily on the growth of modern Chinese nationalism. Leading nationalist figures endorsed these movements, showing that nationalism and cosmopolitanism were seen as expressions of the same ideal of world community, at a specific juncture of Asian colonial modernity. Through this case, we argue that the sociology of cosmopolitanism should attend to non-secular and non-state movements advocating utopian visions of cosmopolitanism, map the circulations that form a nexus of such groups, and identify the contextual dynamics that produce 'cosmopolitan moments' at specific historical junctures and locations.

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\* We wish to thank William Hui, Harry Lloyd, Alex Murray, Mina Fazel, Moojan Momen, Martha Schwartz and Nazila Ghanea, as well as the two anonymous reviewers, for their invaluable comments on earlier drafts of this article. We would also like to acknowledge the seminal research of Professor Cai Degui, which laid the foundation upon which this article could be written.

In the summer of 1916, the young Chinese scholar Hu Shi 胡適 (Hu Shih, 1891–1962), who was completing his doctoral studies at Columbia University under John Dewey and who would soon become one of the leading intellectuals of China’s New Culture movement, received a letter from his friend Mei Guangdi 梅光迪 (K. T. Mei, 1890–1945), who was also pursuing a Ph.D. in literature at Harvard. Mei disapproved of Hu’s experimentation with writing poems in vernacular Chinese, cautioning him against the ‘inappropriate influence’ from the ‘ominous new tides of thought’ popular in Europe and America. He listed ‘Bahatism’ as one of the six religious tides, the others being Billy Sunday, Shakerism, Christian Science, Free Thought, and the Church of Social Revolution.<sup>1</sup> In his reply, Hu refuted Mei, stressing that those movements deserved serious investigation, as they enshrined many truths. A diligent diarist, he recorded portions of Mei’s letter and his reply, in which he re-ordered Mei’s list by placing the English term ‘Bahatism’ at the top, which he rendered into Chinese as ‘Persian Pantheism’ (波斯泛神教).<sup>2</sup>

‘Bahatism’, now known as the Bahá’í Faith, had enjoyed widespread publicity in the United States around the time of Hu’s studies there. During a tour of North America in 1912, the movement’s leader, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá (1844–1921), had been described by the American press as a ‘Persian Prophet’ who advocated world citizenship and the unity of religions, women’s rights, and racial equality, during widely reported lectures and talks hosted by Theosophists, socialists, Unitarians, suffragettes, black colleges, liberal Christians, and Jews.<sup>3</sup> Born in Tehran, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá was the eldest son of and successor to Bahá’u’lláh (1817–1892), the founder of the Bahá’í Faith, which had emerged out of the Bábi millenarian movement. This movement had convulsed Iran in the mid-nineteenth century by challenging the authority of the country’s Shi’a orthodoxy and proclaiming the inauguration of an independent religious dispensation. As elaborated in Bahá’u’lláh’s writings and explicated by his son during his overseas travels, the new teachings included the common origin and purpose of all religions; the oneness of humanity; the abolition

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<sup>1</sup> Du Chunhe 杜春和 and Geng Laijin 耿來金, ‘Youguan Hu Shi tichang xinwenxue de jize shiliao 有關胡適提倡新文學的幾則史料 [Historical Records Pertaining to Hu Shi’s Promotion of New Literature],’ *Xinwenxue shiliao* 新文學史料 [Historical Records of New Literature], no. 4 (1991). We are grateful to Cai Degui 蔡德貴 for locating these and other materials, which have been reproduced in Cai Degui et al. (eds.), *Bahay wenxian jicheng* 巴哈伊文獻集成 [Chinese Studies on the Bahá’í Faith: A Comprehensive Collection], vol. 1 (Jinan: Shandong University Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> Hu Shi 胡適, *Hu Shi quanji* 胡適全集 [Complete Works of Hu Shi], vol. 28 (Diary 1915–1917) (Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 421–22. Hu may have heard of or met with some prominent exponents of Bahatism, such as Stanwood Cobb (1881–1982), who was, together with Dewey, a driving force of the Progressive Education movement in early twentieth century America.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Robert H. Stockman, *‘Abdu’l-Bahá in America*. Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2012; Amin Egea, ‘The Travels of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá and Their Impact on the Press,’ in *Lights of Irfan*, vol. 12 (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2011), 1–25. See for example ‘Persian Prophet Here,’ *New York Tribune*, 12 April 1912.

of religious, racial and ethnic prejudice and violence; the equality of women and men; harmony between science and religion; the independent search for truth and the abolition of ecclesiastical authority; and advancing towards a new civilization leading to a World Commonwealth and the ‘Most Great Peace’.<sup>4</sup>

Although Hu Shi did not discuss ‘Bahá’ism’ in detail, he may have found resonance between his own beliefs and the pivotal Bahá’í principle of the ‘oneness of mankind’. As president of the Cornell Cosmopolitan Club (1914) and a leading member of America’s Association of Cosmopolitan Clubs, he was a strong advocate of the clubs’ shared ideal that ‘above all nations is humanity’.<sup>5</sup> In his writings, he translated ‘cosmopolitanism’ into *datong zhuoyi* 大同主義, using the term *datong*—the ‘Great Oneness’ or ‘Great Unity’ evoked in the ancient *Book of Rites* (禮記), which, since the late nineteenth century, had among Chinese intellectuals and reformers symbolized ideals of world peace and unity, a cosmopolitanism rooted in the deep values of ancient Chinese civilization.<sup>6</sup>

Although it is likely that it was in America that Hu Shi had heard of the Bahá’í Faith, during the same period the movement was also becoming known among intellectuals and leaders of society in China itself. Over the next two decades, many leading thinkers, politicians and military leaders in Republican China became familiar with and sympathized with the Bahá’í teachings, which came to be known as *Datong jiao*, the ‘teachings of the Great Oneness’—or, to reverse Hu Shi’s translation, the ‘teachings of Cosmopolitanism’. In fact, with the possible exception of Iran, in no other country of the world was the Bahá’í Faith as well-known among a nation’s elite—but, while the new faith was persecuted as a heresy in the country of its birth,<sup>7</sup> its reception in China was, on the whole, quite positive.

By tracing the individuals, connections and events through which knowledge of the Bahá’í Faith spread in China around the turn of the twentieth century, our study reveals an interconnected web of networks that shared overlapping cosmopolitan ideals: intellectual reformers, liberal Christians, Esperantists, Confucian modernizers, redemptive society activists, and socialists. The Bahá’í connections thus serve as a thread that reveals the influence of cosmopolitan thought and networks in Republican China, hitherto largely ignored in the scholarly literature on this period,

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<sup>4</sup> See Peter Smith, *The Bábí and Bahá’í Religions: From Messianic Shiism to a World Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Bahá’u’lláh, *The Kitáb-i-Iqán: The Book of Certitude* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 2003); ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, *The Promulgation of Universal Peace* (Wilmette, IL: Bahá’í Publishing Trust, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> Hu Shi, *Hu Shi quanji*, vol. 27 (Diary 1906–1914), 587–88; also cf. T. Bevis, *International Students in American Colleges and Universities: A History* (Springer, 2007), 71, 81.

<sup>6</sup> Bart Dessein, ‘Yearning for the Lost Paradise: The ‘Great Unity’ (Datong) and Its Philosophical Interpretations,’ *Asian Studies* 5, no. 1 (2017): 83–102.

<sup>7</sup> Dominic Parviz Brookshaw and Seena B. Fazel (eds.), *The Bahá’ís of Iran: Socio-Historical Studies* (London: Routledge, 2008).

which has focused primarily on the growth of modern Chinese nationalism.<sup>8</sup> While some recent edited collections have examined cosmopolitan ideas during this period from the perspectives of Chinese intellectual and literary history,<sup>9</sup> we focus here on the spread and overlapping of social networks, forming what we call a ‘cosmopolitan nexus’. Prasenjit Duara’s work has previously discussed some of these networks, but while his research led him to focus primarily on those intellectuals and movements that were pan-Asian in orientation,<sup>10</sup> our case sheds light on the cosmopolitan affinities and connections between those groups and Western-originated movements such as liberal Christianity and Esperantism, as well as the Bahá’í Faith as a movement originating in the Middle East.

### A cosmopolitan moment in colonial modernity

Cosmopolitanism as a normative ideal, as an intellectual tradition, as a theoretical framework and as a subjective condition has been the subject of renewed intellectual and academic debates over the past two decades.<sup>11</sup> In the context of these discussions, sociologists and anthropologists have called for looking beyond cosmopolitanism as an abstract political philosophy to examine empirically existing forms of cosmopolitanism; for breaking out of a Eurocentric genealogy and conceptualization of the cosmopolitan; and for following the transformations of cosmopolitan thought and social forms within specific historical periods and contexts.<sup>12</sup> The case presented here is one of cosmopolitanisms<sup>13</sup> that were transnational, Asian-focused, often religious, and grounded in non-state social organizations and networks.

Conventional accounts of the history of cosmopolitanism place its origins in the thought of the Greek Cynics and Stoics; its modern development in European Enlightenment thought,

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<sup>8</sup> Frank Dikötter, *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (London: Hurst, 1992); Henrietta Harrison, *China: Inventing the Nation* (London: Arnold, 2001); Rebecca E. Karl, *Staging the World: Chinese Nationalism at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>9</sup> Minhui Hu and Johan Elverskog (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism in China, 1600–1950* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2016); Ban Wang (ed.), *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017); Ning Wang (ed.), ‘Cosmopolitanism and China: Toward a Literary (Re)Construction,’ special issue of *Telos* 180 (Fall 2017).

<sup>10</sup> Prasenjit Duara, ‘The Discourse of Civilization and Pan-Asianism,’ *Journal of World History* 12: no. 1 (2001), 99–130; *Sovereignty and Authenticity: Manchukuo and the East Asian Modern* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004).

<sup>11</sup> Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (eds.), *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling beyond the Nation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998); Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (eds.), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism: Theory, Context and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); R. J. Holton, *Cosmopolitanisms: New Thinking and New Directions* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> Ulrich Beck and Natan Sznaider, ‘Unpacking Cosmopolitanism for the Social Sciences: A Research Agenda,’ *British Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 1 (2006): 1–23; Pnina Werbner, *Anthropology and the New Cosmopolitanism: Rooted, Feminist and Vernacular Perspectives* (Oxford: Berg, 2008); Minhao Zeng, ‘Subaltern Cosmopolitanism: Concept and Approaches,’ *The Sociological Review*, Vol. 62, 137–148 (2014).

<sup>13</sup> Sheldon Pollock et al., ‘Cosmopolitanisms,’ *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 577–89.

exemplified by Kant; its decline with the rise of nationalism in the late nineteenth century; and its renewed relevance following World War II, the establishment of the United Nations and the emergence of institutions of global governance.<sup>14</sup> Challenging this narrative of the ups and downs of a political cosmopolitanism closely tied to Western universalism, recent contributions have explored non-Western traditions of cosmopolitan thought, as well as the social reality of cosmopolitan subjectivities fostered by transnational networks and migratory flows in the contemporary period.<sup>15</sup>

This literature has stressed the distinction between ‘philosophical cosmopolitanism’ and ‘empirical-analytical cosmopolitanism’. The latter is typically described as unintentional and even passive; in so doing, however, this approach has ignored social movements and organizations that consciously advocate, propagate and attempt to realize a cosmopolitan utopia.<sup>16</sup> Here, in contrast, we focus on such groups and on their overlaps and interconnections. We refer to this interlinked network of groups as a ‘cosmopolitan nexus’, referring not only to the fact that they were made up of often well-travelled people with a cosmopolitan outlook on the world, but to their conscious pursuit of an explicitly cosmopolitan social and even religious ideal. This article focuses on China, but it reveals that the cosmopolitan nexus was a transnational one, with the same networks of Bahá’ís, liberal Christians, Theosophists, Esperantists, socialists, colonial intellectuals and modernizers of tradition, criss-crossing and overlapping in places as varied as Shanghai, Tokyo, Calcutta, London, Paris, Budapest, and New York.

Many authors have stressed how modern cosmopolitanism is in many ways a product of the colonial experience, in which the formation of colonial empires led to sustained cross-cultural encounters that facilitated the emergence of a global consciousness among both the colonizers and the colonized, and to the rise of elites, both European and colonial, whose world travels fostered a cosmopolitan subjectivity. The ideological and social structuring of this consciousness and subjectivity thus bore the imprint of the colonial or imperial frame. Nonetheless, as argued by van der Veer, transnational religious movements in colonial contexts can be cosmopolitan in a different way than the secularism of Western colonialism.<sup>17</sup>

While many of the Chinese intellectuals who appear in this study, such as Hu Shi, Lu Xun and Cai Yuanpei, are known today as Westernizing modernizers and secularists, our case does, nonetheless, challenge conventional narratives of cosmopolitanism: what we find here, with the

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<sup>14</sup> David Inglis, ‘Alternative Histories of Cosmopolitanism: Reconfiguring Classical Legacies,’ in *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, (ed.) Gerard Delanty (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 11–24.

