

THE IDLE AND THE BUSY

Teahouses and Public Life in Early Twentieth-Century Chengdu

DI WANG
Texas A & M University

In a doggerel verse about his tour of Chengdu,¹ Huang Yanpei, Republican China's preeminent educator, wrote, "One idle person wanders the street, counting paving stones; two idle persons go to a teahouse to spend the whole day."² This verse presents a vivid picture of the determinedly leisurely style of life Chengdu people once lived. Similarly for Shu Xincheng, another famous educator who visited Chengdu in the 1930s, the strongest impression the city gave him was that of the local culture's prizing of leisure time. He expressed surprise at the huge number of teahouse-goers and their long stay there each day: "Every teahouse is crowded from sunrise to sunset; there is often no room to sit."³ Still another Chinese visitor noted that in Chengdu, "to eat a meal takes no time at all, but to drink tea in a teahouse takes at least three to four hours."⁴ Foreign travelers noticed this widespread culture of leisure as well. According to the geographer George Hubbard, many people had "little else to do on the street but wander and chat."⁵ This was the landscape of early twentieth-century Chengdu's streets and public life. The hectic rhythm usually associated with big-city life was hardly in evidence.

It is understandable that visitors had such reactions. The leisure culture permeated everywhere and was even actively promoted by the people of Chengdu. As a matched couplet posted by a tea and wine shop advised, "Work hard for reputation and work hard for profit, but find leisure time to drink a cup of tea; work hard for thinking and think hard for working, but seek happiness to sip a little wine."⁶ A song sung by gambling stall keepers on the sidewalks told a similar story: "Don't hurry and don't be busy. What busy man has a good fate?"⁷ Local people joked about their hometown as a city of the "Three Plenties"—plenty of idle people, plenty of teahouses, and plenty of lavatories.⁸

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Even a local proverb said, "half of Chengdu people go to teahouses routinely."⁹ If a Chengdu native wrote about his city, it was nearly always to discuss its teahouses.¹⁰

Drinking tea in teahouses had become a cherished social custom. Many travelers believed that no other city in China had such a large number of teahouses and teahouse-goers.¹¹ Teahouses were so important in people's lives that Japanese investigators even connected teahouses with the prosperity of the city.¹² When a modern writer writes about the *chake* (literally, "tea guests" or "tea drinkers") of Chengdu, he says that Chengdu people scorn the tea drinking of all other places, that they consider only themselves qualified to be called *chake*, and that Sichuan alone is a true *chaguo* (Kingdom of Tea).¹³ Certainly, as a birthplace of tea production and tea drinking,¹⁴ Sichuanese have much of which to be proud. Their teahouses, teahouse culture, and teahouse life have been well known in China and have become important parts of local tradition.¹⁵

Who were the main patrons in the teahouses of Chengdu? A guidebook of 1938 and a travel note of 1943 listed two categories: "the idle class" (*youxian jieji*) and "the busy class" (*youmang jieji*).¹⁶ The idle in Chengdu, as commonly understood, was the leisure class: local scholars, absentee landlords, retired officials, and other elites. The busy class was the people who had to work to make a living. The busy in the teahouse could be classified into three groups. First were those who used the teahouse as a theater, such as local opera performers and storytellers. Second were those who used teahouses as their offices, such as merchants, fortune-tellers, doctors of Chinese medicine, and craftsmen. Third were those who used teahouses as a market, such as food and sundries peddlers and free laborers. We must recognize, however, that here "the idle" and "the busy" are used very loosely and are not intended as strict definitions of social classes. Although the term *the idle class* was often used, generally meaning the people who did not have to work and who enjoyed leisure life, it was never formally defined as an independent class, and its members could come from various economic backgrounds. Although in Chinese cities, a person who was rich and had nothing to do was generally regarded as an "idler," a person who was poor and had nothing to do also could be an idler.¹⁷ Nonetheless, these two terms indeed properly represented two kinds of groups that acted in the teahouse.

Teahouse life is, in a sense, key to exploring social transition and local politics.¹⁸ In fact, we can hardly find any other institutions in early twentieth-century Chengdu more important than teahouses for people's daily lives.¹⁹ If we attempt to observe townspeople, their social connections, and cultural appearance in Chinese cities, we need to know where to look for them. Teahouses are the best location, at least in Chengdu, for such a purpose. The teahouses of Chengdu were in many ways similar to the coffeehouses, taverns, and saloons of the West. They were far more than locations for leisure, just as leisure seeking was only a surface phenomenon of Chengdu's social life. If

anything, the social and cultural role of Chengdu teahouses seems even more complex than that of comparable institutions in Europe and America. The importance of teahouses as public sites is that they could encompass different classes of people. All teahouse-goers in Chengdu—no matter whether elite or commoner, rich or poor, idle or busy—shared a common space. This study will try to enter inside the daily life of early twentieth-century Chengdu to examine this most basic cultural institution. Understanding the expansive social, cultural, and political roles of the teahouse can go far in helping us to understand not just Chengdu in microcosm but the overall Chinese urban society of the early twentieth century, as well as a broader connection between the transformation of Chengdu society and modern Chinese politics.

GATHERING FOR COMMON HOBBIES AND FREE TALK

People went to the teahouse to meet friends, do business, sell goods, perform, have a chat, take a break, or just watch pedestrians for fun. Unlike workers in industrial cities of the West, who had to work at least an eight-hour day, Chengdu people did not have stable working hours, and their time was quite flexible. They could just stay in teahouses when they were not working, whether day or night.

In the early twentieth century, the teahouse in Chengdu was compared by Westerners to the English public house: "There are also restaurants and tea-drinking saloons open to the street. The latter take the place of the public houses in England, and are a great deal less harmful. Friends meet there for social chat."²⁰ Many establishments, like English public houses, had a definite neighborhood character. A foreign teacher who lived on Wheelbarrow Lane in the early Republic described that the teahouse in his neighborhood served as "the Lane's social centre."²¹ Like the saloon in the American cities, the teahouse in Chengdu also developed for lower classes "alternative spaces to spend that leisure time away from crowded homes."²² Nevertheless, we can also say that the teahouse provided a bustling and lively place for elites, who sought to escape from their quiet and spacious walled compound homes. Teahouses were so attractive that some office clerks even went to teahouses during working hours, and they were punished when caught by their bosses.²³

The teahouse was a place of freedom for males. If a man felt hot, he could strip to the waist. If he needed a haircut, the barber could cut his hair at his seat, even if the clippings often fell into other's teacups. He also could take off his shoes and have his nails clipped by a pedicurist. If he was alone, he could either listen to others' talk or join in if he preferred. He could stay as long as he liked. If he had an errand to run, he could simply move his cup to the middle of the

table and tell the waiter to "keep it"; he could continue to enjoy the cup of tea when he returned several hours later.²⁴

Unlike American cities, which had many forms for leisure available,²⁵ in Chengdu, going to the teahouse was almost the only choice, especially with street life not active after dark. A teahouse could become a gathering place for those with common interests, like a social club. The Archer Society (*Shede hui*) had its own teahouse in the Smaller City Park for those who practiced archery. The teahouse on Zhongshan Street was near the pigeon market, so it became a pigeon club. The Broadway Teahouse was at the bird market and became a bird club.²⁶ Many bird lovers liked to meet together in teahouses with their birds; some came to the teahouse early every morning carrying their birds. They hung their birdcages under eaves or on trees while they drank tea and listened to the birds' singing. Of course, feeding and training birds was a favorite topic of discussion. Some teahouses, such as the Pleasure Wind (*Hui-feng*) Teahouse in Zhongshan Park, became regular markets for bird trade.²⁷ Local opera aficionados were another major group in the teahouses. They gathered in the teahouse to practice local operas with simple instruments and without performing and makeup. This was called "sitting around and beating drum" (*da weigu*) or "sitting opera" (*bandeng xi*) (see Figure 1).²⁸