<sup>15</sup> Carol Appadurai Breckenridge, Sheldon I. Pollock, and Homi K. Bhabha (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

<sup>16</sup> Ulrich and Sznajder, ‘Unpacking Cosmopolitanism,’ 6–9.

<sup>17</sup> Peter van der Veer, ‘Cosmopolitan Options,’ *Etnográfica* VI, no. 1 (2002): 20.

Bahá'ís, is a *religious* cosmopolitanism that originated in Iran, whose spread to China can be traced to links with the Ottoman Empire, British Palestine, the United States and Japan. It had emerged in an Islamic context, and had as many affinities with Confucianism as with Western modernism.<sup>18</sup> It connected with exponents of a strand of Chinese thinking that could claim a cosmopolitan pedigree at least as ancient as the Greek origins of its Western counterpart, and that was actively discussed and pursued among intellectuals and political reformers.<sup>19</sup> Rather than an abstract philosophy of peace, the Bahá'í cosmopolitanism studied here was a system of belief grounded in theological concepts, a community with emerging forms of practice, and an international organization that linked up with other organized cosmopolitan networks.<sup>20</sup>

This article thus sheds light on cosmopolitanism in China during a crucial period in the early decades of the twentieth century. Contrary to the perception that ‘from the end of the nineteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century the national imagination for the greater part prevailed over the cosmopolitan imagination’,<sup>21</sup> we show how pervasive the cosmopolitan imagination was among Chinese elites during this period. But many of the persons who appear in our narrative are also among the founding figures of Chinese nationalism. During this ‘cosmopolitan moment’ in China’s modern history,<sup>22</sup> constructing the Chinese nation was imagined as a necessary stepping stone towards establishing an ideal cosmopolitan community; conversely, cosmopolitan ideals framed the mental space within which the nation could be imagined.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> On the Islamic social context of the emergence of the Bahá'í Faith and its critical engagement with Western notions of democracy, the nation-state and cosmopolitanism in the late nineteenth century, see Juan R. Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium: The Genesis of the Bahá'í Faith in the Nineteenth-Century Middle East* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Joseph R. Levenson, *Revolution and Cosmopolitanism: The Western Stage and the Chinese Stages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Ban Wang (ed.), *Chinese Visions of World Order*.

<sup>20</sup> At present, the Bahá'í Faith is estimated to have some seven million adherents residing in around 221 sovereign countries and dependencies, making it one of the world’s most globalized religious communities. Large concentrations of Bahá'ís can be found, among other places, in India, Iran, the US, Canada, Malaysia, Cambodia, Congo, Central African Republic, Columbia, Brazil, and Papua New Guinea. Cf. Darrell J. Turner, ‘Religion: Year In Review 2010—Worldwide Adherents of All Religions,’ *Britannica.com*, 2010, accessed 5 November 2016, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/religion-Year-In-Review-2010/Worldwide-Adherents-of-All-Religions>; see also Association of Religion Data Archives (ARDA), [http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList\\_125.asp](http://www.thearda.com/QuickLists/QuickList_125.asp) as well as the official website of the Bahá'í Faith, [www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org). For sociological and comparative studies on the Bahá'í Faith, see Margit Warburg, *Citizens of the World: A History and Sociology of the Bahá'ís from a Globalization Perspective* (Leiden: Brill, 2006); Margit Warburg et al. (eds.), *Bahá'í and Globalization* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Gerard Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination: The Renewal of Critical Social Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 51.

<sup>22</sup> Minghui Hu and Jonathan Elverskog, ‘Introduction,’ in Hu and Elverskog (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism in China*, 14.

<sup>23</sup> Mark Edward Lewis and Mei-yu Hsieh, ‘Tianxia and the Invention of Empire in East Asia,’ in Ban Wang (ed.), *Chinese Visions of World Order*, 20; Wang Hui, *China from Empire to Nation-State*, (trans.) Michael Gibbs Hill (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014).

## Reformist intellectuals, Gilbert Reid and ‘spiritual Esperanto’

The political disorder that ensued after the fall of the Qing dynasty in 1911 gave rise to the New Culture Movement, an intellectual campaign for the rejection of traditional Confucian values and the embrace of Western modernism.<sup>24</sup> One of its key leaders was the afore-mentioned Hu Shi, who returned to China in early 1917.<sup>25</sup> It was against this background that the first reports on the Bahá’í movement appeared in newspapers, journals and public talks.<sup>26</sup> As early as 1911, the Hong Kong-based *South China Morning Post* reported ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s imminent visit to Europe. It highlighted the rapidity of the spread of the Bahá’í Faith, stating that ‘now a third of the Persian people are converts’<sup>27</sup> and ‘there are many believers in Egypt, India, the United States, France, and England’. Quoting Rev. R. J. Campbell (1867–1956), the editor of the London weekly *Christian Commonwealth*—the radical Christian mouthpiece of the ‘New Theology’, which published frequent articles on the Bahá’í Faith, Theosophy, Oriental religions and progressive social movements—the report likened the Bahá’í Faith to a ‘spiritual Esperanto’ that seeks ‘to demonstrate the fundamental unity of all religions’.<sup>28</sup>

It was the American Presbyterian missionary Gilbert Reid (known in Chinese as Li Jiabai 李佳白, 1857–1927), however, who played a pivotal role in introducing the Bahá’í Faith to Chinese intellectuals in the 1910s. Reid had started his four-decade career in China in 1882. Although he started his mission among the rural poor in Shandong, he observed that the root of opposition to Christianity came from the elite, and, during a furlough back to the US in 1892, sought support to establish a Mission among the Higher Classes in China (MHCC), which would aim not to proselytize, but to build friendships. The proposal was rejected by his leaders, and he resigned from the Presbyterian Church, continuing his work as an independent.<sup>29</sup> Reid also attended the World’s

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<sup>24</sup> See Rana Mitter, *A Bitter Revolution: China’s Struggle with the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 12–149.

<sup>25</sup> Vera Schwarz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> Bahá’ís from Iran are reported to have resided in Hong Kong and Shanghai as early as the 1860s, and to have influenced the development of the Lingmingtang (靈明堂) Sufi order in Gansu. See Moojan Momen, ‘Jamál Effendi and the Early Spread of the Bahá’í Faith in South Asia,’ *Bahá’í Studies Review* 9, no. 1 (2000). Jianping Wang, ‘The Influence of Bábí Teachings on Ling Ming Tang and Nineteenth-Century China,’ in *Lights of Irfan: Papers Presented at the Irfán Colloquia and Seminars*, vol. 3 (Evanston, IL: Bahá’í National Center, 2002), 185–200.

<sup>27</sup> The actual number of Bahá’ís in Iran was probably around 100,000 at that time, although many Christian missionaries’ reports in Iran noted the rapid growth of the new Faith. See Smith, *The Babi and Bahá’í Religions*, 89.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Bahaism: A New Religion From Persia,’ *South China Morning Post*, 11 October 1911, sec. 5. On the links between Campbell, the *Christian Commonwealth*, the Bahá’ís and new spiritual movements in England, see Brendan McNamara, ‘Religious Reformers in Britain at the Turn of the Twentieth Century: The Visits of Abdul Bahá.’ (Ph. D thesis, University College Cork, 2017), 97–116.

<sup>29</sup> Ralph R. Covell, ‘Gilbert Reid (1857–1927),’ *Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity*, accessed 27 April 2017, <http://www.bdcconline.net/en/stories/r/reid-gilbert.php>. For a full biography of Gilbert Reid, see Cai Degui,

Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 and he returned to Beijing imbued with the spirit of this interfaith congress.

Reid established the International Institute of China (*Shangxian tang* 尚賢堂), which was officially incorporated in 1897.<sup>30</sup> Its aim was to ‘advance the cause of international harmony and good-will, and the cause of truth and righteousness, with special reference to the welfare of China’.<sup>31</sup> Reid and the Institute became an important influence for promoting modernizing reforms as the means to strengthen China against foreign encroachment.<sup>32</sup> They received recognition and support from many Chinese officials and intellectuals, including the leading reformers Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1872–1929) and his teacher Kang Youwei 康有為 (1858–1927). The former wrote an introductory account of the institute, praising its lofty, fraternal aspirations,<sup>33</sup> while the latter, a daring utopian thinker,<sup>33</sup> was developing his own vision of the future unification of ‘nations, races and religions’ and eventually wrote his celebrated *Datong shu* 大同書 or *Book of Great Unity*.<sup>34</sup>

Due to the unstable situation in Beijing following the Boxer Rebellion, Reid moved his Institute to Shanghai, where he secured in 1914 an official recognition from the new Republic.<sup>35</sup> One of the core activities of the institute was to organize seminars, at which lectures were delivered on various faiths. In 1914, Reid gave a talk in English on the ‘Benefits of the Bahá’í Movement’, whose transcript appeared in the *Shanghai Times*.<sup>36</sup> He concluded his talk by reading out the English translation of a letter from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, whom he had written and invited to attend a ‘Congress of Religions’, modeled on the Parliament of Religions, that he proposed to hold in Shanghai.<sup>37</sup> ‘Abdu’l-Bahá showed great appreciation of Reid’s ‘lofty exertion’, but regretted to say

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*Xilai jurn—Li Jiabai de Zhongguo xin* 西來巨儒—李佳白的中國心 [The Great Confucian from the West: The Chinese Heart of Gilbert Reid] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> On its preparation and official sanction, see Gilbert Reid, *The International Institute of China* (New York, 1897).

<sup>31</sup> Gilbert Reid, ‘International Institute: Director’s Semi-Annual Report,’ *The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette (1870–1941)*, 31 May 1913.

<sup>32</sup> Tsou Mingteh, ‘Christian Missionary as Confucian Intellectual: Gilbert Reid (1857–1927) and the Reform Movement in the Late Qing.’ In Daniel Bays (ed.), *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1996), 73–119.

<sup>33</sup> Liang Qichao 梁啟超, ‘Ji Shangxian tang 記尚賢堂 [An account of the International Institute],’ in *Liang Qichao quanji* 梁啟超全集 [Complete Works of Liang Qichao], (ed.) Zhang Pingxing 張品興, vol. 1 (Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1999), 112.

<sup>34</sup> Kang Youwei 康有為, ‘Woshi 我史 [My history],’ in *Kang Youwei quanji* 康有為全集 [Collected Works of Kang Youwei], vol. 5, (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 2007), 64; Kang Youwei 康有為, *Datong shu* 大同書 [Book on Great Unity] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1935); Laurence G. Thompson, *Ta Tung Shu: The One-World Philosophy of Kang Yu-Wei* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1958).

<sup>35</sup> Covell, ‘Gilbert Reid (1857–1927).’

<sup>36</sup> International Institute, ‘Benefits of the Bahai Movement,’ *The Shanghai Times (1914–1921)*, 21 November 1914.

<sup>37</sup> The proposed Congress of Religions in Shanghai did not materialize, due to the worsening situation brought about by the First World War.



that he did not have the strength to make the long journey.<sup>38</sup>

[INSERT PICTURE 1 NEAR HERE. LEGEND: Picture 1. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s original letter in Persian to Gilbert Reid. Courtesy of Hamilton College Archives, US.]

The Chinese version of Reid’s talk was also published in the popular *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 (The *Eastern Miscellany*).<sup>39</sup> Included in the same issue of the journal was another article on the Bahá’í movement by Reid’s friend Du Yaquan 杜亞泉 (1873–1933), the journal’s chief editor. An important thinker, Du was one of the protagonists of the far-reaching debate on Eastern-Western cultures in the late 1910s, arguing for the complementarity of Western science and Chinese tradition. His chief opponent was Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), future co-founder of the Chinese Communist Party.<sup>40</sup> While appreciating the value of Western science, Du lamented the fact that the primacy of religion in Western culture had been dethroned by the rise of materialism, social Darwinism and militarism.<sup>41</sup> Du spoke highly of the Bahá’í vision to ‘trace all religions to [...] one single Divine source’. He commented that the Bahá’í teachings on unity and peace met both the needs of the times and the tradition of the Chinese people, who, unlike other peoples in other lands, carried no religious ‘burden’ from history. He predicted that it would be only a matter of time before the movement would become widely promulgated and established in the world.<sup>42</sup> Three years later, as the World War drew to an end, Du again cited the Bahá’í Faith as an exemplar of unity in his discussion on the conciliation of various conflicting ‘isms’.<sup>43</sup>

This first phase of Bahá’í connections in China exemplifies the rise of a trans-religious, cosmopolitan spirituality in the context of imperial and colonial modernity. Religious circulations between the Christian West and the domains of the ‘Orient’ led many to a search for a common

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<sup>38</sup> International Institute, ‘Benefits of the Bahai Movement’. We are grateful to Cai Degui, Allen Amrollah Hemmat and Zhou Xiayi for the discovery of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s original letter in Persian to Gilbert Reid at Hamilton College.