The most attractive thing about the teahouse for many customers, however, was free talk. Teahouses in Chengdu, like those of nineteenth-century Hankou, were the sites of "non-class-restrictive discussions of current news and events."²⁹ In a teahouse, people could talk about anything; there was even a teahouse in West City Gate simply called "Free Talk Pavilion" (*Geshuo ge*).³⁰ People in the teahouses discussed a wide range of topics. According to the 1943 guidebook *Xin Chengdu* (New Chengdu), teahouse-goers "tell ancient and modern stories, comment on society, play chess, gamble, criticize public figures, investigate private matters, and gossip about the secrets of the boudoir."³¹

Public talk was usually described as "gossiping" or "spreading rumors" (*shanbu yaoyan*). This always has been regarded as an "unhealthy" aspect of the teahouse. Some studies, however, have suggested that gossiping is a "form of sociable interaction" "a way of speaking."³² Gossip is part of the practice of daily life. As Roger Abrahams says, "public life is . . . a continuity of experience, from the most casual everyday event to the most stylized ceremony. Gossip is therefore" and "simply one of the many inevitable performances of everyday life."³³ James Scott even defines gossip as a "form of resistance" and as a "kind of democratic 'voice.'"³⁴ Teahouse talk, whether "pure talking" or gossiping, became a part of people's daily lives. For good or ill, it was almost impossible to regulate it. For the poor, gossip probably was not merely for curiosity or for fun but could also, according to Scott, allow them to achieve "the expression of opinion, of contempt, of disapproval while minimizing the risks of identification and reprisal."³⁵ The objects of commoners' gossip were usually



Figure 1: A "Sitting Opera" (*bandeng xi*) or "Sitting Around and Beating Drum" (*da weigu*)

SOURCE: Fu Chongju, *Chengdu tonglun* 1909-1910, vol. 3: 120.

local notables or rich persons. Gossip about their lives of luxury and splendid weddings was a means for commoners to complain about the unequal society; rumors about their adultery provided evidence that the rich were "immoral"; the unfortunate incidents befalling the rich could give commoners some kind of satisfaction.

A RECREATION AND BUSINESS SPACE

In traditional Chengdu, teahouses often were used as entertainment centers and were the best places for a diverse assortment of performers to make a living. Teahouses vied to host good performers, hoping to attract more customers. Early theaters in Chengdu emerged from teahouses. In the beginning, a teahouse merely offered its location for a troupe's performance; later, the teahouse became a permanent theater (see Figure 2).³⁶ When the streets were dark and quiet, people gathered in the bright and crowded teahouses behind the main streets to listen to storytelling. Highly skilled storytellers could attract audiences day after day and even year after year.

Various folk performers made the public life in the teahouse rich and colorful. Most of them were native popular performers, such as ballad singers. Some of the entertainment came from other places, such as "drum stories" from North China. Some were national popular entertainment but with local color, such as the dulcimer and "fish drum." Many folk entertainers had their regular teahouses for performances. Audiences also knew where to find their favorite shows: they could go to the New World (Xin shijie) Teahouse for dulcimer, to the Lotus Pavilion (Furong ting) for bamboo dulcimer, or to the teahouse near the New South Gate for ballad singing. Other popular entertainment, such as storytelling, comic dialogue, drum stories, and "golden bamboo clappers" (*jinqian ban*), spread in teahouses throughout Chengdu.³⁷

Despite the leisurely surface of the teahouse, it served the society in multiple ways. The teahouse could be called a "free market," because people such as craftsmen, servants, and free laborers gathered there to sell their labor, skills, and goods. Petty peddlers shouted back and forth between tables, and patrons did not feel that they were interrupted.³⁸ In 1920s Chengdu, Hubbard saw that "merchants hurry to meet prospective buyers or sellers at their shops or in a tea room. And the peddler is always there, hawking his wares with an intonation, whistle, gong or clapper, everywhere characteristic of his trade."³⁹ The special skills of the peddlers could often amuse patrons. One fried-seed-selling girl sold her seeds quickly because she could seize in a handful the exact number of seeds requested by the customer.⁴⁰ From this, we can see that the peddlers in teahouses were not only selling their products but also providing entertainment for patrons. Water-pipe men offered patrons very long, even six to seven feet, water pipes to smoke. As soon as anyone who wanted to smoke called him, he could hand the pipe to the patron from far away. If the pipe was not long enough, he had prepared pipes to connect to it. The development of such techniques probably came from the frequent overcrowding in the teahouse. In a crowded teahouse, a water-pipe man could provide his service to many patrons without moving.⁴¹

A teahouse also was a labor market, in which many free laborers and peasants from the countryside sought employment. Generally, the same kind of laborers gathered in the same teahouse, and therefore employers knew where



Figure 2: A Local Opera Show in the Elegant Garden

SOURCE: *Tongsu huabao* [Popular pictorial], 1909, no. 4.

NOTE: The gist of inscription reads, "The performance in the Elegant Garden has been gradually reformed. There are more famous performers, and it is also convenient to drink and eat there."

to find the laborers they needed.⁴² For example, back carriers (*beizi*) usually gathered in the teahouses in Frying Pan Alley (Luoge xiang) and Grinding Stone Street (Mozi jie). "It is very convenient. Whenever you call, they can come with you."⁴³ When a foreign resident needed to hire a servant, her Chinese friend told her to go to the "tea-shop inside the South Gate of the city where, every morning, women gather who wished to hire themselves out."⁴⁴ From this, we also see that women as well as men used the teahouse as a sort of employment office.

The teahouse gathered "people of all walks of life" (*sanjiao jiuliu*). Many craftsmen worked in the teahouses to repair daily items for patrons. Fortune-tellers always had their own regular teahouses for their business. Pedicurists and barbers provided their services regularly in the teahouses despite hygiene regulations.⁴⁵ Some beggars even sold so-called cool wind—fanning a patron for money. This was actually more a way of begging than a service. A beggar would fan a patron, and if he appreciated it, and was in a good mood, he would give some change to the beggar.⁴⁶ The most interesting people were ear pickers who had more than ten kinds of ear-picking tools to meticulously pick, grip, scrape, or rinse ears.⁴⁷

Chengdu people also used teahouses as reception rooms; they liked to make appointments and meet their friends there.⁴⁸ Because most common people had small living spaces, they felt more comfortable meeting their friends in a teahouse. If they had leisure time, they often could simply find their friends in the teahouse without advance notification.⁴⁹ Many residents' decisions about their daily lives often were made in teahouses. Sewell's memoir told a story of how, when one of his friends was in trouble, they discussed the solution in a teahouse.⁵⁰ Some occupations, social organizations, and students used teahouses as meeting and gathering places.⁵¹

Many business deals were sealed in teahouses. Merchants had their customary teahouses for talking business while drinking tea. Even rickshaw pullers, second-hand goods traders, and latrine cleaners had their respective teahouses.⁵² Han Suyin has written about such business talk in her autobiography:

The call: "I buy tea," uttered so frequently in the teahouses . . . prefaced amicable talk of business, respect to an elder, demand for a favour, or any of those transactions of land or merchandise which are normally done in a teahouse or a restaurant because the home is no place for such mundane matters.⁵³

Western travelers also noticed the function of commerce at the teahouse, and they found that a teahouse was not only a place for public chat, but "a large proportion of the business is also done there."⁵⁴

A CIVIL COURT

The functions of teahouses included not only cultural and economic aspects but also often playing a role in keeping social harmony, acting as a sort of “civil court.” An unwritten rule took shape gradually in the society of Chengdu: when in conflict, people would resist going to court. Philip Huang has described the three stages of civil lawsuits in Qing China, finding that many disputes had been settled before the cases were judged by magistrates.⁵⁵ In fact, there was a yet more primary stage that took place before a lawsuit formed. Most disputes were usually solved before going to the court because of social mediation, which always took place in teahouses. This activity in Chengdu was called “arguing one’s case in a teahouse” (*chaguan jiangli*) or “drinking settlement tea” (*ci jiangcha*). Generally, the two parties concerned would invite a prestigious public figure to a teahouse to hear their case. That is why “there is seldom any real fighting” in Chengdu, according to a foreigner’s observation. When quarrels arose,

after the principals have emptied themselves of all the abuse they can deliver, they are hurried off to a tea-shop or perhaps invited each other to go, and there the grievances are gone into before a crowd of people who sip tea while listening, and in the end, the one who is in the wrong must pay the score.⁵⁶

As a result, some people became professional teahouse mediators. These positions were usually taken by local powerful men, such as leaders of secret societies.

After the founding of the Chengdu police in the late Qing, such activity in teahouses was forbidden. According to Li Jieren’s satirical account, “this was the first inconvenience the director Zhou Shanpei of the police gave to the local people, and that was why he was abused by his folks.”⁵⁷ Although I am not sure whether Li’s comment was true, there was a news item in a local newspaper that said that, after the police issued a regulation to forbid settling disputes in the teahouses in the early Republic, the teahouse guild appealed to the police officials to make a clear distinction between settling disputes and normal chatting. It was thought that the confusion between these two activities would jeopardize teahouse business.⁵⁸

The effort of local authorities to prohibit the practice of teahouse settlement might have a deeper cause. The teahouse, as a civil court, became a rival to the authority of the state. City dwellers preferred the justice rendered by mediators to that of the local government. This not only suggests that the people did not trust the judgement of “muddled officials” but also reflects the expansion of nonofficial forces in Chengdu society. Several scholars of Chinese history, such as Mary Rankin and William Rowe, have emphasized a dramatic development of elite activism—disaster relief, granaries, charity, civil construction,

and other managerial activities—after the mid-nineteenth century and the profound impact of this on society.⁵⁹ Still, they do not attempt to bring the teahouse—an important public arena of elite activities and of expanding their social influence—into their discussion. While Rankin, Rowe, and David Strand have adapted the concept of “public sphere” to analyze social transformation, Philip Huang has suggested that there was a “third realm” of the justice system between state and society, which performed as a semi-institutionalized sphere.⁶⁰ Here, however, I would like to suggest that elites’ participation in the activity of drinking settlement tea provides another aspect of elite activism, which shows how elites handled conflicts among individuals and between individuals and society. This is also a window to observe how the community of Chengdu kept social harmony without official involvement and how a rival force existed outside the official justice system.

CLASS AND GENDER

In late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American cities, the working class dominated public drinking places, and the middle and upper classes generally drank at home or in private clubs or expensive hotels.⁶¹ In the eastern coastal areas of China, the teahouse was usually a place for the middle and lower classes to go.⁶² Teahouses in Chengdu, however, were renowned for their multiclass orientation. One of the “virtues” of Chengdu teahouses was their “relatively equality.”⁶³

If examined more closely, though, Chengdu teahouses were not so equal as they appeared on the surface. In fact, there was an inevitable class distinction among teahouses. For instance, the Real Amusement Garden (Zhengyu huayuan) was a place the “high society goes to.”⁶⁴ The guidebook of Chengdu also revealed that the teahouses in Chengdu were classified into different levels depending on the social status of their patrons.⁶⁵ We do not have clear evidence to tell us how to distinguish between high-rate and low-rate teahouses, but according to information from the memoirs, travel notes, and newspapers, generally, *chashe* (tea societies) were usually street teahouses, small in size and usually for lower class customers. *Chalou* (Tea towers), *chayuan* (tea gardens), and *chating* (tea halls), by contrast, were what I would call “courtyard teahouses,” usually larger, charging higher rates, and directed at middle- or upper-class patrons.

The small teahouses behind the main streets were full of the shabbily dressed poor. According to statistics, there were about five hundred third- and fourth-class teahouses that served the middle and lower classes in 1931.⁶⁶ These teahouses were very simple and crude; most used a room opening to the street and set low tea tables and low stools. They served especially “wheelbarrow pullers, sedan-chair carriers, and other working classes who are struggling for their livelihood. Between jobs, a teahouse is the only place for them to kill

time and take a rest.” The *New Chengdu* expressed its sympathy by saying, “for these laborers, there is no reason to criticize them for wasting time in teahouses.”⁶⁷ Although a cup of tea in Chengdu was very cheap, many poor people could not afford even this. A “mercy” tradition in Chengdu was that teahouses did not exclude “the poorest of the poor” and allowed them in to drink the tea others left over, which was called “drink overtime tea” (*he jiaban cha*).⁶⁸ There was even a customary rule regarding how to drink the overtime tea.⁶⁹

There was some obvious social discrimination in the teahouse, some of which derived from social custom and some from governmental regulations. In the late Qing and even the early Republic, actors and actresses of local operas were not allowed to drink tea and watch shows in the teahouses.⁷⁰ The police regulation was based on the social attitude. Actors or actresses in teahouses always drew public attention. People’s curiosity often caused disruption. Performers of local operas, however, had their own teahouses, such as the Small Garden (Xiaohua yuan) Teahouse.⁷¹

Furthermore, women were not supposed to go to teahouses until the late Qing. In 1906, the Elegant Teahouse probably was the first one that allowed female patrons, but the police soon forbade them because male curiosity threatened social order. Later on, the Joy Teahouse began to admit women but using a separate entrance.⁷² Although the regulations did not allow young women to enter the teahouse in the late Qing, some defiant women still tried to challenge this male arena.⁷³ In the late Qing, a growing number of middle-class women began to frequent first-rate teahouses, but the “well-dressed ladies of high society” still refused to lower their status by going to teahouses, even if they wanted to. As soon as they entered a teahouse, they were gazed at by many men’s eyes and also suffered from endless gossip (see Figure 3).⁷⁴ Teahouses, in fact, did not want to lose such a large pool of female patrons. After the Qing, some teahouses allowed women in but attempted to segregate them from the men.⁷⁵ By the middle 1910s, it was still not common for teahouses to allow both male and female patrons to mingle (see Figure 4). In these mixed-sex teahouses, when an opera was reaching its climax, men took the occasion to stand up and gawk at the women, and women, according to the complaint of a local newspaper, “tantalize men by laughing loudly.” This “disorder in the teahouse” always caused local elites’ criticism of women’s public appearance.⁷⁶

Until the 1920s, even though women’s public lives were still questioned by many people, some open-minded elites had begun to connect women’s appearances in public with the issue of equality.⁷⁷ In this period, however, the teahouse had become a symbol to value the extent of women’s equality to men, as one folk poem expressed: “Drinking tea in the teahouse of the park, men and women enjoy equality.”⁷⁸ By the 1930s, it seems that women in teahouses had been accepted by the society. We can even find women involved in the traditional male area of “settling disputes in teahouses.”⁷⁹

In the early modern Western cities, according to Richard Sennett’s observation, people “sought to flee” for finding “personal meanings in impersonal



Figure 3: Local Opera Craze: Watching the Show or Watching Women?

SOURCE: *Tongsu huabao*, 1912, no. 35.

NOTE: This picture mocks the people going to the theater for watching women instead of watching the performance. The poem says, "Women in the balcony, don't turn your head. Hurry to the front and take big steps. If no woman appears, why do I come here? The reason I am here is to watch beautiful women. It is wrong to say that I come here for local opera."

situations" and "in the private realms of life, especially in the family" because of "the product of a profound dislocation which capitalism and secular belief produced."⁸⁰ Contrary to what Sennett describes, the public life of Chengdu reflected an opposite process, in which people tried to get rid of their families for joining more public life. The new generation and women's pursuit of public appearances provide strong evidence for this point.

PUBLIC POLITICS AND "SECRET POLITICS"

A teahouse in Chengdu always reflected local politics. Any social change could be seen directly or indirectly in the teahouses. Their patrons, both the idle and the busy, were all inevitably involved in local politics. As Han Suyin wrote in her autobiography,

You know how our Chengdu is: an old, old city, trees, flowers, literature, old bookshops, a quiet city, proud of its age, its history. But . . . at the end of May



Figure 4: Shameful! Women Watching Male Performers

SOURCE: *Tongsu huabao*, 1912, no. 5.

NOTE: The inscription at the edge of the stage reads, "It is not right for women to watch local opera, but it is even more shameful for women to watch men's performance. Showing up in the theater, let male performers have the opportunity to feast their eyes on women. There are many kinds of maladies in the theater, which entail untold troubles. Decent people should tell women not to enter the theater." In this picture, we can also see three-piece sets of teacups and how a waiter pours boiled water into a cup.

1911 it was uneasy, irritable, anxious, the teahouses in the public gardens and on the streets exuding unease. An anxious city, poised for rioting.