<sup>39</sup> Reid Gilbert [李佳白], ‘Lun Bohaihui zhi jingshen yu zuoyong 論波海會之精神與作用 [On the Spirit and Benefits of the Bahá’í Society],’ *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 [The *Eastern Miscellany*] 12, no. 5 (1915): 5–7.

<sup>40</sup> Wang Yuanhua 王元化, ‘Du Yaquan he dongxi wenhua wenti lunzhan 杜亞泉與東西文化問題論戰 [Du Yaquan and the Debate on the Relationship between Eastern and Western Cultures],’ in *Du Yaquan wencun* 杜亞泉文存 [The Works of Du Yaquan], (eds.) Tian Jianye 田建業 and Xu Jilin 許紀霖 (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 2003), 1–20.

<sup>41</sup> Du Yaquan 杜亞泉, ‘Zhanhou dongxi wenming zhi tiaohu 戰後東西文明之調和 [On the Complementarity between Eastern and Western Cultures],’ in *Du Yaquan wencun*, 345–50. See also Wang Hui and Minghui Hu, ‘Why Culture? The Great War and Du Yaquan’s Civilizational Discourse,’ in Hu and Everskog (eds.), *Cosmopolitanism in China*, 263–308.

<sup>42</sup> Lao Gao 勞高 [杜亞泉], ‘Bohai hui 波海會 [The Bahá’í Movement],’ *Dongfang zazhi* 12, no. 5 (1915): 12–13.

<sup>43</sup> Du Yaquan 杜亞泉, ‘Maodun zhi tiaohu 矛盾之調和 [The Conciliation of Conflicts],’ *Dongfang zazhi* 15, no. 2 (1918).

essence between different traditions, and to a distancing from or rupture with orthodox religious institutions. For liberal Christians such as Gilbert Reid, this approach had begun with the purpose of smoothing the conversion of the Chinese to Christianity; although his enthusiasm for promoting interfaith harmony led his original American patrons to suspect his commitment to his own faith. On the other hand, as in India, some Chinese intellectuals such as Du Yaquan sought for an alternative modernity opposed to Western imperialism and materialism. But, as has been shown by Peter van der Veer, this universalizing modern spirituality could also serve to underpin notions of national essence in the context of anti-colonial nationalism. <sup>44</sup>

### The Pan-Asiatic League and the first Chinese Bahá'í

The first recorded Chinese Bahá'í was Chen Hai An (Harold A. Chen), who embraced the Faith in mid-1916 when still a student at the University of Chicago, through the introduction of Zia Bagdadi, then associate editor of the Bahá'í journal *Star of the West*.<sup>45</sup> He was so enthusiastic about his 'newly-gained gospel' that he desired to spread it 'among three thousand students' in his university.<sup>46</sup> Inspired by Pan-Germanism, Pan-Slavism, Pan-Latinism and Pan-Americanism as well as by the Bahá'í ideals, Chen played a key role in the creation of the Pan-Asiatic League based at the University of Chicago. Possessed of the belief that 'Asia Is One', the League aimed 'to study the several civilizations represented in the League [India, China, Japan, the Philippines, Persia, and Turkey] ... to bring about a unity among the peoples in Asia'.<sup>47</sup> Chen was elected its president, while his Bahá'í teacher Zia Bagdadi, the treasurer.<sup>48</sup> Like Hu Shi at Cornell, Chen was also involved in the University's Cosmopolitan Club.<sup>49</sup> After he completed his MA at Chicago in June 1916,<sup>50</sup> Chen went to study law at Columbia University (where Hu Shi was now studying). Meanwhile, he developed a strong desire to travel to Palestine and visit 'Abdu'l-Bahá 'for spiritual food'.<sup>51</sup> Records show that he had received a letter from 'Abdu'l-Bahá, but there is no evidence

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<sup>44</sup> Peter Van der Veer, *The Modern Spirit of Asia: The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014); for a review essay, see David A. Palmer, 'Spirituality, Transcendence, and the Circulatory History of Modern Asian Religion,' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 78:1 (2018): 171–180.

<sup>45</sup> Roy Wilhelm, '[Letter to] My Dear Sisella,' 20 October 1916, US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>46</sup> Hai An Chen, '[Letter to] My Dear Earnest,' 4 May 1916, US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>47</sup> Hai An Chen, 'Constitution and By-Laws of the Pan-Asiatic League [Chicago],' circa 1916, US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>48</sup> Hai An Chen, '[Letter to] My Dear Earnest,' 4 May 1916.

<sup>49</sup> 'Cosmopolitan Club, 1916,' University of Chicago Centennial Exhibition Catalogues, accessed 1 February 1 2018, [https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/projects/centcat/quad/quad\\_img50.html](https://www.lib.uchicago.edu/projects/centcat/quad/quad_img50.html); Hai An Chen, '[Letter to] My Dear Earnest,' 12 May 1916, US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>50</sup> Alumni Council, *Alumni Directory: The University of Chicago, 1919* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1920), 64.

<sup>51</sup> Hai An Chen, '[Letter to] My Dear Earnest,' September 2, 1916, US National Bahá'í Archives.

that he made the trip.<sup>52</sup>

[INSERT PICTURE 2 NEAR HERE. LEGEND: Picture 2. Hai An Chen's letter to 'My dear Earnest' dated 4 May 1916, penned on a pre-printed letterheaded paper of his newly established Pan-Asiatic League. Courtesy of the US National Bahá'í Archives.]

Chen was eager to carry his 'Gospel' back to China. On the eve of his return at the end of 1916, he wrote to his American friends that he would meet 'Mr. Bahí', a Persian Bahá'í in Shanghai, and they would 'try to establish a Chinese Bahá'í assembly there'.<sup>53</sup> Chen, who worked at the Chinese-American News Agency based in Shanghai,<sup>54</sup> was very likely to have helped with the production of what was probably the first Bahá'í publication in Chinese in 1917.<sup>55</sup> The pamphlet, entitled *Baha zhi jianyi* 巴哈之建議 or 'The Bahá'í Proposal', gave a brief account of Bahá'u'lláh and his teachings, highlighting that his aim was 'to unite all religions in oneness of God, and all nations as one family'. It added that Bahá'u'lláh's teachings embrace the doctrines of Judaism, Islam, Zoroastrianism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism and Confucianism, and share the ideas expressed in ethics, philosophy, mysticism and even socialism. It stated that the Bahá'í goal was to achieve the 'economic, social and spiritual unity of the world of humanity'. It quoted copiously from the writings of Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá, and thus marked the beginning of Chinese translation of Bahá'í scriptures.<sup>56</sup>

In 1919, Abdu'l-Bahá addressed a letter from Haifa to a certain Chen Ting Mo in Shanghai, who was probably the same person as the afore-mentioned Chen Hai An.<sup>57</sup> As there was no postal arrangement between China and Palestine, the letter was sent via the prominent early American Bahá'í Roy Wilhelm (1875–1951) based in New York, whom Chen had become acquainted while studying in the US. In the letter Abdu'l-Bahá praised Chen's teaching efforts in China, exhorted him to 'consolidate the assembly thou hast established at Shanghai' and to make efforts to institute another one at Peking, and asked Chen to convey his love and kindness to two new Chinese

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<sup>52</sup> We are grateful to Robert Stockman, Edward Sevcik and Vargha Mazlum for helping secure these and other primary materials concerning Chen Hai An.

<sup>53</sup> Hai An Chen, '[Letter to] My Dear Earnest,' undated, US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>54</sup> Alumni Council, *Alumni Directory*, 64.

<sup>55</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, 'A Chronology of Some Major Events in the History of the Bahá'í Faith in China,' Unpublished document, 1990, 2.

<sup>56</sup> Barbara R. Sims, *The Taiwan Bahá'í Chronicle: A Historical Record of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Faith in Taiwan* (Taipei: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Taiwan, 1994), 4.

<sup>57</sup> The Chinese characters for the name of Chen Ting Mo have yet to be identified. Chen Ting Mo was referred to as a Chinese believer who became a Bahá'í in the US before returning to Shanghai. As it was a common practice for educated Chinese men to have two names, one given and one literary, one may wonder if Chen Ting Mo could be the same person as Chen Hai An.

believers.<sup>58</sup> Clearly Chen was a very active Bahá'í in China, and he would carry out activities well into the early 1920s, as can be inferred from the fact that the police of the Shanghai International Settlement investigated his 'Bahá'í Movement Esperanto'.<sup>59</sup>

### The Japanese connection and the Esperanto movement

There were, indeed, deep affinities and connections between Bahá'ís and Esperantists.<sup>60</sup> After its invention in 1887 by the Polish-Jewish ophthalmologist Ludwik Zamenhof (1859–1917), Esperanto soon spread beyond Russia and eastern Europe to many countries in Western Europe, America and Asia.<sup>61</sup> Its ideal chimed well with the Bahá'í teaching on the necessity of an international auxiliary language. Although he did not endorse Esperanto as the future lingua franca envisioned in the Bahá'í scriptures, 'Abdu'l-Bahá encouraged Bahá'ís to study and spread it.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, Zamenhof also expressed his admiration for the Bahá'í cause, and his daughter, Lidia, would become an active Bahá'í herself, translating Bahá'í literature into Esperanto and Polish.<sup>63</sup> The interactions between the Bahá'ís and Esperantists, as we show below, were also strong in China and Japan, where Esperanto had been most widely disseminated outside Europe and the Americas.<sup>64</sup>

Chen Hai An's adoption of the Bahá'í Faith had been simultaneous with his involvement in the aforementioned Pan-Asiatic League, which evokes the doctrine of Pan-Asianism—a Japanese-led cosmopolitan movement that advocated Asian unity against Western imperialism, and which would eventually become co-opted into Japanese imperialism.<sup>65</sup> But in Japan itself, it was the Esperanto movement that provided the soil for the spread of the Bahá'í Faith, and from thence

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<sup>58</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, 'A Chronology in China,' 3; Abdu'l-Bahá's letter in Arabic is available in Abdulhamid Eshraq-Khavari, *Mubádirát*, Vol. III, (ed.) Vahid Rafati (Holfheim-Germany: Bahá'í-Verlag, 2009), 299. We are grateful to Allen Amrollah Hemmat for his provisional English translation of the letter.

<sup>59</sup> National Archives and Records Administration, *Guide to the Scholarly Resources Microfilm Edition of the Shanghai Municipal Police Files, 1894–1949* (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1984).

<sup>60</sup> Peter Smith, 'Esperanto,' *A Concise Encyclopedia of the Bahá'í Faith* (London: Oneworld, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> For a sociological account of the Esperanto Movement, see Peter G. Forster, *The Esperanto Movement* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1982).

<sup>62</sup> John E. Esslemont, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1980), 165–66. For a general introduction on the Bahá'í Faith and Esperanto, see B.E.L., 'The Bahá'í Faith and Esperanto,' The Bahá'í Esperanto League, accessed 23 June 2017, <http://www.bahaaeligo.bahai.de/angla/englisch.htm>.

<sup>63</sup> Peter Smith, 'Zamenhof, Lidia (1904–42),' *A Concise Encyclopedia*.

<sup>64</sup> On the spread of Esperanto and its intellectual impact in China and Japan, see Ulrich Lins, 'Esperanto as Language and Idea in China and Japan,' *Language Problems and Language Planning* 32, no. 1 (2008): 47–60; Gregor Benton, *Chinese Migrants and Internationalism: Forgotten Histories, 1917–1945*, 1st edn. (London: Routledge, 2011), 98–114.