During the Railroad Protection Movement, according to Han's father, teahouses no longer were places for quiet chat but were full of political debates and political activities: The call "I buy tea" was now practically

a clarion call for an immediate drift of diverse loiterers, small groups coalescing into larger ones, some even standing to listen as debates went on concerning the nationalization question and the railway loan; and silently they would drift apart again, then on to another teahouse, to hear another man expound.⁸¹

While teahouses were an arena for open discussion for the people, they were also a resource for the local government to collect intelligence on antigovernment agitation. Officials often sent their agents to sit in teahouses to listen in on public conversation.

About the crowded teahouses went the spies of the Manchus. In the open-air spaces, under the trellised honeysuckle dripping fragrance and shade, between the harmony trees and the bamboo groves, agents of the dynasty loitered, sipping tea, listening to the talk of the scholars.⁸²

During the early Republic, warlords and local governments used the same means to ferret out the so-called destructive people (*pohua fenzi*).⁸³ Since the government often used the information collected from teahouses against ordinary people, to avoid any trouble from teahouse conversation, in every teahouse there was usually a public notice on the wall with the four Chinese characters *xiu tan guo shi* (do not talk about national affairs).⁸⁴ On the other hand, the government tried to bring its own politics into the teahouses by requiring all such establishments to hang portraits of Sun Yat-sen, Chiang Kai-shek, the "Party Members' Principles of the Guomintang" (*Dangyuan shouze*), and the "Pledge of the Citizen" (*Guomin gongyue*).⁸⁵ During this time, free public conversation was, to a serious extent, interrupted by local authority.

Under the influence of social change, performances in the teahouses also inevitably were politicized. In the past, traditional local operas had mainly dealt with romance, ghosts, filial piety, chastity, and so on, but this situation began to change. "Political operas" began to enter the stage of teahouses. In 1912, the Joy Teahouse performed the Sichuan opera "A Story of the Blacks Recovering Their Rights" (*Heiren guangfu ji*), based on the novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Advertisements in the local newspaper for this opera said the following:

Our teahouse has been trying to reform local operas and promote social development. This is an age of racial competition and the survival of the fittest [*youshen liebai*]. Therefore, especially we present the "Story of the Blacks Recovering Their Rights." . . . This play tells a tragic story about the blacks who lost their

motherland and their honor and tried to recover their rights. This is a moving and touching story, which can provoke our own racial thought [*zhongzu sixiang*] and patriotic zeal [*aiguo rechen*].⁸⁶

Obviously, Chinese understanding of the famous American novel was based on China's situation. The Chinese title was far from its English original to reflect social and political attitudes in China at that time. Before the 1911 Revolution, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had been translated into Chinese and sold in Chengdu (called *Heiren yutian lu*, literally, "The Blacks Crying to the Sky"). It also was used by revolutionaries to campaign against Manchu rule. The performance of this opera was an emotional and ideological expression of the Han people after the overthrow of the Manchu regime.

In the unsettled times of the early Republic, the teahouse was a barometer of social order and local politics. In 1916, during the Nation Protection War (*Huguo zhanzheng*) of the anti-Yuan Shikai campaign, when the battle was extended into the Chengdu streets, frightened residents hid in their houses, and all the shops were closed. The opening or closing of the teahouse became a signal to residents of safety or danger. In an entry in Wu Yu's diary, he wrote that he went out of his house only after he confirmed that "the teahouses have been opened." He even went to a teahouse with his friends after hiding at home for many days while "the shops on all streets were still closed."⁸⁷ This anecdote also tells us that when the city was still in danger, its residents could not wait any longer and gathered in their favorite teahouses.

Various social groups often held their meetings in the teahouses. During the Railroad Protection Movement of 1911, Governor-general Zhao Erfeng imposed martial law and prohibited any public gatherings, including performance of local operas. After the establishment of the Sichuan Military Government, the performances were still banned. The performers who lost their livelihood gathered at their teahouse to discuss a solution. After the failure of their application to reopen business, they gathered in front of the police station to make an appeal.⁸⁸

The teahouses themselves also were organized by their guild for collective action to protect their own interests. In the mid 1920s, Governor Yang Sen undertook a project to build new roads in Chengdu, and many teahouses faced the danger of being dismantled. The small teahouse keepers appealed to the guild for help. All teahouses went on strike to resist the project.⁸⁹ In 1928, because the police forcibly collected a new tea tax and beat and arrested teahouse keepers and workers, the teahouse guild organized a strike to struggle for a tax cut, represented its members in negotiations with the police, and appealed for public support.⁹⁰ Teahouses were increasingly the site of social and political struggle, so much so that some people described them as a "battlefield."⁹¹

Whereas collective activities in teahouses were "public politics," activities of the Sworn Brotherhood Society in teahouses might be called "secret

politics.” Sichuan was one of the most active areas of the Sworn Brotherhood Society (called *Paoge* in Sichuan, literally “Gowned Brothers”), and the power of the Gowned Brothers in Chengdu was dramatically expanded in the late Qing and early Republic.⁹² The Gowned Brothers was banned by the government during the Qing and had developed a highly systematic yet clandestine way of managing its affairs and resolving disputes. For this reason, its appearance in public always appeared mysterious to others.

Most headquarters of the Gowned Brothers were located in teahouses, and some teahouses were dedicated to activities of the Brothers. If a sign or a lantern with “x x society” (*she*) or “x x public port” (*gongkou*) hung on the outside of a teahouse, this meant that it was a headquarters of a Gowned Brothers branch. The income of the teahouses supported the Brothers’ activities.⁹³ Even if some teahouses were not the public ports of the Gowned Brothers, their teahouse keepers usually joined the organization for protection. Generally, teahouses were forced to contribute money or provide free tea and boiled water to the locally powerful persons to seek their protection. The teahouses opened or protected by the Gowned Brothers, warlords, and other powerful people were not harassed.⁹⁴

Teahouses were the best places for communication between members of different branches. In the teahouses of Chengdu, people often could see some people acting mysteriously, who were usually members of secret societies. If a member of the Gowned Brothers was forced to flee his hometown, after the fugitive arrived in Chengdu, he

enters a convenient teahouse, seats himself at a table . . . and orders a cup of tea or hot water. The keeper of the teahouse, who is familiar with this ceremony, sends at once for the controller of the local branch. The latter appears steadily and puts a series of questions to the refugee who must reply in appropriate, extremely technical terms.⁹⁵

A common way that members of the Gowned Brothers contacted their followers was to play “teacup formations” (*chawan zhen*), which was an alternative of their secret languages.⁹⁶

CONFLICTS IN TEAHOUSES

Teahouses in Chengdu reflected not only social harmony but also social conflict. The conflict often took place among patrons. Overcrowding often caused disputes and even violence. Often, the dispute arose when a patron left his seat for a moment and someone else occupied it. The police made a rule that “even though the guest has left, the seat should be kept for him if his teacup is still on the table.” Conflicts over gambling also often transpired in teahouses. The teahouse was a place for free talk, but such talk could lead to fights. The

teahouses themselves often fell into trouble, such as conflicts with performing troupes, patrons, and landlords. The teahouse often became an arena for struggle over livelihoods and also could become an arena of class struggle, such as that between the master and performers.⁹⁷

Theft of teacups was a recurring problem in teahouses. Usually, a good teahouse used teacups made in Jingdezhen, the most famous production site for porcelain in China. A poor man could live on a stolen teacup for a few days.⁹⁸ He would be punished severely if caught.⁹⁹ Such an incident also could provide a moment of excitement for the teahouse-goers. When the waiter caught a poor man stealing teacups and beat him, many spectators cried out, “beat the shameless one to death.” Many patrons enjoyed watching such live “plays” in public space, an activity called “watching excitement” (*kan renao*).¹⁰⁰ Teahouses often suffered property damage. The chairs, tables, and teacups could be damaged deliberately by patrons for any reason, such as the postponement of an announced performance.¹⁰¹ Once, more than two hundred soldiers watched a show in the Joy Teahouse, and they destroyed many chairs and tables when a dispute took place.¹⁰² Teahouses could punish the powerless poor but were helpless when facing powerful soldiers during the warlord era.

The teahouse is a window through which to understand society and its changes. In the early Republic, we find a clear increase in conflicts and violence. Although people still visited teahouses as a part of their daily routine, it was inevitably interrupted. Local toughs and bullies tyrannized teahouses. Hoodlums gathered there, and as soon as they saw a beautiful woman, they would harass her with obscenities. More severe incidents could involve murder and mass violence (see Figure 5).¹⁰³ A teahouse, as a public space, also was used by local toughs to show off their bullying power.¹⁰⁴ Such disorder in teahouses was a reflection of disorder in the larger society as a whole.

CONTROL, REFORM, AND RESISTANCE

Since the late Qing, local authority had criticized teahouses as “disorderly” (*zhixu buliang*) and had tried to control them in the name of preserving public order.¹⁰⁵ Just as in the West, “the commercialization of leisure always attracted criticism as a waste of time.”¹⁰⁶ In Chengdu, teahouse-goers were criticized for “idly lounging in teahouses all day long” and reflecting Chinese “inertia” (*duoxing*). The municipal authority also considered teahouses to be places of rumor spreading and troublemaking, because various kinds of people gathered there and often did not behave themselves. Another criticism of teahouses was that students went there and neglected their studies.¹⁰⁷ Performance of local operas in teahouses also was a target of the authorities’ attack.

In the late Qing, when the police force had just been established, a code of “Teahouse Regulations” was issued for the first time.¹⁰⁸ During the early



Figure 5: Doing Violence (*xingxiang*)

SOURCE: *Tongsu huabao*, 1912, no. 29.

NOTE: The inscription reads, "When Deng Yukun was drinking tea in a teahouse at Copper Well Alley (*Tongjing xiang*) one evening, a man named He called him out for a talk. As soon as he went out, several people carried sabres and iron sticks beat him madly. The police rushed in to stop them."

Republic, when "the Chinese police force's interference in urbanites' personal lives represented the new state's effort to create a civil culture,"¹⁰⁹ similar regulations were issued one after the other. Teahouses, indeed, became a major

focus of the government's "modernist" attack on popular culture. In 1916, the police issued rules for controlling theater teahouses, with so-called licentious operas banned by the police. Performances could not contain any disapproved language or behaviors. All operas in teahouses were to end by ten o'clock during summer and autumn and by nine during spring and winter.¹¹⁰ In 1921, the comic dialogue (*xiangsheng*) was prohibited in the teahouse due to its "licentious" and "dirty" language.¹¹¹ Hygiene regulations for teahouses were promulgated in 1926 and again in 1932: permitting no people who had lung, venereal, skin, and other affective diseases to work in the teahouse; requiring tables, chairs, and teacups be kept clean; providing spittoons in the teahouse and no spitting on the ground; and toilets within the teahouse with no odor.¹¹²

In the 1930s, when in Shanghai and other major cities in China public leisure was increasingly controlled by the Nationalist government,¹¹³ teahouses in Chengdu suffered unprecedented attacks. A new regulated code allowed each park to have only one teahouse, shut down some establishments in areas with high teahouse density, and shortened the business hours of teahouses to six per day.¹¹⁴ In the 1940s, there was even a more radical project against teahouses, limiting their teahouse number, hours, and patrons. Of course, such radical regulation was opposed by many people including many social reformers, because this dramatically interrupted the people's accustomed public life.¹¹⁵

Although local authorities repeatedly sought to regulate teahouses over the years, the teahouses just as routinely sought to resist those regulations. The "superstitious" and "licentious" plays had been prohibited since the late Qing, but they were nevertheless constantly performed in public. Ironically, the Elegant Teahouse, a "reformed" theater teahouse in the late Qing, was criticized for performing "dirty" (*xialiu*) and "licentious" (*yindang*) plays in the early Republic.¹¹⁶ In 1932, only one teahouse followed the rule by turning its program in to the municipal government before each performance, even though the government threatened punishment for violators.¹¹⁷ Why did teahouses take such a risk to keep showing forbidden local operas? The answer is clear: because performing ghost and licentious operas attracted more patrons and thus was good for business.¹¹⁸ Teahouses resisted the control over local operas, because it seriously affected their profits. When business was depressed, to perform such plays was always a surefire way to revive it.¹¹⁹

Such tensions always existed between governmental regulations and mass demands throughout the Republican era. Teahouses not only violated the regulations on performances of local operas but also struggled for their use of public space. Teahouses always extended their tables and chairs to occupy space on the streets, squares, or parks, especially during the summer, because the shadows of trees and cool breezes always comforted the patrons.¹²⁰ In 1929, after the municipal government made a new regulation that did not allow any teahouses to encroach on public space, all teahouses in the Smaller City Park,

the Central City (Zhongcheng) Park, and Zhiji Temple Park resisted and presented an appeal to the local government, which complained that this restriction would damage their business seriously.¹²¹ Gambling in teahouses had been repeatedly banned since the late Qing, but until the 1930s, such an activity seems to have become more popular than ever before.¹²² Prostitutes were forbidden to enter theater teahouses by the police regulations, but some tried to challenge this rule, even though they would be humiliated by the public and arrested by the police once they were caught.¹²³

The teahouse was always a place where city dwellers, especially ordinary people, struggled for their livelihood and leisure space. They used their own strategies to protect their space in the unequal society. James Scott remarks, "Everyday forms of resistance make no headlines," and there is "rarely any dramatic confrontation."¹²⁴ Various regulations severely affected the people who depended on teahouses for a living. For the popular entertainers, governmental supervision limited their use of teahouses. Although they were unable to (or even never planned to) conduct organized protest, they did undertake daily resistance through the "weapons of the weak" to express their dissatisfaction and to maintain their survival space. Women also tried to find their space in teahouses and other public spaces, which were traditionally occupied by men. They gradually broke the limitations for the women and successfully changed the social mood. By examining the Chengdu commoners' struggle for the use of public space, we can see the "prosaic but constant" format of everyday resistance. As James Scott points out, "What everyday forms of resistance share with the more dramatic public confrontations is of course that they are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims vis-à-vis those superordinate classes."¹²⁵ In Chengdu, when commoners could not survive under ordinary ways or legal ways, some of them were forced to travel illegal paths.

We cannot say, however, that nothing had been changed in the course of the late Qing and early Republican social transition. Teahouses inevitably were influenced by changes in society. One obvious example is that some teahouses were more often engaged in public affairs and took advantage of this to enhance their social reputation. Some teahouse keepers participated in charitable activities on both the local and national levels.¹²⁶ Teahouses also began to pursue new styles and new fashions, frequently fashions that reflected the mood of social reform. In the early Republic, some new teahouses even experimented with new styles of entertainment. For example, the Invigorated Pavilion (Taoran ting) Teahouse, opened in 1912, had a "bowling room" (*qiufang*) to host what it called "civilized games from the West for healthy leisure." It also provided telephones, newspapers, and food service.¹²⁷ The Joy Teahouse, always a pioneer for new entertainment, was also the first one that introduced modern dramas (*huaju*) onto its stage in the early 1920s.¹²⁸ Nevertheless, we must recognize that the basic motive of such changes was to pursue profit despite the driving force of new social trends and reformers' promotion.

CONCLUSION

The teahouse was a microcosm of the society. While serving as places of public leisure, recreation, and entertainment, they also were multifaceted work sites and arenas of local politics. They have been, however, misunderstood not only by historians but also by contemporaries. The general belief in the early twentieth century was that teahouses were places for idlers; therefore, the most common accusation against teahouses was that they encouraged people to waste their time. Alongside other social changes in China came changes in the very concept of time,¹²⁹ but this new understanding was largely limited to “modernized” and Westernized elites. Most ordinary residents, whether the idle or the busy, retained their own concept of time. How they used their time depended on many factors such as personal habits, degrees of education, occupations, family backgrounds, economic status, and so on. In the teahouse, a scholar might find inspiration for his writing, a merchant might make a deal for his business, a student might study the society beyond his textbooks, a member of a secret society might make contact with his fellows, and a casual worker might find employment. And of course, there were also many petty peddlers, performers, and craftsmen who made their living there. Therefore, the idle and the busy were mutable and overlapping categories. In the teahouse, when a man looked idle, he might be busy and vice versa. Idleness and industry were each part of the rhythm of daily life, and the teahouse provided a space for both. The teahouse was one of a small number of public spaces available to urban residents for their public life, and even after other modern gathering places emerged, the teahouses remained the most affordable place for urban commoners to go.