<sup>65</sup> 'Pan-Asianism' is sometimes known as 'Pan-Asiatic League' as well in English literature. For more on the subject, see Christopher W. A. Szpilman and Sven Saaler, 'Pan-Asianism as an Ideal of Asian Identity and Solidarity, 1850–Present,' *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 9, no. 17 (2011): 1–30.

into China. The key catalyst was the Bahá'í teacher Agnes Alexander (1875–1971), an American born into a Hawaiian Christian missionary family, who moved to Japan in 1914 and helped establish the Japanese Bahá'í community. A self-taught Esperantist, she became an advocate of the language in Japan and used it to spread the Bahá'í message.<sup>66</sup>

Indeed, at that time the Esperanto Movement enjoyed favour in Japan, and attracted an increasing number of followers.<sup>67</sup> Among those attracted to the Bahá'í teachings was the Russian Esperantist and story-writer Vasili Eroshenko (1890–1952), who was teaching Esperanto to the blind in Tokyo.<sup>68</sup> He helped Alexander with her teaching work and with the translation into Esperanto of the *Hidden Words*, a popular collection of short moral exhortations by Bahá'u'lláh. 'It was through his [Eroshenko's] effort', Alexander wrote, 'that I had the joy of sharing the Bahá'í Message with the blind of Japan'.<sup>69</sup> After the 1917 Russian Revolution, however, Eroshenko became pro-communist. Not only did he begin to distance himself from the Bahá'í movement, but he also urged the Esperanto movement in Japan to ward off its Bahá'í leaning.<sup>70</sup> He was arrested due to his active participation in socialist protests in Japan and was eventually deported in 1921 under the charge of a Soviet conspiracy allegedly in connection with the Bahá'í movement.<sup>71</sup> He then made his way to China, where he was warmly received by his fellow Chinese Esperantists. While in Beijing, he was befriended and accommodated by Lu Xun 鲁迅 (1881–1936) and his brother Zhou Zuoren 周作人 (1885–1967), both renowned writers and supporters of Esperanto, and who had also studied in Japan. Zhou Zuoren seems to have known about the Bahá'í Faith: in his 1919 discussion of the Japanese 'New Village' (Atarashiki-mura 新村), he quoted Bahá'u'lláh as saying that 'Association is always conducive to union and harmony'.<sup>72</sup> The New Village was a quasi-socialistic utopian commune established by the Japanese novelist and philosopher Saneatsu Mushanokoji (武者小路実篤, 1885–1976), whose humanitarian philosophy was inspired by Leo Tolstoy (1828–1910), who himself showed deep appreciation of the Bahá'í Faith in his later

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<sup>66</sup> Peter Smith, 'Alexander, Agnes Baldwin (1875–1971),' *A Concise Encyclopedia*.

<sup>67</sup> In 1912, Japan had 26 Esperanto groups, a number that would increase to 181 in 1926, second to none in Asia. See Forster, *The Esperanto Movement*, 22.

<sup>68</sup> For a recent and informed account of his life, see Julija Patlanj, 'Vasilii Yakovlevich Eroshenko,' (trans.) David Pardue, 2005, accessed 26 March 2018, <https://zh.scribd.com/document/44318129/Vasilii-Yakovlevich-Eroshenko-1890-1952>.

<sup>69</sup> Agnes Alexander, *History of the Bahá'í Faith in Japan, 1914–1938*, (ed.) Barbara Sims (Osaka: Bahá'í Publishing Trust of Japan, 1977), 20, [http://bahai-library.com/alexander\\_history\\_bahai\\_japan](http://bahai-library.com/alexander_history_bahai_japan).

<sup>70</sup> Alexander, 21; Akita Ujaku 秋田雨雀, 'Yi Ailuo xianke 憶愛羅先珂 [Recollections of Eroshenko],' (trans.) Qi Sheng 齊生, *Mangzhong 芒種 [Bearded Grain]*, 2, no. 1 (1935): 19–21.

<sup>71</sup> Mabel Garis, *Martha Root: Lioness at the Threshold* (Wilmette, Ill: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1983), 165. Given this international context, it was probably due to suspicions of the same political nature that the Shanghai police investigated Chen Ting Mo's 'Bahai Movement Esperanto' mentioned earlier.

<sup>72</sup> Zhou Zuoren 周作人, 'You Riben xincun ji 遊日本新村記 [On Visiting the Japanese New Village],' *Xinchao 新潮 [The Renaissance]* 2, no. 76–80 (1920).

years).<sup>73</sup> On the recommendation of the Zhou brothers, Eroshenko was invited to teach Esperanto at Peking University. A collection of his children's stories was translated into Chinese by Lu Xun, which earned fame for Eroshenko in China as 'the blind poet and writer from Russia'.<sup>74</sup>

### Martha Root and the Chinese Esperantists

In October 1923 Agnes Alexander was joined by another American woman, Martha Root, who played a pivotal role in proclaiming the Faith in China. A journalist based in Pittsburgh, Root had become a Bahá'í in 1909 through the introduction of the afore-mentioned Roy Wilhelm. Eventually, she made it her life's work to make lengthy tours around the world to promote the Bahá'í Faith, giving talks, writing articles, distributing Bahá'í literature, contacting educators, scholars, government officials, and other groups such as Theosophists, Esperantists and followers of various spiritual traditions.<sup>75</sup>

Root had longed to visit China ever since she read what later came to be known as the 'China Tablet', a famous passage on China by 'Abdu'l-Bahá published in 1917. Although China was at that time considered by Westerners to be among the feeblest and most helpless nations, 'Abdu'l-Bahá affirmed the great potential of the Chinese people and praised their spiritual qualities and traditions. 'China, China, China, China-ward the Cause of Bahá'u'lláh must march!' he wrote, calling for the 'right kind' of Bahá'í teachers to go China, characterizing it as 'the country of the future'. He stressed that the Bahá'í teacher of the Chinese people 'must first be imbued with their spirit, know their sacred literature, study their national customs and speak to them from their own stand-point, and their own terminologies'.<sup>76</sup>

Eventually, Root arrived in Beijing in April 1923, following a brief visit to Japan where she had been suspected by the Tokyo police of spreading some 'communist-like' doctrine.<sup>77</sup> At that time, the Republic was still dominated by regional warlords, with its presidency changing hands frequently. In this complex political context, Root as a journalist adhered to the Bahá'í principle of noninvolvement in politics by declining the request of her new employer, the Asiatic News Agency, to write political commentaries.<sup>78</sup> During her stay in Beijing, her schedule was filled up

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<sup>73</sup> Zenzo Kusakari, *The Communes of Japan: The Kibbutz on the Other Side of the World* (Japanese Commune Movement, 1977), 69–87; Luigi Stendardo, *Leo Tolstoy and the Bahá'í Faith* (Oxford: George Ronald Publisher, 1985).

<sup>74</sup> Huang Qiaosheng 黄喬生, 'Ailuo xianke yu Zhou shi xiongdi 愛羅先珂與周氏兄弟 [Eroshenko and the Zhou Brothers], *Beijing jishi* 北京紀事 [Beijing Documents], no. 02 (2013): 97–99.

<sup>75</sup> For her biography, see Garis, *Martha Root*.

<sup>76</sup> 'Abdu'l-Bahá, 'China Is the Country of the Future,' *Star of the West* 13, no. 3 (1917): 37.

<sup>77</sup> Garis, *Martha Root*, 165.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

with Chinese lessons, making new contacts, giving talks and writing articles.<sup>79</sup> She called on persons of rank to speak about the Faith, among them the head of the largest local mosque, an adviser to President Li Yuanhong 黎元洪, and the president of Tsinghua College, Cao Yunxiang 曹雲祥 (1881–1937, as discussed below).<sup>80</sup>

As during her visits to many other countries, Martha Root reached out to Chinese Esperantists. Her proficiency in Esperanto had proved to be very helpful in her outreach during her visits to Brazil (1919), Panama (1919), Canada (1920) and Japan (1923).<sup>81</sup> Esperanto was first introduced into China in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In the 1910s, it had spread widely in China. Not only was it made an optional course for teachers' colleges, but Esperanto groups, schools and clubs mushroomed in many cities. By the time Root arrived in China, Esperanto-related associations or societies had been established in dozens of cities including Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou and Hankou. A large number of literary and intellectual leaders, such as Ba Jin 巴金 (1904–2005), Qian Xuantong 錢玄同 (1887–1939) and Hu Yuzhi 胡愈之 (1896–1986), were its enthusiastic advocates.<sup>82</sup> The cosmopolitan ideal underlying the language was inspirational to Chinese Esperantists, who regarded the language as a means of fostering equality and amity among nations.<sup>83</sup> Esperanto was more than a language in China; it was also a movement strongly linked to Chinese anarchism and later to Communism.<sup>84</sup>

Root did not arrive early enough to meet Alexander's old friend Eroshenko, who had just left Beijing for the Soviet Union; nevertheless, she had found another channel to associate with the Esperantists in the capital. In Autumn 1923, she obtained a teaching job at the newly established Peking Esperanto College (*Pekina Esperanta Kolegio*). Its founding president was Cai Yuanpei 蔡元培 (1898–1940), then president of Peking University. Among her colleagues was Lu Xun; his brother Zhou Zuoren had been elected President of the Beijing Esperanto Society the previous year. Given such connections, Root undoubtedly associated with them. She also spoke of the Bahá'í cause to the students, some of whom had correspondence with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's grandson Shoghi Effendi Rabbani (1897–1957, known as the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith), then residing in Palestine.<sup>85</sup> It was customary for Root to promote Esperanto and the Bahá'í movement together.

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<sup>79</sup> Martha Root, 'Circular Letter to Friends in the United States,' 20 May 1923, The US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>80</sup> Garis, *Martha Root*, 168, 171.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 98, 109, 124, 165–66.

<sup>82</sup> See Hou Zhiping 侯志平, *Shijieyu zai zhongguo* 世界語運動在中國 [Esperanto Movement in China] (Zhongguo shijieyu chubanshe, 1985), 1–20; Forster, *The Esperanto Movement*, 24.

<sup>83</sup> Hou, *Shijieyu zai zhongguo*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Lins, 'Esperanto as Language and Idea.'

<sup>85</sup> Jimmy Seow, *The Pure in Heart: The Historical Development of the Bahá'í Faith in China, Southeast Asia and Far East* (Bahá'í Publications Australia, 1991), 32; see also Alexander, *The Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 59.

This was shown in the title of one of her later talks, ‘Esperanto and the Bahá’í Movement’, in which she presented Bahá’í principles for the ‘bringing together of all peoples [and] of all religions’.<sup>86</sup> As will be seen later, she would continue to make contact with Esperantists in other Chinese cities she visited.

### The Christian general and the Communists

One of Alexander’s Chinese friends was Bao Shijie 包世傑 (1891–1938), whom she had attracted to the new faith in 1920. Bao was an important figure in Shanghai’s political, religious, cultural and even commercial circles. He had played a role in the merging of five parties into the Nationalist Party (國民黨) to contest the first national elections at the outset of the Republic in 1912. A Christian, he was a key member of the Beijing Society for Religious Freedom (北京信教自由會) and a leading member of the Shanghai Christian Association for National Salvation (上海基督教救國會).<sup>87</sup> After his return to Shanghai, he had an article on the Bahá’í Faith translated for a local newspaper, which, in all likelihood, was a 1922 article entitled ‘The Great Movement to Unite All Religions’ in the time-honored *Shen Bao* 申報 or *Shanghai News*.<sup>88</sup>

By 1923, Bao was now working as secretary and diplomatic representative of Feng Yuxiang 馮玉祥 (1882–1948), the famous ‘Christian General’. It was reported that most of the General’s officers professed Christianity and almost half of his soldiers were baptized.<sup>89</sup> Feng paid great attention to the education of his men’s children through a School for the Sons of the Military Officers. With Bao’s arrangement, Root and Alexander spoke at the school and gave every student a copy of a Chinese Bahá’í booklet (which Alexander and Root had arranged for translation into Chinese by a Chinese student studying in Japan) with the hope that they would become ‘torch bearers of the Message of Bahá’u’lláh to General Feng’s army of 10,000 men’.<sup>90</sup> Lieutenant K. Tsiang, who had learned about the Faith from Alexander during his visit to Japan, also invited the two Bahá’í teachers to speak to the pilots at his aviation training school.<sup>91</sup> Prior to their departure

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<sup>86</sup> PSJ. ‘News from Central China,’ *The China Weekly Review*, 22 March 1924; cf. Hou, *Shijieyu zai zhongguo*, 31.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. reports in *Shen Bao* 申報 [Shanghai News], 20 August 1912; 3 March 1917; 17 March 1920; 14 April 1920.

<sup>88</sup> Chang Zhi 暢之, ‘Tongyi shijie tongjiao zhi dayundong 同一世界宗教之大運動 [The Great Movement to Unite All Religions],’ *Shen Bao*, 17 December 1922, sec. 19.

<sup>89</sup> Marshall Broomhall, *Marshall Feng: A Good Soldier of Christ Jesus*, 6th edn. (London: China Inland Mission, 1924), 68; James E. Sheridan, *Chinese Warlord: The Career of Feng Yü-Hsiang* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1966), 122.

<sup>90</sup> Alexander, *The Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 59.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



from capital, Root and Alexander also held the first Bahá'í Feast in Beijing on 4 November 1923, which represented a small but significant step towards Root's hope to develop the nucleus of a Bahá'í community in Beijing.<sup>92</sup>

Root and Alexander also met and conversed with Gilbert Reid.<sup>93</sup> Being a strong pacifist, Reid had been forced to leave China in 1917 for his expressed opposition to America's and China's entry into the World War. After his return to China three years later, he revived the activities of the International Institute, and started a weekly newsletter, the *International Journal* (國際公報). He published a report on Root and the Bahá'í movement in his journal,<sup>94</sup> which was followed by another article on the need to use the spirit of religion to renew the corrupted world, warning that failure to do so would result in a second World War.<sup>95</sup> His efforts to promote religious harmony were widely recognized, as was demonstrated by his election as honorary president of the short-lived Association for the Unity of World Religions (世界宗教大同會, including Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam), which was established and officially approved in Beijing in early 1923.<sup>96</sup>

The educator Deng Jiemin 鄧潔民 (1890–1926) was also deeply attracted to the Bahá'í Faith through Root and Alexander, and made sincere efforts to grasp its import.<sup>97</sup> A pro-Communist, Deng was a close friend of such founding members of the Communist Party of China as Li Dazhao 李大釗 (1888–1927) and Zhou Enlai 周恩來 (1898–1976);<sup>98</sup> he was also a convert to Christianity who had established his own church that advocated independence from foreign missionary organizations.<sup>99</sup> Root believed that Deng had converted to the Bahá'í Faith, for she

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 59; cf. Garis, *Martha Root*, 172.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>94</sup> 'Bahajiao zhi xuanchuanzhe 巴哈教之宣傳者 [The Advocate of the Bahá'í Movement],' *Guoji gongbao* 國際公報 [The International Journal] 2, no. 7 (1924): 42–43.

<sup>95</sup> Guo Tianmin 郭天民, 'Jinri gexin shijie jixu zongjiao 今日革新世界亟需宗教 [Religion Needed for a New World],' *Guoji gongbao* 2, no. 7 (1924): 43–45.

<sup>96</sup> Swastika Daily (卍字報), 'Shijie zongjiao datonghui chengli zhi sheng 世界宗教大同會成立誌盛,' *Guoji gongbao* 2, no. 28 (1923): 51–52.

<sup>97</sup> We are grateful to Dr. Chen Jinguo 陳進國 of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences for identifying the Chinese characters of Deng's name.

<sup>98</sup> Qiu Qin 丘琴, 'Deng Jiemin shengping shilue 鄧潔民生平事略 [A Brief Sketch of Deng Jiemin's life],' in *Harbin wenshi ziliao* 哈爾濱文史資料 [Historical Materials of Harbin], vol. X (Harbin: Harbin chubanshe, 1986), 26–27.

<sup>99</sup> Deng Yuying 鄧育英, 'Xianyan Dengxiaozhang Jiemin shilue 先嚴鄧校長潔民事略 [A Sketch of the Life of My Late Father Deng Jiemin],' in *Zhen Yesu jiaobui sa'nian jinian zhuankean* 真耶穌教會卅年紀念專刊 [Collection in Celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the True Jesus Church] (Nanjing: Zhen Yesu jiaohui, 1947), M23–24; cf. Tang Hongbiao 唐紅飈, *Zhen Yesu jiaobui lishi shiji kao* 真耶穌教會歷史史考 [An Investigation into the History of the True Jesus Church] (Self-published, 2006), accessed 23 March 2018, <https://1917-1951.cw.center/> 第二編/第十章/第三節/.

reported in March 1924 that Deng continued holding Bahá'í feasts after she left Beijing.<sup>100</sup> English sources reported that he had established a 'Bahá'í College' in Beijing in early 1924.<sup>101</sup> There are no Chinese records on such a 'Bahá'í College' per se. However, Deng did establish a *Guoji daxue* 國際大學 (International University) in early 1924, with the sponsorship of General Feng.<sup>102</sup> The name conveyed a desire to model on Rabindranath Tagore's International University, which was widely reported in China.<sup>103</sup> Its charter stated its aim to 'promote inter-cultural communication and advance international fellowship', with 'unity of mankind' and 'peace of the world' as its highest ideals.<sup>104</sup> The university only functioned for about one year before it was forced to close by General Feng's political opponents, on the pretext of promoting communism (赤化). Soon afterwards Deng joined the indigenous and nationalist True Jesus Church (真耶穌教會), to which he handed over his own church; he died of cancer in 1926.<sup>105</sup>

### Confucians, Theosophists and redemptive societies

The case of Deng Jiemin and the International University exemplifies Bahá'í sympathies and connections among nationalist Christians with pro-communist sympathies, as well as communists themselves. Indeed, during those times, Bahá'ís were often suspected by the authorities of being communists, as shown by the police investigations mentioned above in Shanghai and Japan (and as would be the case in the 1960s in Taiwan).<sup>106</sup>

At the same time, Root and Alexander actively sought out the advocates of Asian spiritualities, be they Confucians, redemptive societies or Theosophists. During their journey from Beijing to Shanghai, they stopped at Tianjin, Jinan, Qufu, Xuzhou, Nanjing and Suzhou, giving talks at schools and distributing the Chinese Bahá'í booklet. In Jinan, for example, they spoke at Shandong Christian College, and made a special visit to Qufu, the birthplace of Confucius, where they met

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<sup>100</sup> Martha Root, 'Circular Letter to Friends in the United States,' 19 March 1924, 5, The US National Bahá'í Archives.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 5; Garis, *Martha Root*, 176, 185; Seow, *The Pure in Heart*, 33.

<sup>102</sup> Qiu, 'Deng Jiemin shengping,' 26–27, Deng, 'Xianyan Deng Jiemin shilue,' M23-24.

<sup>103</sup> For a detailed early report on Tagore and his university, see Hua Lu 化魯, 'Taigeer de Dongxi Wenhua Lianhe Yundong 臺我爾東西文化聯閣運動 [Tagore's Movement to Unify Eastern and Western Civilizations],' *Dongfang Zazhi* 20, no. 2 (1923).

<sup>104</sup> Qiu, 'Deng Jiemin shengping.' Chen Jinguo is currently investigating further links between Li Dazhao, the Bahá'ís and the International University.

<sup>105</sup> Deng, 'Xianyan Deng Jiemin shilue'; Tang, *Zhen Yesu jiaohui lishi shiji kao*.

<sup>106</sup> Chen Jinguo, 'Bahayí jiao (Datong jiao) zai Taiwan zaoqi de chuanjiao huodong 巴哈伊教(大同教)在臺灣早期的傳教活動 [The Early Teaching Activities of the Bahá'í Faith in Taiwan],' *Taiwan zongjiaoxuehui tongxun* 臺灣宗教學會通訊 [Journal of the Taiwan Society for Religious Studies], no. 8 (2001): 55–69.

‘the little descendent of Confucius, a boy of five years’.<sup>107</sup> He was very likely to be Kong Decheng 孔德成 (1920–2008), the seventy-seventh generation descendant of Confucius in the direct line. Shortly after his birth, he was appointed Duke Yansheng 衍聖公 by the Beijing government in accordance with the imperial tradition, a title bestowed to the eldest male in the main line of descent in each generation.<sup>108</sup> They also visited and spoke at the Third Women’s Normal College in Xuzhou, on the invitation of its principal, Miss Qian Yonghe 錢用和 (1897–1990), whom Alexander had befriended in Japan.<sup>109</sup> Miss Qian later studied at Columbia University and after her return to China served as long-term English secretary to Soong Mei-ling 宋美齡 (Madame Chiang Kai-shek, 1898-2003).

When they finally reached Shanghai, Alexander sailed for Japan, while Root remained there for over two months. Never at rest, she continued to search for opportunities as a journalist and a public speaker.<sup>110</sup> Her articles on the Bahá’í Faith in turn brought her opportunities to give talks to different audiences. She was invited to speak at the Shanghai College of Commerce (上海商科大学) by its president, Guo Bingwen 郭秉文 (Kuo Ping-Wen, 1880-1969), a prominent Chinese educator who had studied at Columbia under John Dewey.<sup>111</sup> Esperantists in Shanghai were among the first to hold a gathering to welcome Root, ‘the instructor from Peking Esperanto College who came to Shanghai to promote the Bahá’í Religion’.<sup>112</sup>

Root also befriended the Theosophists in Shanghai. ‘The head of the Theosophical Society invited me to dinner on Thursday evening,’ Root wrote to her American friends on 11 January 1924, ‘and we talked for three hours’.<sup>113</sup> Outside of Shanghai, there was also a branch of the Theosophical Society in inland Hankou, which Root would visit soon.

Initially founded in New York in 1875, the Theosophical Society had established its international headquarters at Adyar, India, and within half a century its branches had appeared in many countries in America, Europe and Asia.<sup>114</sup> Before coming to China, Root had already shared the Bahá’í principles with Theosophists in such countries as Burma (1915), Brazil (1915), Argentina

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<sup>107</sup> Alexander, *The Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 60.

<sup>108</sup> For more on Kong, see Wang Shichun 汪士淳, *Ruzhe xing: Kong Decheng xiansheng zhuan* 儒者行：孔德成先生傳 [The Journey of a Confucian: A Biography of Kong Decheng] (Taipei: Linking Publishing, 2013), 42–43.

<sup>109</sup> Alexander, *The Bahá’í Faith in Japan*, 60.

<sup>110</sup> Martha Root, ‘Letter to Roy Wilhelm, Etc.’, 11 January 1924, The US National Bahá’í Archives.

<sup>111</sup> ‘Bahá’ijiao xuanchuanzhe Rute nüshi dao hu 巴海教宣傳者儒特女士到滬 [Bahá’í Teacher Miss Root Arrived in Shanghai],’ *Shen Bao*, 23 December 1923, sec. 13.

<sup>112</sup> ‘Shijieyu tongzhi huanying rute nüshi 世界語同志歡迎儒特女士 [Esperantists Welcomed Miss Root],’ *Shen Bao*, 11 January 1924, sec. 14; Root, ‘Letter to Roy Wilhelm.’

<sup>113</sup> Root, ‘Letter to Roy Wilhelm.’

<sup>114</sup> For a historical account of its early history, see Editors of Theosophy Magazine, *The Theosophical Movement 1875–1950* (Los Angeles: The Cunningham Press, 1951), 75, 44.

(1915), Chile (1915), Canada (1920) and Japan (1923).<sup>115</sup> At that time, there were already two branches of the Theosophical Society in Shanghai. The Saturn Lodge was set up in 1920 by Western residents. Spurgeon Medhurst, a Baptist missionary, translator of the *Daodejing* 道德經 and pioneer of Theosophy in China, observed in 1921 that China had ‘turned her back on her saints’, and that Theosophy was the ‘only disinfectant’ which could check the ‘spreading virus’ of materialism and irreligion in China.<sup>116</sup> The Sun Lodge was established in 1922 by Chinese Theosophists, with the prominent diplomat Wu Tingfang 伍廷芳 (1842–1922) posthumously elected Honorary President. Wu and his fellow Theosophists held the opinion that only Theosophy could unite the ‘three religions’ of China, and the propagation of its teachings and ideals would help China take its right place among the nations.<sup>117</sup> In the late 1910s, while serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs and briefly as Acting Premier of the Republic of China, Wu started to promote Theosophy in China through giving talks (including at Gilbert Reid’s International Institute of China in 1916) and translating theosophical texts by Annie Besant.<sup>118</sup> During two trips to China in 1914 and 1922, the French lawyer and Orientalist Hippolyte Dreyfus-Barney (1873–1928), who was the first French Bahá’í, and his wife, the American philanthropist Laura Clifford Barney (1879–1974)—both of whom had played instrumental roles in organizing Abdu’l Bahá’s visits to Europe and North America—met with Wu Tingfang; Barney wrote in her memoir that ‘we found him as always a fervent Theosophist and interested in Baháism’.<sup>119</sup>

Root’s newspaper articles also drew interest from several members of the Confucian Association (孔教會), who called upon her and tried to arrange for her to meet their leader, saying he had read the Chinese Bahá’í booklet.<sup>120</sup> The Confucian Association was founded in 1912 chiefly through the efforts of the US-educated Chen Huanzhang 陳煥章 (1881–1933) under the guidance of his teacher Kang Youwei. It was based on Kang’s reinterpretation of Confucianism as a religion of Confucius or *Kongjiao* 孔教. To Kang, *Kongjiao* was a lost religion originally founded by Confucius and now restored by him, which would, with the assistance of Buddhism, lead the

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<sup>115</sup> See Garis, *Martha Root*, 66, 99–101, 106, 124, 140, 163.

<sup>116</sup> Annie Besant, *The Theosophist: Oct 1921–Sep 1922*, vol. 43 (Madras: Theosophical Publishing House, 1922), 279–80.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 43:557.

<sup>118</sup> For a good introduction to Wu Tingfang and Theosophy in China, see Zhong Shaner 鐘山兒, ‘Wu Tingfang yu Zhengdao xue 伍廷芳與證道學在中國的歷史 [Wu Tingfang and the History of Theosophy in China],’ accessed 22 June 2017, <http://www.shenzhixue.org/theosophy-in-china.html>.

<sup>119</sup> Laura Clifford Dreyfus-Barney, ‘The Way Reopens.’ Unpublished memoir conserved at the National Bahá’í archives of France, 1922, 156.

<sup>120</sup> Root, ‘Letter to Roy Wilhelm.’