Although teahouse culture, like other kinds of popular culture, was a culture created and shared by the commoners, the state never stopped influencing it. The studies of James Watson on Tianhou (Empress of Heaven), David Johnson on temple festivals, and Prasenjit Duara on Guandi (God of War) all reflect as much.¹³⁰ The state’s engagement with popular culture could take various forms, such as controlling it through promotion, as with the cult of Tianhou; or supporting it through direct participation, as with temple festivals in Shanxi; or simply attempting to demolish it, as with Guandi in North China. In the early Republic, teahouses in Chengdu experienced the third pattern of the government involvement—they suffered constant attack from local authorities, not only because their culture was not one the state tried to promote but also because they had emerged as public spaces that state power and local authorities were unable to control completely.

Therefore, teahouses were transformed into an arena fraught with cultural controversy and political conflict. How to evaluate and deal with the popular culture that local people created and enjoyed was always an issue facing the government and local authorities. No regime, it seems, from the late Qing on

was able to work out a successful accommodation with it. But urban elite reformers in Chengdu itself, who better understood local popular culture, had a different attitude. Unlike the late Qing, when social reformers favored most reform projects,¹³¹ the Republican government received less enthusiastic support from them. The disagreement between the local reformist elites and the Nationalist government over teahouses was in a sense emblematic of wider schisms in their relationship over the course of time. Reformers emphasized the special feature of teahouses and disagreed with the municipal government's more radical plans. Whereas the government kept imposing strict controls and dramatic reforms on the teahouse, elites, although they criticized various ills of teahouses and promoted reforms, basically preferred to keep the teahouses as they always had been. Why they adopted such an attitude is not hard to understand. Teahouse life was a part of their own daily lives. While they decried the maladies of teahouses, they understood their virtues as well. The main reason why radical government controls always failed was probably because they were without enthusiastic support from local reformers. That is also why the teahouses were so persistent.

On the surface, the teahouse and teahouse culture seem to have been weak and vulnerable, always regulated, attacked, and reformed. But ultimately, it was the Chengdu teahouse that survived, a bit changed to be sure but ever vital as a central sociocultural institution of urban life. The struggle of teahouses in Chinese cities was similar to that of the folk culture of industrialized Europe, which was "not killed by the industrial revolution, [but instead] flourished as an expression of the economic and political struggles of the new workforce."¹³² Although the process of modernizing Chinese cities in the early twentieth century had a profound impact on folk tradition and popular culture, they survived by adapting to the shifting social and political environment.

NOTES

1. Chengdu was the capital of Sichuan province and also a fairly typical inland city with a long historical and cultural tradition. Until the late Qing, it did not receive much impact from the West. I have discussed the feature of Chengdu and its culture. See Di Wang, "Street Culture: Public Space and Urban Commoners in Late-Qing Chengdu," *Modern China* 1 (1998): 34-72. For other studies of the city, see Kristin Stapleton, "Police Reform in a Late-Imperial Chinese City: Chengdu, 1902-1911" (Unpublished dissertation, Harvard University, 1993); "Urban Politics in an Age of 'Secret Societies': The Cases of Shanghai and Chengdu," *Republican China* 1 (1996): 23-64; and "County Administration in Late-Qing Sichuan: Conflicting Models of Rural Policing," *Late Imperial China* 1 (1997): 100-32. Wang Di, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie: Changjiang shangyou quyu shehui yanjiu, 1644-1911* [Striding Out of a Closed World: A Study of Society in the Upper Yangzi Region, 1644-1911] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 259-63, 595-605; "Wanqing jingzheng yu shehui gaizao" [Late-Qing Police Force and Social Reform], in *Xinhai geming yu jindai Zhongguo* [The 1911 Revolution and Modern China], pt. 1 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1994).

2. Chen Jin, *Sichuan chapu* [Teahouses in Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1992), 12-3.

3. Shu Xincheng, *Shuyou xinying* [My Feeling in Sichuan Tour] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1934), 142-3.

4. Xue Shaoming, *Qian Dian Chuan luxing ji* [Travel Notes in Guizhou, Yunnan, and Sichuan] (Chongqing: Chongqing chubanshe, 1986 [1936]), 166.
5. George D. Hubbard, *The Geographic Setting of Chengdu* (Oberlin: Oberlin College, 1923), 125.
6. Zheng Yun, "Yifu duilian de miaoyong" [A Smart Use for a Matched Couplet], in *Chengdu fengwu* [Chengdu Folklore], vol. 1 (1981), 82-3.
7. Interview with Yu Xun, 73 years of age at the Joy [Yuelai] Teahouse on June 21, 1997.
8. Chen, 32.
9. Zhang Fang, "Chuantu suibi" [Informal Essays on Sichuan Customs], *Longmenzhen* [Folk tales, hereafter LMZ], 3 (1995): 96.
10. Li Jieren, *Dabo* [The great wave], 3-1631 in *Li Jieren xuanji* [A Selection of Li Jieren's Works], vol. 2, pt. I-III (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1980). This is a historical story about the Railroad Protection Movement in early twentieth-century Chengdu.
11. There were 454 teahouses in 1909-1910, more than 620 in 1931, and 599 in 1935. Fu Chongjiu, *Chengdu tonglan* [Investigation of Chengdu] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1987 [1909-10]), pt. 2, 253; *Guomin gongbao* [Citizens' Daily, hereafter GMGB], January 15, 1931. An estimate says that there were 120,000 patrons per day in 1935, and the population was about 600,000 in Chengdu at that time. Yang Wuneng and Qiu Peihuang, *Chengdu da cidian* [Dictionary of Chengdu] (Chengdu: Sichuan cishu chubanshe, 1995), 731; Qiao Zengxi, Lie Canhua, and Bai Zhaoyu, "Chengdu shizheng yange gaishu" [A General Information about the Course of Change and Development of Chengdu Municipal Administration], in *Chengdu wenshi ziliao xuanji* [Selections on Literature and Historical Materials of Chengdu, hereafter CWZX], vol. 5 (1983), 20.
12. Tōa Dōbunkai, *Shinshu shina shobetsu zenshi* [A New Complete History of All Provinces in China] (Tokyo, 1941), vol. 1, Shisen-sho [Sichuan], 631.
13. Lin Wenxun, *Chengdu ren* [Chengdunese] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang renmin chubanshe, 1995), 141.
14. John C. Evans, *Tea in China: The History of China's National Drink* (New York: Greenwood, 1992), 7-14.
15. A writer in the 1940s comparing the teahouses in Chengdu with those in North and South China found that, "northerners are not as interested in tea as the Sichuanese." Guangdong had teahouses too, but "they are for the bourgeois and are not popularized like those of Sichuan." Wang Qingyuan, "Chengdu pingyuan xiangchun chaguan" [Rural teahouses in Chengdu plain], *Fengtu shi* [The Folkways] 4 (1944): 29-38. Shu Xincheng recognized that Nanjing people, unlike Chengdu people who stayed in teahouses for a whole day, went to teahouses only in the morning. Shu Xincheng, 142.
16. Hu Tian, *Chengdu daoyou* [Guidebook of Chengdu] (Chengdu: Shuwen yinshuashe, 1938), 62; Yi Junzuo, "Jincheng qiri ji" [Seven days in Chengdu], in *Chuankang youzong* [Travel notes in Sichuan and Xikang] (Zhongguo luxingshe, 1943), 194.
17. For example, the police often accused beggars of idleness and forced them to work in the work-houses. See J. Vale, "Beggars Life in Chentu [Chengdu]" *West China Missionary News* 10 (1907): 7-9.
18. Tea drinking as a Chinese tradition has long been noticed by both Japanese and Western observers. In their travel notes, investigations, and memoirs, they always wrote their impressions of Chinese teahouses. Robert Fortune, *Two Visits to the Tea Countries of China* (London: John Murray, 1853); Nakamura Sakujirō, *Shina man yūdan* [Travelogue of China] (Tokyo: Sesshikai, 1899); Robert J. Davidson and Isaac Mason, *Life in West China: Described by Two Residents in the Province of Sz-chwan* (London: Headley Brothers, 1905); Koubai Inoue, *Shina fouzoku* [Chinese customs] (Shanghai: Nihondon shoten, 1920); William Sewell, *The People of Wheelbarrow Lane* (New York: A. S. Barnes, 1970); Takeuchi Minoru, *Chakan: Chūgoku no fudo to sekaizo* [Teahouses: A General Description of Chinese Customs] (Tokyo: Taishukan shoten, 1974); Brockman Brace, ed., *Canadian School in West China* (Published for the Canadian School Alumni Association, 1974); John S. Service, ed., *Golden Inches: The China Memoir of Grace Service* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); Naito Rishin, *Sunde mita Seito: Shoku no kuni ni miru Chūgoku no nichijo seikatsu* [Chengdu as I Lived It: The Chinese Today in the Land of Shu] (Tokyo: Saimaru Shuppankai, 1991). Scholars have begun to study Chinese tea culture and teahouses, especially in the coastal areas and Chengdu. See Evans, *Tea in China*, 1992; Qin Shao, "Tempest over Teapots: The Marginalization of Teahouse Culture in Early Republican China" (paper presented at the 1998 annual meeting of the Association for Asian Studies, forthcoming in the *Journal of Asian Studies*). Suzuki Tōmō, "Shinmatsu Kō-Seku no chakan ni tuite" [Teahouses in Late Qing Jiangsu and Zhejiang], in *Rekishu ni okeru minshūto bunka: Sakai Tadao sensei koki shūgaku kinen ronshō* [People and Culture in History: An Essay Collection in Honor of Sakai Tadao] (Tokyo: Kokusho kankōkai, 1982), 529-40. Nichizawa Haruhiko, "Yamucha no hanashi" [Talks on drinking tea] *GS-Tanoshii chisiki* 3 (1985): 242-53; and "Gendai Chūgoku no chakan: Shisen shou

Seiito no jirei kara" [Teahouses in Modern China: A Case of Chengdu, Sichuan], *Fūzoku* 4 (1988): 50-63. Although Nichizawa's article on Chengdu teahouses before 1949 is basically a summary of Chen Maozhao's memoir "Chengdu chaguan" (Teahouses in Chengdu, in CWZX, vol. 4, 1983), he is probably the first non-Chinese scholar who really focuses on Chengdu teahouses. The most interesting part in his article is his description of the reblooming of Chengdu teahouses after the Cultural Revolution.

19. Teahouse culture was a part of what I call "street culture," and teahouse life was also a part of street life. Street culture here means various cultural aspects that appeared on the street, covering the appearance of the street, the decoration and signs of shops, folk performances, and rituals of celebration, as well as the ways of making a living and street life. For a detailed discussion on street culture, see Di Wang, "Street Culture: Public Space, Urban Commoners, and Local Politics, 1875-1928" (Unpublished dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1998), chap. 1.

20. Davidson and Mason, *Life in West China*, 86.

21. Sewell, *The People of Wheelbarrow Lane*, 15.

22. Roy Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours for What We Will: Workers and Leisure in an Industrial City, 1870-1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 49.

23. GMGB, March 22, 1930.

24. Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 340.

25. David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Basic Books, 1993); Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986).

26. Cui Xianchang, "Jiu Chengdu chaguan shumiao" [A Literary Sketch of Chengdu Teahouses], LMZ 6 (1982): 96.

27. Zhou Zhiying, *Xin Chengdu* [New Chengdu] (Chengdu: Fuxing shuju, 1943), 236.

28. Fu Chongju, *Chengdu tonglan*, vol. 1, 297.

29. William T. Rowe, *Hankow: Conflict and Community in a Chinese City, 1796-1895* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1989), 60.

30. Wen Wenzi, ed., *Sichuan fengwu zhi* [Customs in Sichuan] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1990), 454.

31. Zhou Zhiying, *Xin Chengdu*, 246.

32. Sally Yerkovich, "Gossiping as a Way of Speaking," *Journal of Communication* 1 (1977): 192-6.

33. Roger D. Abrahams, "A Performance-Centred Approach to Gossip," *Man* 2 (1970): 290-301.

34. James Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 282.

35. Ibid.

36. The Elegant (*Keyuan*) was believed to be the first theater in Chengdu; it was formerly the Reciting (Yongni) Teahouse and was reorganized as a theater in 1906. Fu Chongju, *Chengdu tonglan*, vol. 1, 279.

37. Wen Wenzi, *Sichuan fengwu zhi*, 457; Che Fu, "Zhou lianzhang chaguan he Li Yueqiu" [Company Commander Zhou's Teahouse and Li Yueqiu], LMZ 2 (1995): 1-6.

38. Yi Junzuo, "Jincheng qiri ji," 104.

39. Hubbard, *The Geographic Setting*, 125.

40. He Manzi, *Wuzakan* [Five series of random talks] (Chengdu: Chengdu chubanshe, 1994), 193.

41. Interview with Zhou Shaojie, 75 years of age, at Joy Teahouse on June 22, 1997.

42. Wang Qingyuan, "Chengdu pingyuan xiangchun chaguan," 35.

43. Zhou Zhiying, *Xin Chengdu*, 251.

44. Sewell, *The People of Wheelbarrow Lane*, 73.

45. *Chengdu shi shizheng nianjian* [Yearbook of Chengdu Municipal Administration, hereafter CSSN] (1927), 511-2.

46. Cui Xianchang, "Jiu Chengdu chaguan shumiao," 98.

47. Chen Jin, *Sichuan chapu*, 59.

48. Hu Tian, *Chengdu daoyou*, 69; Yi Junzuo, "Jincheng qiri ji," 194.

49. *Sichuan shengzhengfu shehuichu dang'an* [Archives of Social Department of Sichuan Provincial Government, hereafter SSSD], in the Sichuan Provincial Archives, vol. 186, no. 1431.

50. Sewell, *The People of Wheelbarrow Lane*, 131-2.

51. GMGB, October 17, 1929; Hu Tian, *Chengdu daoyou*, 70; Yang Huai, "Shentongzi yu Mantianfei" [A magical boy and a wandering man], LMZ 1 (1982): 67.