Chinese people and all humanity in achieving the Utopian Commonwealth of the Great Oneness (*datong*).<sup>121</sup>

In addition to Confucians, Root corresponded with Hou Sushuang 侯素爽 (1871–1942), a former official of the Qing court and later a key member of the Daoyuan (道院), a major redemptive society which flourished in the 1920s and which established a nationwide charity organization, the Red Swastika Society (紅卍字會).<sup>122</sup> Hou was undoubtedly a friend of Gilbert Reid, who had played an important role in facilitating the formal registration of the Daoyuan in Beijing; Reid was also the Honorary President of a similar redemptive society, the *Wanguo daodehui* 萬國道德會, which was closely aligned with the Confucian Association and presented itself in English as the World Ethical Society.<sup>123</sup> Redemptive societies, which grew out of the Chinese salvationist and spirit-writing traditions, used modern associational forms to promote a Chinese-centered ethical culture and spiritual universalism, combining the Five Teachings of Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam to usher in the *datong* era of the Great Commonwealth. Root reported that Hou studied the Bahá'í teachings most passionately and had passages from the Bahá'í writings published in *Zhebao* 哲報, one of the two major journals run by the Daoyuan.<sup>124</sup>

In March 1924 Root left for Hong Kong, where she met Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941), who had stopped at the city on his way to Beijing. Tagore had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in America in 1912 and was deeply impressed by the Bahá'í teachings.<sup>125</sup> One of the questions he asked Root on the first day of his arrival was: 'How is the Bahá'í Cause progressing?'<sup>126</sup> In a few weeks, he would journey northward and visit Tsinghua College, whose president, Cao Yunxiang, had been confirmed in the Bahá'í Faith through Root.

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<sup>121</sup> Kang Youwei, 'Kongjiaohui xu 孔教會序 [Introduction to the Confucian Association],' in *Kang Youwei quanji*, vol. 9, 343–46; Huan-Chang Chen, *The Economic Principles of Confucius and His School* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1911), 3–47; Zhaoyuan Wan, 'The Relationship between Science and Religion in Kang Youwei's Confucianism' (Ph.D. thesis, University of Oxford, 2019), 106–151.

<sup>122</sup> On redemptive societies and the Daoyuan, see Duara, 'The Discourse of Civilization,' 117–126; Thomas DuBois, 'The Salvation of Religion? Public Charity and the New Religions of the Early Republic.' *Minsu qiyi* 172 (2011).

<sup>123</sup> Lu Zhongwei 陸仲偉, *Minguo huidaomen* 民國會道門 [Sects and Secret Societies in the Republican Era] (Fuzhou: Fujian renmin chubanshe, 2002), 109, 131.

<sup>124</sup> Martha Root 儒特, 'Bahaijiao xuanchuanshi Rute nüshi zhi Hou Sushang shu 巴海教宣傳使儒特女士致侯素爽書 [Letter to Hou Sushuang from the Bahá'í Teacher Ms. Root],' *Zhebao* 哲報 [Spiritual Records] 3, no. 2 (1924): 2. See for example 'Bahai de Tianqi 巴海的天啓 [The Bahá'í Revelation],' *Zhebao* 3, no. 6 (1924): 7–18.

<sup>125</sup> Shoghi Effendi, *God Passes By* (Wilmette, Ill.: Bahá'í Pub. Committee, 1944), 289.

<sup>126</sup> 'World Peace: Lecture at Hong Kong University,' *South China Morning Post*, 25 April 1924.

## Cao Yunxiang, Tsinghua University and the YMCA

Cao Yunxiang was born into a prominent Christian family. After graduation from St. John's College in Shanghai, he went to Yale University for graduate studies and then to Harvard Business School, where he earned an MBA in 1914, the first Chinese to have done so. In fact, Cao had already met Hu Shi and Gilbert Reid in 1911, when all three attended and spoke at a Christian summer school on China's religious question.<sup>127</sup> After his return to China, he acted as a diplomat to the UK and Denmark for the Beijing government, during which time he married Elin Halling, a Swedish American lady, who was a member of the Theosophical Society.<sup>128</sup> In 1922, Cao was appointed as President of Tsinghua (American Indemnity College); during his six-year tenure, he upgraded the college into the full-fledged University which would eventually become China's most prestigious institution of higher education).<sup>129</sup>

Cao may have learned about the Bahá'í Faith while studying or working abroad. It was, however, through Martha Root that he and his wife became 'confirmed' in the Faith in late 1923.<sup>130</sup> From that time on, he seemed to ally himself with the Bahá'í Faith both in writing and in speeches. According to one of his Yale classmates who knew him very well, Cao 'writes that politically he is a free lance and in regard to church affiliation he is a member of the Bahá'í movement'.<sup>131</sup> His latest biographer, Cai Degui, has pointed out that Bahá'í principles were manifested in Cao's talks and work at the university.<sup>132</sup> One of his acclaimed reforms was setting up the Academy of Sinology (國學院) at Tsinghua, for which he had, on the recommendation of Hu Shi, invited four leading scholars to be the mentors, including Liang Qichao, Wang Guowei 王國維, Chen Yinke 陳寅恪, and Zhao Yuanren 趙元任. Cao's advocacy of his new faith went beyond the campus. To a liberal Christian congregation, for example, he gave a well-received speech on 'The Unity of Civilization and the Universality of Religion', concluding it with twelve Bahá'í principles.<sup>133</sup> In his talk, he argued that not only had most great religions always claimed to be universal, but the first

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<sup>127</sup> Liang Guanting 梁冠霆, *Liumei qingnian de xinyang zhuixun: Beimei Zhongguo Jidujiao xuesheng yundong yanjiu* 留美青年的信仰追尋：北美中國基督教學生運動研究 1909–1951 [The Search for Faith of Chinese Students in America: A study of the Chinese Christian Student Movement in North America, 1909–1951], (Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe, 2010), 43.

<sup>128</sup> Alexander, *The Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 59.

<sup>129</sup> For his life, see Cai Degui, *Qinghua zhifu Cao Yunxiang: Zhuanjipian* 清華之父曹雲祥：傳記篇 [The Life of Cao Yunxiang, Founding Father of Tsinghua University] (Xi'an: Shaanxi shifan daxue chubanshe, 2011).

<sup>130</sup> Keith Ransom-Kehler, 'In the Footsteps of the Pioneers,' *The Bahá'í World 1932–1934* V (1936): 520; Alexander, *The Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 59.

<sup>131</sup> Cited in Alexander, *The Bahá'í Faith in Japan*, 62.

<sup>132</sup> Cai, *Qinghua zhifu*, 247.

<sup>133</sup> Cao Yunxiang, *Datong jiao zhi zai zhongguo* 大同教之在中國 [The Bahá'í Cause in China] (Shanghai: Datong Press, 1932), 5.

two decades of the twentieth century also witnessed religious and philosophical thinkers aiming at universality in religious life as well as an up-to-date, all-inclusive conception of world-citizenship. The Bahá'í movement, in his opinion, stood out of the various movements that strived for the unification of religions and the unity of mankind.<sup>134</sup>

Cao stressed that the Bahá'í Faith not only met the needs of modern times and the exigencies of China, but was also consonant with Chinese spiritual traditions. It had been, he wrote, the age-long political ideal of China to redeem the world following the Confucian process from the cultivating of oneself, to the regulating of the family, the ruling of the country and eventually the governing of the world. He asserted that the universalism upheld in the Bahá'í cause was a logical succession to ancient Chinese ideals. To him, the very fact that unity of family, of tribe, of city-state, and nation had been successively established could only point to the next step, the unification of the whole of mankind.<sup>135</sup> Based on these considerations, he decided to find a more appropriate Chinese name for the Bahá'í cause. He used the Chinese term *datong* or 'Great Oneness'—the term that Hu Shi had used to translate as the Chinese equivalent of 'cosmopolitan'—to name the Bahá'í Faith as *Datong jiao* 大同教 (literally, the Teachings of Great Oneness).<sup>136</sup> This name would be used by Chinese Bahá'ís, especially in Taiwan, until the early 1990s.<sup>137</sup> Cao went on to translate several of the key Bahá'í scriptures, some of which were published by the Chinese Bahá'í Press (大同社), which he helped to establish in Shanghai.<sup>138</sup>

After he left Tsinghua in 1928, Cao moved to Shanghai where he took up various posts, including Chairman of the Board of the Shanghai Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA). He and his wife joined the local Bahá'ís and became active members of the community.<sup>139</sup> He reported that he had 'ample opportunities' to discuss the Bahá'í teachings with a variety of friends, including generals, Christians, businessmen, Buddhists and Muslim clerics, some of whose

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<sup>134</sup> Y. S. Tsao [Cao Yunxiang], 'The Unity of Civilization,' *The Bahá'í Year Book (1925–1926)* I (1926): 141–47.

<sup>135</sup> Cao Yunxiang, 'Datong zhuyi yu xinzhongguo 大同主義與新中國 [Universalism and New China],' *Gexin 革心 [Renewing the Heart]*, no. 4 (1933): 1–6; cf. Y. S. Tsao, 'The Bahá'í Cause in China,' *The Bahá'í World (1930–1932)* IV (1933): 420–24.

<sup>136</sup> Gilbert Reid had coined this name in 1917. Following the controversy over the proposal to install Confucianism as China's state religion, which was fiercely opposed by Christians and secularists, Reid proposed that, instead, the common principles of all religions could be inscribed into China's constitution, without partiality to any sect, and that these common teachings be called *Datong jiao*. See Li Jiabai [Gilbert Reid], 'Xianfa shang zongjiao wenti zhi shangque 憲法上宗教問題之商榷 [A Discussion on the Constitutional Question of Religion],' *Shangxiantang jishi 尚賢堂紀事 [The Institute Record]*, no. 1 (1917), 10–12, quoted in Cai Degui, 'Datong jiao kaolue' 大同教考略 [An Examination of the Datongjiao name], paper presented at the international conference on Bahá'í principles, discourses and practices on world peace and social development, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences, 14–15 November 2015.

<sup>137</sup> Research Department of the Universal House of Justice, 'Extracts from the Communications Written by and on behalf of Shoghi Effendi Regarding Dr. Tsao,' 25 January 2016, 3.

<sup>138</sup> Cf. Cao, *Datong jiao*.

<sup>139</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, 'A Chronology' 6.

appreciative testimonies he had collected and published in both English and Chinese.<sup>140</sup> It should be noted, however, that while becoming increasingly engaged with the Bahá'í Faith, Cao did not withdraw from his Christian activities in association with the YMCA. For in his view, the two faiths were unified in the concept of 'oneness of religion' and a true Bahá'í would necessarily uphold the teachings of Jesus Christ.<sup>141</sup>

### Sun Yat-sen and China's political elite

During her sojourn in Hong Kong in early 1924, Martha Root made a special trip to Guangzhou, where she had an audience with Sun Yat-sen 孫中山 (1866–1925). The meeting was arranged through Sun's family friend Liao Chongzhen 廖崇真 (1898–1971), a newly returned Cornell graduate, who embraced the Bahá'í Faith in the US through the same Roy Wilhelm, and would later become a leading agricultural reformer and translator of the Bahá'í writings.<sup>142</sup> At that time, Sun had just regrouped his followers into the Nationalist Party (commonly known as Kuomintang or KMT) with assistance from the Communists and the Soviet Union, and established a government of his own in Guangzhou as an alternative to the warlord-dominated government in Beijing.<sup>143</sup> A Chinese newspaper reported that Sun 'showed greatest appreciation' of their discussion on world peace.<sup>144</sup> Root ended her teaching journey in China in May 1924 when she left for Australia. She cherished the hope that she could come back to China and spend the rest of her life there.<sup>145</sup>

Root paid another two-month visit to China in late 1930. While in Shanghai, she had her articles on the Bahá'í Faith published in several newspapers.<sup>146</sup> Equally responsive was the city of Guangzhou, where Root was invited to give three broadcasts on the Bahá'í Movement and Esperanto, whose texts appeared in a special supplement to the *Guangzhou Municipal Daily News* (廣州市政日報 22 September 1930). She was invited by the Chancellor, Zhang Naiyan 張乃燕

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<sup>140</sup> Tsao, 'The Bahá'í Cause in China,' 424; cf. Cao, *Datong jiao*, 13–15.

<sup>141</sup> Cao Yunxiang, 'Datong jiao yu renxin de gaizao 大同教與人心的改造 [The Bahá'í Cause and the Transformation of Human Hearts],' *Ziyou yanlun* 自由言論 [Free Speech], no. 6 (1933): 16–17.

<sup>142</sup> Liao Chongzhen 廖崇真, 'Jieshao Luode Nüshi 介紹羅德女士 [Introduction to Miss Root],' *Guangzhou Shizheng Ribao* 廣州市政日報 [Canton Municipal Daily News], September 23, 1930, sec. 11.