52. Hu Tian, *Chengdu daoyou*, 70; Yi Junzuo, "Jincheng qiri ji," 194; Wen Wenzi, *Sichuan fengwu zhi*, 456-7.

53. Han Suyin, *The Crippled Tree: China, Biography, History, Autobiography* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1965), 228-9.
54. Davidson and Mason, *Life in West China*, 86.
55. Philip C. C. Huang, *Civil Justice in China: Representation and Practice in the Qing* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).
56. Davidson and Mason, *Life in West China*, 86.
57. Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 338-9.
58. GMGB, July 8, 1914.
59. Mary B. Rankin, *Elite Activism and Political Transformation in China: Zhejiang Province, 1865-1911* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1986), chap. 3; "The Origins of a Chinese Public Sphere: Local Elites and Community Affairs in the Late Imperial Period," *Etudes Chinoises* 2 (1990): 14-60; Rowe, *Hankow*, chaps. 3 & 4 and "The Public Sphere in Modern China," *Modern China* 3 (1990): 309-29.
60. Rankin, *Elite Activism*; Rankin, "The Origins of a Chinese Public Sphere"; Rowe, *Hankow*; Rowe, "The Public Sphere"; David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), chap. 8; Philip C. C. Huang, "Public Sphere/Civil Society in China? The Third Realm between State and Society," *Modern China* 2 (1993): 216-40.
61. Rosenzweig, *Eight Hours*, 51.
62. Suzuki, "Shinmatsu Kō-Seku no chakan ni tuite."
63. He Manzi, *Wuzakan*, 192.
64. Zhou Zhiying, *Xin Chengdu*, 247.
65. Hu Tian, *Chengdu daoyou*, 70.
66. GMGB, January 15, 1931.
67. Zhou Zhiying, *Xin Chengdu*, 247.
68. *Chengdu chengfang guji kao* [Materials on Urban Construction and Historical Sites of Chengdu] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1987), 464.
69. Only drinking the uncovered tea, which meant the patron had left; and not drinking directly from the cup but using the lid to ladle out water from the cup. Hao Zhicheng, "Fuqin de gushi" [Stories about my father], *LMZ* 1 (1997): 39-40.
70. GMGB, March 13, 1917.
71. Peng Qnian, "Xinhai geming hou chuanju zai Chengdu de xin fazhan" [A New Development of Sichuan Opera in Chengdu after the 1911 Revolution], in *CWZX*, vol. 8 (1963), 159.
72. Fu Chongju, *Chengdu tonglan*, 277-9.
73. A newspaper report in 1910 said that a fifteen-year-old girl dressed like a man drank tea with her three male friends. She was taken to the police station after her true sexual identity was discovered. She and her friends were accused of "a serious offense against decency" (*dashang fenghua*) and were punished. *Tongsu ribao* [Popular daily, hereafter *TSRB*], May 4, 1910.
74. Li Jieren, *Dabo*, 1464.
75. GMGB, April 25, 1912; October 31, 1912.
76. GMGB, March 8, 1914.
77. As a folk poem of that time said, "social contact between men and women should be made in public, which shows that men and women are equal. Where to find such a place? The Reform (Weixin) Teahouse allow mixture of men and women." Lin Kongyi, ed., *Chengdu zhuzhi ci* [Chengdu folk poems] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1986), 100.
78. *Ibid.*, 196.
79. GMGB, July 17, 1930.
80. Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man: On the Social Psychology of Capitalism* (New York: Vintage, 1977), 259.
81. Han Suyin, *The Crippled Tree*, 228-9.
82. *Ibid.*, 96.
83. Zhong Maoxuan, *Liu Shiliang waizhuan* [An Informal Biography of Liu Shiliang] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), 91.
84. SSSD, 23; Wen Wenzhi, *Sichuan fengwu zhi*, 454.
85. SSSD, 3.
86. GMGB, April 4, 1912.
87. Wu Yu, *Wuyu riji* [Wuyu Diary] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1984), vol. 1, 265-6.
88. Peng Qnian, "Xinhai geming hou chuanju zai Chengdu de xin fazhan," 159.

89. Zhong Maoxuan, *Liu Shiliang waizhuan*, 40-1.
90. GMGB, December 11, 12, 1928.
91. Hu Tian, *Chengdu daoyou*, 70; Wen Wenzhi, *Sichuan fengwu zhi*, 457.
92. See Wang, *Kuachu fengbi de shijie*, 545; Stapleton, "Police Reform."
93. Shao Yun, "Chengdu 'paoge' shilue" [A Short History of Chengdu Gowned Brothers] *Chengdu zhi tongxun* [Newsletter of Gazetteer of Chengdu] 1 (1988): 61. According to an investigation undertaken by the Chengdu Police Station, there were 130 branches of the Gowned Brothers in Chengdu before 1949. Out of the 130 branches, we know the locations of 119 headquarters, and among them 36 branches were in tea-houses. All others were only marked in "x street," and we may assume that many of them probably also had their headquarters in the tea-houses. "Chengdu shi paoge de yige jingtou" [A View of the Gowned Brothers in Chengdu]. In *Chengdu shi gong'an ju dang'an* [Archives of Chengdu Police Station]. No date. From its contents, I estimate that the time was about 1949-1950.
94. Chen Maozhao, "Chengdu chaguan," 186.
95. Liao T'ai-ch'u, "The Ko Lao Hui in Szechuan," *Pacific Affairs* 20 (6/1947), 161-73.
96. "Teacup formations" mean arranging the cups in particular patterns on the table. For example, if a member went to another "public port" to ask for help, he would set up a "single whip formation" (*dambian zhen*), which was a teacup facing the mouth of a small teapot. If the host agreed to offer help, he would drink the cup of tea; if he did not, he would spill the tea to the ground. Wang Chunwu, *Paoge tanmi* [Exploring the secrets of Paoge] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1993), 65-6.
97. GMGB, August 30, 1914; August 4, December 26, 1916; January 27, July 29, August 1, 18, September 15, 16, 1929; May 29, 1930; March 28, 1928; August 29, 1930. TSRB May 3, 1909; May 15, 1910; August 1, 1911.
98. Zhong Maoxuan, *Liu Shiliang waizhuan*, 62.
99. GMGB, August 5, 1930.
100. Zhong Maoxuan, *Liu Shiliang waizhuan*, 59.
101. GMGB, January 5, 1916.
102. GMGB, June 12, 1922.
103. GMGB, July 17, 1928; September 24, 1930.
104. In the Archery Teahouse, several soldiers forced a man to kneel to a young woman as he apologized to her. The reason was only that the woman, the wife of a military officer, had bought a dish from the restaurant and a waiter gave it to her in a rough-pottery bowl. She felt that she was humiliated, and her husband took this way to avenge himself against the boss of the restaurant. GMGB, August 6, 1930.
105. SSSD, 6.
106. Perry R. Duis, *The Saloon: Public Drinking in Chicago and Boston, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 4.
107. Zhou Zhiying, *Xin Chengdu*, 246; SSSD, 18-19.
108. *Sichuan tongsheng jingcha zhangcheng* [Regulations of the Sichuan Provincial Police], 1903. From the *Archives of Police Ministry* (1501), vol. 179 in the First Historical Archives (Beijing). Thanks to Kristin Stapleton for providing me with a handwritten copy of this document.
109. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 20.
110. GMGB, December 26, 1916.
111. GMGB, December 10, 1921.
112. CSSN, 510-1.
113. Frederic Wakeman, Jr., "Licensing Leisure: The Chinese Nationalists' Attempt to Regulate Shanghai, 1927-49," *Journal of Asian Studies* 1 (1995): 19-42.
114. Jia Daquan and Chen Yishi, *Sichuan chaye shi* [A History of Sichuan tea] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1988), 369.
115. SSSD, 14-23.
116. GMGB, March 29, 1916.
117. *Chengdu shi shizheng gongbao* [Gazette of Chengdu Municipal Administration, hereafter CSSG] 43, April 1932.
118. Lin Kongyi, *Chengdu zhuzhi ci*, 106.
119. CSSG, 17 (1930).
120. GMGB, August 8, 1930; CSSG, 44 (1932).
121. GMGB, June 25, 1929.

122. Although teahouses did not dare to advance this activity publicly, they never really wanted to stop gamblers. A reporter from a local newspaper saw that in the Fangyuan Teahouse, the gambling was doing on the tables, on the chairs, and even on the floors. GMGB, June 4, 1930.
123. GMGB, October 7, 1914.
124. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, 36.
125. Ibid., xvi, 32.
126. TSRB, August 6, 1909; May 25, 1910; GMGB, June 14, 1912.
127. GMGB, September 7, 1912.
128. Zhou Zhiying and Gao Sibao, "Chengdu de zaoqi huaju huodong" [Activities of Early Modern Drama in Chengdu], in CWZX, vol. 36 (1967).
129. Wen-hsin Yeh, "Corporate Space, Communal Time: Everyday Life in Shanghai's Bank of China," *American Historical Review* 1 (1995): 97-116. Qin Shao, "Space, Time, and Politics in Early Twentieth Century Nantong," *Modern China* 1 (1997): 99-129.
130. James L. Watson, "Standardizing the Gods: The Promotion of T'ien Hou ("Empress of Heaven") along the South China Coast, 960-1960," in D. Johnson, A. J. Nathan, and E. S. Rawski, eds., *Popular Culture in Late Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); David Johnson, "Temple Festivals in Southeastern Shansi: The Sai of Nan-She Village and Big West Gate," *Minsu quyi* [Folk Customs and Folk Performances] 91 (9/1994): 641-734; Prasenjit Duara, "Knowledge and Power in the Discourse of Modernity: The Campaigns against Popular Religion in Early Twentieth-Century China," *Journal of Asian Studies* 1 (1991): 67-83.
131. See Wang, "Street Culture," chap. 4.
132. David Vincent, "The Decline of the Oral Tradition in Popular Culture," in Robert D. Storch, ed., *Popular Culture and Custom in Nineteenth-Century England* (New York: St. Martin's, 1982), 40.