<sup>143</sup> Martha Root, 'Chinese culture and Baháism,' *Star of the West*, 21, no. 9 (1930): 262.

<sup>144</sup> 'Meiguo nüjizhe zhi youyue 美國女記者之遊粵 [An American Female Journalist Visited Canton],' *Guangzhou guomin ribao* 廣州國民日報 [Canton People's Daily], 4 April 1924.

<sup>145</sup> Root, 'Baháijiao xuanchuanishi,' 1.

<sup>146</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, 'A Chronology' 3. For newspaper coverage on her lectures on the Bahá'í Faith in Shanghai, see, for example, 'Lady Lectures on Esperanto, Bahá'í Movement' (*The China Press*, September 28, 1930); 'Esperanto and Baháism' (*The North-China Herald and Supreme Court & Consular Gazette*, 30 September 1930).



(1894–1958), to give a speech to two thousand students at the National Central University in Nanjing, probably the largest audience she had ever had in China.<sup>147</sup> She also visited a number of governors and ministers and shared with them Bahá'u'lláh's message, including General Chen Mingshu 陳銘樞 (1889–1965), then Governor of Guangdong, former Minister Ye Gongchao 葉恭綽 (1881–1968), Wang Zhengting 王正廷 (1882–1961), Minister of Foreign Affairs, to whom Bao Shijie had once served as secretary, and Jiang Menglin 蔣夢麟 (1886–1964), Minister of Education.<sup>148</sup>

### Toward the 1930s and 40s

Through these numerous contacts with political, educational and cultural leaders, talks at colleges, schools, societies and on the radio, and articles in newspapers and magazines, the message of Bahá'u'lláh reached numerous Chinese and generated unprecedented publicity for the Faith in China in the 1920s. These favorable conditions contributed to the growth of the Chinese Bahá'í community. By 1928, a Bahá'í Spiritual Assembly had been formed in Shanghai, with the Persian Bahá'í Ouskouli as the secretary. Ouskouli had settled in the city with his family and functioned as the main correspondence channel with Shoghi Effendi in Haifa.<sup>149</sup>

At the same time, the Bahá'í movement was increasingly recognized as an important advocate of world peace. In August 1929, for example, it was reported in the *Islamic Monthly of Yunnan* (雲南清真鐸報) that the Bahá'í religion would take part in the Universal Religious Peace Conference to be convened at Geneva, Switzerland, in 1930, along with other great religious systems including Buddhism, Hinduism, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Ethical Culture, Shintoism and Theosophy. The report highlighted that though an emerging, less-known religion, the Bahá'í movement was a universal one, whose teachings resembled yet predated those of socialism, and that there were already quite a few followers in Shanghai.<sup>150</sup>

In the following two decades of the 1930s and 40s, the Chinese Bahá'í community experienced modest growth. But, as China came under the unified control of the Nationalist Party in the early 1930s, the project of nation-building shifted from the realm of intellectual ideas to (often violent) social engineering by the KMT Party-State, communist revolution, and Japanese imperialism. Cosmopolitan ideals were marginalized, incorporated or co-opted in the ideological struggle

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<sup>147</sup> Root, 'Chinese culture' 266; see also Garis, *Martha Root*, 362.

<sup>148</sup> Root, 262–65.

<sup>149</sup> Bahá'í World Centre, 'A Chronology,' 5.

<sup>150</sup> 'Zongjiao Heping Dahui 宗教和平大會 [Universal Religious Peace Conference],' *Yunnan Qingzhen Duobao* 云南清真鐸報 [An Islamic Monthly of Yunnan], no. 7 (1929): 21–22.

between the rival forces. The intellectual avant-garde, many of whom were Esperantists in their youth, now divided into the different camps. The older generation of Confucian cosmopolitans had passed away; the redemptive societies devoted themselves to the day-to-day urgency of charity and religious salvation. The politicians and generals deferred their internationalist sympathies to a distant future. With the Anti-Japanese war and the civil war between the Nationalist and Communist Parties, the ‘cosmopolitan moment’ of the early twentieth century came to an end.

### Hilda Yen, the UN, and the post-war cosmopolitan moment

But the final episode in this study links our Chinese story to another cosmopolitan moment, in the aftermath of World War II, with the founding of the United Nations Organization. In 1944, a prominent Chinese diplomat, Yan Yaqing 顏雅清 (Hilda Ya-tsing Yen, 1906–1970), declared herself a Bahá’í in New York. A niece of Cao Yunxiang, she came from a high-profile Chinese family. Her uncle Yan Huiqing 顏惠慶 (W. W. Yen, 1877–1950) had several times held the post of Premier of the Republic in the 1920s, and later became China’s ambassador to the Soviet Union, in which role he invited her to act as the Embassy hostess. That paved the way for her to become a diplomat herself, serving as a Chinese representative to the League of Nations. After the Sino-Japanese War broke out, she trained as a pilot and made widely reported solo flying trips across the US in 1938–39, sometimes in her own plane named ‘The Spirit of New China’, eloquently speaking about the need of assistance for China to fight against Japan’s invasion.<sup>151</sup>

An Episcopal Christian, Yan may have first heard about the Bahá’í Faith from her maternal uncle Cao Yunxiang, but it was through her contact with the American Bahá’ís that she finally became confirmed.<sup>152</sup> Invigorated by her new faith and acting as Chinese representative, Yan attended such momentous meetings as the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks Conference that laid the foundations for the United Nations.<sup>153</sup> She worked as the public liaison officer at the UN Office of Public Information, and was one of the founding members of the UN representative office of the Bahá’í International Community (BIC), one of the first non-governmental organizations to be accredited at the UN in 1948. In the next year, Yan served as a member of the Bahá’í delegation to the UN International Conference of NGOs held at Lake Success, NY.<sup>154</sup> In addition, she

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<sup>151</sup> Cf. Patti Gully, *Sisters of Heaven: China’s Barnstorming Aviatrices* (San Francisco: Long River Press, 2008), 43–71; Cai Degui, *Shijie gongmin Yan Yaqing zhuan* 世界公民顏雅清傳 [The Life of World Citizen Hilda Yen] (Guangzhou: Huacheng Press, 2013).

<sup>152</sup> Louise Gregory, ‘The Historic Thirty-Sixth Convention,’ *Bahá’í News*, no. 170 (September 1944): 1–8.

<sup>153</sup> ‘Peace Depends on Religion, Bahá’ís Told by Hilda Yen,’ *Grosse Pointe News*, 6 August 1945; cited in Gully, *Sisters of Heaven*, 88.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. Mildred Mottahedeh, ‘In Memoriam: Hilda Yank Sing Yen 1905–1970,’ *The Bahá’í World 1968–1973* XV

served as one of the secretaries to Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt, the first chairperson of the preliminary United Nations Commission on Human Rights, during the drafting of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.<sup>155</sup> In this role, she undoubtedly had many interactions with the Vice-Chairman of the Commission, the Chinese representative P. C. Chang 張彭春 (1892–1957), who was her former colleague in the Chinese diplomatic service, and who had also, two decades earlier, been employed by her uncle Cao Yunxiang as professor and director of teaching affairs at Tsinghua University.<sup>156</sup> Chang is widely recognized for his seminal contributions, representing a Confucian perspective, to the deliberations on the wording of the Declaration.<sup>157</sup> These personal connections show how the cosmopolitan nexus had stayed alive over the decades, tracing a direct link between the two ‘cosmopolitan moments’ of early Republican China and of post-war internationalism.

### Conceptualizing cosmopolitan moments

Cosmopolitanism as a normative ideal has been defined by Prasenjit Duara as the notion that ‘all humans belong non-exclusively to a single community’.<sup>158</sup> The sociological challenge is to understand ‘how a normative idea emerges and becomes embodied in social forms’.<sup>159</sup> As outlined by Holton, a research programme on cosmopolitanism needs to address the question of ‘What varieties of cosmopolitanism have emerged, and how do these relate to both the temporal and spatial development of globalization?’<sup>160</sup>

This article has used the history of the Bahá’í Faith in Republican China to document the appearance of a ‘cosmopolitan nexus’ of interconnected and transnational networks in the early decades of the twentieth century. These groups, which, in China, included Bahá’ís, Esperantists, Theosophists, liberal Christians, Confucians, redemptive societies, reformist intellectuals and socialists, all had different social, cultural, philosophical and ideological starting points, but they all

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(1974): 476–78; Annie Remer, ‘Divine Plan Unfolds, Convention Report - 1948,’ *Bahá’í News*, no. 208 (June 1948): 2–5; ‘Timeline,’ Bahá’í International Community, accessed 24 March 2018, <https://www.bic.org/about/about-us>.

<sup>155</sup> Gully, *Sisters of Heaven*, 90.

<sup>156</sup> John Israel (ed.), ‘Qinghua School’, Part I of ‘Draft History of Qinghua University’, *Chinese Education* 15, no. 3–4 (1982): 1–30.

<sup>157</sup> Frédéric Krumbain, ‘P. C. Chang—The Chinese Father of Human Rights,’ *Journal of Human Rights* 14, no. 3 (2015): 332–52; Sun Pinghua, ‘Pengchun Chang’s Contributions to the Drafting of the UDHR,’ *Journal of Civil and Legal Sciences* 5, no. 5 (2016).

<sup>158</sup> Prasenjit Duara, *The Crisis of Global Modernity: Asian Traditions and a Sustainable Future* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 20.

<sup>159</sup> Gerard Delanty, ‘Not All Is Lost in Translation: World Varieties of Cosmopolitanism,’ *Cultural Sociology* 8, no. 4 (2014): 377.

<sup>160</sup> Robert John Holton, ‘Cosmopolitanism or Cosmopolitanisms? The Universal Races Congress of 1911,’ *Global Networks* 2, no. 2 (2002): 157.

aspired to some form of cosmopolitan ideal by which they would transcend their original civilizational or religious matrix—be it Islamic, Christian, Chinese or Western—and build an all-encompassing human community that could both respect and transcend difference. This common aspiration facilitated connections and exchanges between these networks; indeed, the same individuals were often active in more than one of the groups. But these networks were not only based on these specific cosmopolitan movements; they largely overlapped with elite intellectual and political networks. The story of the dissemination of the Bahá'í teachings in China during this period is a mapping of many of China's leading cultural, intellectual and political figures of the time, all of whom were directly or indirectly connected to each other.

The wide-ranging sympathy of China's elite for the ideas prevalent in the cosmopolitan nexus seems to indicate that there was something 'in the air' that drew them to those ideals, particularly during the first three decades of the twentieth century. This was a specific 'cosmopolitan moment', defined by Delanty as a time when the encounter between cultures, and the encounter between the local and the global, leads to transformation and self-problematization.<sup>161</sup>

Our account raises the question of the conditions leading to the beginning and end of specific cosmopolitan moments. These include imperial and colonial expansion, the development of trade networks, migratory and religious circulations, and technological changes that integrate territories through infrastructures. The rapid conjunction and intensification of these factors provokes the weakening or breakdown of orthodoxy and a flourishing of cultural experimentation, eclecticism and innovation, as well as a new subjectivity and reflexivity. Such a moment reveals unique dynamics of interaction and distinctive cosmopolitan subjectivities, aesthetics, networks, ideals and imaginations. But the moment ends when some of the ideas and networks congeal into competing and mutually exclusive ideological and political formations, marginalizing or co-opting the less exclusivist strands.

Different moments have generated different cosmopolitan dynamics. Our study points to the Asian colonial modernity of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century<sup>162</sup> as a key cosmopolitan moment. The worldwide dissemination through colonial empires and spheres of influence, of modern infrastructures of transport, administration, education, hygiene and religion, and networks of transcontinental circulation and imperial political integration, led to the formation

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<sup>161</sup> Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 177.

<sup>162</sup> Barlow (ed.), *Formations of Colonial Modernity in East Asia* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997); 'Debates over Colonial Modernity in East Asia and Another Alternative,' *Cultural Studies* 26: 5(2012): 617–44; Lee Hyunjung and Youngnan Cho, 'Introduction. Colonial Modernity and Beyond in East Asian Contexts,' *Cultural Studies* 26:5 (2012), 601–16; Jeremy Jammes and David A. Palmer, 'Occulting the Dao: Daoist Inner Alchemy, French Spiritism, and Vietnamese Colonial Modernity in Caodai Translingual Practice,' *The Journal of Asian Studies* 77, no. 2 (2018), 405–28. doi:10.1017/S0021911817001425.

of a specific type of imagination of a universal human community. The new generation of elites who were trained in Western-style educational institutions worked in modern-style political or economic organizations, but lived in societies in which traditional forms of thought and society were still pervasive. New horizons of knowledge and progress, and experiences of intercontinental travel, served to give them a more cosmopolitan outlook, transcending without losing their embedding in local cultures, while the universalism of the Western imperial imagination and civilization held a strong attraction. At the same time, they strove to redress the insufficient universality of the Western-dominated order, by embracing cosmopolitan visions that were either more radical or that more fully encompassed non-Western cultures and civilizations. New forms of religious or spiritual universalism were one solution, which promised to maintain the material and scientific progress of the West while legitimizing, rejuvenating and universalizing the spirituality of the Orient, forming a complete union of spiritual and material civilization that would incorporate the wisdom of all peoples. Another solution was nationalism, which, in this period, saw nation-building as the foundation of a true cosmopolitanism, replacing the lopsided Western domination of the colonial empires with a world community of diverse, independent and equal cultures and nations. Socialism was a third solution, which promised a new universal commonwealth of the people of the world, rid of capitalist and imperialist oppression. In the period covered by this study, these different options had not yet fully crystallized into what, today, may appear to be radically incompatible visions of world order. This was a time of heated debates and controversies, far from any consensus. At the same time, the actors knew each other, experimented with different ideas, moved between networks, and often changed their own positions.<sup>163</sup>

Cultural reflexivity and self-problematization, a necessary condition for the cosmopolitan condition, was not limited to colonized intellectuals—it also occurred in the colonial metropolises. The impact of the colonial encounter on Western intellectual and artistic reflexivity has been well documented.<sup>164</sup> Here, we can see how a cosmopolitan self-problematization became apparent in the religious field, even if it never became dominant. Many liberal Christians questioned the exclusivist claims of their faith, and were moved to engage in interfaith encounters and to recognize the possibility of truth in other traditions. Theosophists and others rejected the forms of Western religiosity, and sought for wisdom in the traditions of the Orient. Both movements were advocates of social reform. During this period, under the ministry of ‘Abdul’-Bahá, the Bahá’í

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<sup>163</sup> See Rana Mitter, ‘Contention and Redemption: Ideologies of National Salvation in Republican China,’ *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 3:3 (2002), 44–74.

<sup>164</sup> Peter van der Veer, ‘Spirituality in Modern Society,’ *Social Research* 76:4 (2009): 1097–120.

Faith in the West combined both sensibilities, alternatively or simultaneously perceived by Westerners as a universalistic Oriental wisdom, or as a modern religious movement that affirmed Jesus Christ and the Christian spirit but without sectarianism and exclusivity.<sup>165</sup>

The consensus in much of the academic literature has been to portray most of these trends, whether in the West or among colonial elites, as expressions of Westernization or ‘Protestantization’.<sup>166</sup> To be sure, Max Müller’s *Sacred Books of the East*, the World’s Parliament of Religions, and other interfaith initiatives were dominated by Christians who continued to believe in the supremacy of their own faith and promoted a form of religiosity that conformed to liberal Protestant norms. Western seekers after the wisdom of the Orient, similarly, projected their own fantasies and tropes, derived from Western expectations, onto Asian spiritual traditions. And the elite cosmopolitans of Asia, especially in China, were often at the forefront of Westernizing cultural trends and of movements to destroy traditional culture and religion.<sup>167</sup> Such were the structural conditions of the cosmopolitan moment under colonial modernity, that it was virtually impossible to imagine alternative forms of global community without borrowing from, partly mirroring, or inverting the very imagination of Western political, cultural and religious hegemony.

However, following recent sociological conceptualizations, cosmopolitanism (or ‘cosmopolitanization’<sup>168</sup>) can be conceived, not as a state that is either present or absent,<sup>169</sup> but as a process of transformations in self-understanding caused by increasing interactions between societies and between the local and the global, leading to a greater openness to difference coupled with the quest to find shared norms of co-existence and to build the foundations of a global community.<sup>170</sup> This is not a linear process, however. Within such a framework, the cosmopolitanism of colonial modernity at the turn of the twentieth century, can be seen as one of a succession of cosmopolitan moments in time and space. It was preceded by other moments in pre-colonial and colonial contexts,<sup>171</sup> and was followed by other moments, in the post-war, post-colonial, and contemporary contexts.

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<sup>165</sup> Smith, *The Babi and Bahá’í Religions*, 100–57.

<sup>166</sup> Seager, Richard H. *The World’s Parliament of Religions: The East-West Encounter* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995).

<sup>167</sup> Goossaert and Palmer, *The Religious Question*. On the religiosity of China’s elites during this period, see Paul Katz, ‘Secular yet Sacred: The Religious Lives of Modern Chinese Elites,’ in Paul Katz, *Religion in China and its Modern Fate* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2014), 109–54.

<sup>168</sup> Ulrich and Sznajder, ‘Unpacking Cosmopolitanism,’ 7.

<sup>169</sup> Gerard Delanty, ‘Introduction: The Emerging Field of Cosmopolitanism Studies,’ in *Routledge Handbook of Cosmopolitan Studies*, (ed.) Gerard Delanty (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), 4. See also Ryan Dunch, ‘Beyond Cultural Imperialism: Cultural Theory, Christian Missions, and Global Modernity,’ *History and Theory*, 41 (2001): 301–325.

<sup>170</sup> Delanty, *The Cosmopolitan Imagination*, 177.

<sup>171</sup> Bryan S. Turner, ‘Reflexive Traditionalism and Emergent Cosmopolitanism: Some Reflections on the Religious Imagination,’ *Soziale Welt* 61 (2010), 313–18.

## Diverging trajectories

In our case, during the cosmopolitan moment of early twentieth century China, we see a range of cosmopolitan ideals distributed in a wide array of networks and organizations, with sufficient overlap that they facilitated links, conversations and circulations between and among them. Being largely confined to intellectual, religious and political elites, however, they did not penetrate into the grassroots of society. And ultimately, the cosmopolitan dreams were insufficient to transcend the identities that crystallized around each network. The cosmopolitan ideals were, in each network, combined with specific cultural or religious traditions, ideological inclinations, and geo-political affinities. As the decades advanced and China was put on a war footing, cosmopolitan utopianism was relegated to a distant future and put at the service of nationalist or imperialist goals: the liberal Christian strand becoming associated with the American ties of the Kuomintang; the socialist strand becoming solidified as part of the ideology of the Communist Party; and the pan-Asiatic, traditionalist strand becoming the target of Japanese strategies of co-optation. But the Bahá'í connections show that, in the early decades of the century, cosmopolitan ideals facilitated the circulation of ideas and people, in networks of communication that had not yet congealed into the three camps that shaped the rise of Chinese nationalism during and after the Second World War.

As for the Bahá'í Faith itself, while it acted as a connector between the different networks, it was also an outlier within the cosmopolitan nexus. Liberal Christianity, modernizing Oriental spiritualities, and secular universalism and socialism all had deep roots and influence in the cultural, religious or political worlds in which Chinese cosmopolitans circulated, whether in Shanghai, Peking, London, New York, Moscow or Tokyo. The Bahá'í Faith could connect and show affinities with all of these movements, but it remained independent of them all. Its cosmopolitanism was more radical. It had emerged out of a different cultural matrix, Iranian Islam, from which it was cut off through its affirmation of a new divine revelation and its persecution as a heresy; it had parted ways from the nationalist and Islamist movements that were led by many of its leading interlocutors in the Middle East.<sup>172</sup> Unlike the latter, or its friends among Christians, Confucians and redemptive societies, it did not represent a modernizing, liberalizing or universalizing trend that still situated itself within an existing tradition; rather, it claimed to be a new and independent religious revelation with the oneness of humanity at the very core of its theology and eschatology. Unlike the socialists, communists and militant pan-Asianists, it banned the pursuit of political

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<sup>172</sup> Cole, *Modernity and the Millennium*.

power and involvement in partisan struggles. It was thus not incorporated or co-opted into any of the ideologies or geo-political camps associated with the competing forces during the war period.

In some ways, the Bahá'í affinities were strongest with the Theosophists and the Esperantists, which may explain why these two networks were so often intertwined with those of the Bahá'í Faith. Like the Theosophists, the Bahá'ís formed a highly transnational movement that claimed to unify and transcend every specific religious tradition. Like the Esperantists, the Bahá'ís shared a radical utopian ideal of human community. But unlike the former's aspiration to form an esoteric spiritual elite, and the latter's focus on language alone as a vehicle for world solidarity, the Bahá'í Faith saw itself as a fully-fledged world religion and way of life, a mass movement and a set of principles for the organization of a world commonwealth.

This distinction was still aspirational in early twentieth century China, however; it would take decades for the diverging trajectories of the different movements to open a wide gulf between them, loosening the deep affinities that formed the cosmopolitan nexus of the period we have focused on here. The Theosophical Society, based in India but with a network of chapters throughout the Americas, Europe and Asia, reached its peak in the late 1920s, with a membership of 45,000. Its leaders Henry Steel Olcott (1832–1907) and Annie Besant (1847–1933) had played significant roles in promoting the modernization of Theravada Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as the Indian home rule movement. While the Society suffered from divisions and schisms after the 1930s, Theosophy had a profound influence on the reinvention and spread of Asian spiritualities in the West.<sup>173</sup> The Esperanto movement also peaked in the 1920s, when Iranian, Chinese and Japanese delegates to the League of Nations proposed the adoption of the language in international relations.<sup>174</sup> As for the Bahá'í Faith, at the time, its nucleus as an organized religion was constituted by its Iranian community, hardened by persecution and numbering around 100,000, including merchants, clerics, peasants and nomads; a flourishing exile community in Ishqabad in Russian Turkmenistan; its leadership based in Haifa in British Palestine; a network of intellectual interlocutors in Cairo, Beirut and Istanbul;<sup>175</sup> and fledgling communities throughout the United States, Canada, Britain, France, Germany, India, Burma, Japan and Australia. In China, while organized Spiritual Assemblies are reported to have been formed in Shanghai and Beijing, the Bahá'í influence seems to have been primarily through the promotion and circulation of its ideas through personal networks, intellectual conversations, speeches and news reports, as we have

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<sup>173</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994).

<sup>174</sup> Forster, *The Esperanto Movement*; Gerald Chan, 'China and the Esperanto Movement,' *Australian Journal of Chinese Affairs* 15 (1986): 1-18.

<sup>175</sup> Oliver Scharbrodt, *Islam and the Bahá'í Faith: A Comparative Study of Muhammad 'Abdub and 'Abdul-Bahá 'Abbas* (London: Routledge, 2011).



described in this article.

The Bahá'í community in mainland China withered away after the establishment of the Peoples' Republic in 1949. The Bahá'ís from abroad, like other foreigners, had to evacuate the country. Only Ouskouli managed to stay in Shanghai, where he passed away in 1956 and was buried.<sup>176</sup> The rest of the foreign believers, together with some of the native ones, moved to Taiwan and Malaysia. It was there, and in Hong Kong, Macau and Singapore, that Chinese Bahá'í communities were established and grew from the mid-twentieth century onwards.<sup>177</sup> During that period, the Bahá'í Faith also underwent massive expansion in rural regions of the global South, in regions such as South Asia, Central Africa, Latin America and Oceania. A worldwide institutional structure of elected councils at the local, national and international levels was established. While the cosmopolitan vision of the oneness of humanity and a future world commonwealth remained at the core of the Bahá'í teachings, the network of Bahá'í interlocutors had expanded far beyond the early circles of liberal Christians, Theosophists or Esperantists. Efforts became more focused on engaging with families and youth at the grassroots, community groups, local authorities and development organizations.

It was only in the late 1980s that the Bahá'í Faith resumed its spread in mainland China—a process that began through overseas educational and business connections, without direct link with the earlier history that we have narrated here. It accelerated through local Chinese groups in the early twenty-first century. <sup>178</sup> In China as elsewhere, Bahá'í cosmopolitanism can now be characterized by the dynamic tension inherent to its goal of creating a single global movement that is rooted in self-sustaining grassroots communities in tens of thousands of localities on all continents. Meanwhile, the rise of nationalist populism on all continents seems to signal the end of the post-Cold War cosmopolitan moment. Only time will tell us when, and under what configuration, we may witness the signs of a new cosmopolitan moment.

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<sup>176</sup> R. and S. A. Suleimani, 'In Memoriam: Husayn Uskuli 1875–1956,' *The Bahá'í World* XIII (1970): 871–73.

<sup>177</sup> Cf. Sims, *The Taiwan Bahá'í Chronicle: A Historical Record of the Early Days of the Bahá'í Faith in Taiwan*; *The Bahá'í Faith: 50 Years in Singapore 1950–2000* (Singapore: The Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Singapore, 2000); Barbara R. Sims, *Macau Bahá'í Community in the Early Years* (Tokyo: Bahá'í Publishing Trust, 1991); Shantha Sundram, *Mystic Connections: Stories of Some Early Bahá'ís of Malaysia* (Bahá'í Publishing Trust Malaysia, 2003).

<sup>178</sup> David A. Palmer, 'From "Congregations" to "Small Group Community Building": Localizing the Bahá'í Faith in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Mainland China,' *Chinese Sociological Review* 45, no. 2 (January 2012): 78–98.